

Craig's Flight  
by Laura Echtinaw

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In anticipation of my husband's one year anniversary of his death... well, I've had this idea... A push... A voice... Like this is what I need to do... What... Why? It didn't become clear until this past Saturday.

For some time I've been uncertain what I should do on this life changing day. For those of you who know me I'm symbolic through ceremony. This past Saturday I woke up sad. I'm so tired of being sad. This overwhelming urge overcame me of all things to go skydiving. After trying to gather friends with this last minute impulse, it was evident that this was something that I had to do alone. So, now my overwhelming feelings of grief were pushed away as I had a new goal. It had to be done today. I want to do this... but... uhg... so scary... Should I... what about Shane and Mariah... So alone... Just do it... So, I did and this is why...

The past year has been the most profoundly intense year of my life. I lost my husband/my best friend not to suicide but to mental illness. Most of us can't comprehend how someone could voluntarily exit this life. We can take an educated guess. But we can't experience the feelings that would bring someone to this edge of choice. We truly can't comprehend what it is like to struggle with an illness that is so misunderstood.

As our plane took off from the safety of the solid earth my jumpmaster, Kirk, made sure I was securely harnessed to him. We spoke about free falling – What to expect – what to feel – What to do – How to breathe... SCREAM... He made me feel relaxed and safe.

Craig fell into mental illness without choice. Through trial and error he was told – What to do – What to take – What to expect – What to do if... This was his flight and his flight alone.

My jumpmaster gently put his hands on my shoulders, told me to take some deep breaths and commented on how relaxed I appeared to be. The anticipation of not knowing what this experience was going to be like was so inconceivable. Did I really want to jump out of an airplane from 13,000 feet, putting my trust and life in the hands of this man? Yes. What am I doing?

For over a decade Craig lived each day working hard to be whole, knowing that any moment he could go over the edge. He put his trust in the hands of his doctors and everyone who loved him.

WHEN CRAIG WAS SAD HE WOULD SING  
WHEN HE WAS ANGRY HE WOULD WHISTLE  
WHEN HE WAS CONFUSED HE WOULD WRITE

## WHEN HE WAS WEAK HE WOULD WALK

We were the last to log roll out of the plane, it happened so fast, no time to change my mind. So, at 13,000 feet all of the sudden I was completely out of control. It was so loud. For the first 10 seconds I experienced sheer terror. Then I knew I knew there was no turning back. I couldn't hear myself scream. Be in control... Breathe... Scream... Trust... Faith.

Craig had over ten years of nightmares. His silent terror. He worked so hard to withhold his screams so nobody would hear them. Craig was the loan soldier, a renaissance man. A man who people gravitated too with his magnetic energy.

The ground was so far away like a perfect patchwork quilt. After free falling 8,000 feet my jumpmaster pulled the parachute. Within a blink... Silence... Floating... Breath... Flying... Peace... Painless

## JOY

I was in total awe with this spiritual experience on this incredible day. Then a completely peaceful feeling surrounded my entire being as we floated slowly downward. I knew at that moment that Craig too had soared into peace and was safe and sound. He is in God's hands now.

I want to thank all of you from the bottom of my heart for the caring and support you've given to Shane, Mariah, and myself this past year. You are receiving this because in some way you touched our hearts and gave us strength.

With love and friendship,

Laura Echinaw