

Daniel DC Riedel

Dick To The Wind

A short story of wild, first skydive anticipation.
What happened when things DIDN'T go as
planned.



Dick to the Wind

Copyright © 2018 Whatif Books TM

His eight hours were up, including the seventeen thousand feet of altitude the King Air had just climbed while Dick sat there strapped in, pretending to be calm and cool. “Just one of the gang, that’s right... breathe...” his mind chirped at him.

Coach Allen noted the paleness of his face, and that all too familiar silence and petrified stare, “Breathe Dick. Take some deep slow breaths, it will help with the anxiety.” Allen chuckled, giving Dick a reassuring pat on the back while the other men just sat and stared.

The group hunkered down in the cold tin can, facing the door, sitting in each other’s laps. Nothing like the flight he had taken the month before on United, with its warm blankets, pillows, coffee and comfort. Dick had no idea there would not be seats. But this was what he wanted after all, wasn’t it? To prove to himself he could do it, on his own, without permission from his friends, family or colleagues?

Allen looked at Dick, studying his face, then gave a sharp toothy smile as the captain came over the speaker, “We’re on jump run, be ready in 30,” he croaked. A thin military man with freckles popped up and began sliding the door toward the ceiling like an accordion.

Dick stiffened at once. His only experience with things like this came from movies, where a hole in a plane normally had passengers being sucked out of it, screaming. But no one screamed. No one even flinched or moved. They all just stared toward the square hole with indifference.

Among them, to his surprise, was an elderly couple. The lady had long brassy gray hair, a pink jump suit, purple rig, Nike sneakers, and was engaged in a private conversation with a man equally her age, and just as colorful. Allen leaned over and spoke above the roar of the air entering the plane, “they jump every weekend... have been doing it for years, long before I moved here. They’re married, some of our best customers.” Dick couldn’t help but crack a smile himself, but quickly realized he had been holding his breath all the while.

“Breathe kid!”

Allen jabbed him in the side, motioning all the while toward the open door and the men standing up. A red light flashed above them signaling it was time to go. Allen was checking Dick’s rig and trying to inform him of what he was doing, but Dick just stared at the door.

A group of military students in fancy blue outfits and space aged black helmets rushed the door first. One positioned himself outside the door, as did another. Five of them clenched hands and positioned their limbs in an intimate pattern, made a quick up and down motion, and out they went. No sound. No drama. They just quietly slipped away. And others were following. "Oh God..." Dick let out his breath.

Allen was pressing on Dick all the while, scooting him closer and closer toward the door along the cold silver of the plane's floor. They were no longer buckled in. Hands adjusted straps, mouths mouthed inaudible words.

Before he knew it, they tilted up to their knees. Allen instructed him on door procedures, reminding him of what he had just learned in class a couple hours earlier. Another instructor, there to help, stepped aside and let the elderly couple pass him bye.

One moment there... one moment gone.

"I can't do this" Dick sputtered loudly. "Holy shit." His face burned red as he neared the square, noisy exit. Allen looked on and laughed. Dick knew he was not the first

The cold air from outside the plane now hit him in the face. Ozone permeated the air, smelling like a cool rainy day.

Allen and the other instructor clapped their hands in a high five, happy that the thunder storms earlier had cleared out in time for one last jump. There had been a possibility of no more loads due to the storms crossing Long's Peak earlier in the day, some of them rather violent and grounding the planes. But to Dick's delight things had cleared up and he and 2 other students got to jump the same day. Only now he cursed himself for being so cocky about it.

And there she was, stepping into the doorway before Dick. Lisa. She had been a real talker. The student whose hand was always up. The know it all. The one who's life experiences rivaled those of anyone else in the class.

Sure, she was pretty. She was well made up and her black hair had been in a tidy pony tail in class, but now it was all bunched under a hideous striped rubber cap being forced onto her head. Lisa grimaced all the while, fighting the brute tending to her in preparation for her big moment. Hands were all over her, tugging, pulling.

Her eyes were barely open and she looked down right constipated. Hardly someone ready to jump out of, what did she call it, yes, a "perfectly good airplane." Dick recalled

seeing weekly news casts of small planes crashing at the local airport or in the mountains and understood why being able to use a parachute was a good skill to have. He looked at Lisa again. The whole scene played out in mere seconds. Lisa entered the doorway, then with a waver and a grunt, she left the plane and began screaming.

Dick was next.

Quickly Allen positioned himself outside the rear of the plane while the other man helped Dick pose in the doorway. Dick felt himself strengthen as he remembered the steps. Hands at the top corner of the door. Feet, one in front of the other at the lower edge. Pelvis forward. Strong arch.

“Dick to the wind kid!” the instructor yelled, laughing. “On three. two... one...”

Suddenly the unthinkable! There he was, half in, half outside the plane. Arching. Dick to the wind. But damn... the plane suddenly jerked up and down violently from turbulence and Dick catapulted out... and down he sped.

Dick felt himself tumbling with no sense of direction. All he could do was think of arching. Like a bat-mitten ball, the arch would set him straight. But the force of the air and his flailing were winning. Down, down he went, cursing.

An arm suddenly appeared to his left, tugging the strap on his rig. Allen worked to gain control of him. Nine thousand feet. Ice pellets from a cloud stung Dick's face. Then flashes of blue. The sun. Dick floated with the ground below him, arms out, legs spread, and yes, as he had been instructed, dick to the wind.

Allen motioned with one hand to his left, as the other instructor grabbed Dick on the right side. He looked around at each, totally forgetting to look at his altimeter. Allen kept gesturing, but Dick could only focus on the position of his body and the feeling of weightlessness. “What?” Dick thought, confused, as he looked at Allen, also making frantic hand signals, his cheeks flapping from the descent.

“Shit!” Dick suddenly exclaimed as he looked at the altimeter, strapped nicely to his left wrist, with its needle at 4000. Too low. Too fast.

He quickly reached back with his right hand and searched for the ball and pilot chute to deploy his main canopy. He fumbled around frantically and felt nothing. He never had to do this before, and his mind raced, trying to think of everything all at once. But still no ball, just the feeling of nylon straps and slick metal.

Another hand grabbed his and placed it on the ball, forcing him to grab and rip it away. In a flash, he felt a tug and jerk as the canopy unfolded over him. The sight of it, as he tilted his dewy head back, was beautiful, with its rainbow of blue, yellow and red spreading out like a shelter overhead. Not only was he saved by his instructors, but he now dangled above the earth almost motionless. Other jumpers below him sailed toward the ground under canopy, while above him more dots leaving the plane grew bigger, and soon turned into equally beautiful splashes of brilliant color.

Dick unhooked his steering toggles and flared his canopy, causing it to slow and dangle. Perfect silence enveloped him. No wind. No mouths talking. No engines running. Nothing.

“My god,” he gasped, “I had no idea.” A patchwork of brilliant Colorado greens and yellows stretched to the horizon, and thunder storms still boomed and flashed in the distance.

He glanced at his altimeter... two thousand.

A voice came over the radio strapped to his chest, calling Dick's name and checking his status. “Stay on heading,” the voice commanded, “turn left downwind at a thousand.”

Dick leaned down to respond when a bright light overtook him. Another jumper struck his canopy, slamming into him...