

Appendix A – Interview excerpt

Introduction

This 21 minute long excerpt is a part of the larger 1 hour and 15 minutes long interview with Medusa. In what follows, ‘C’ stand for me, the interviewer and ‘M’ for Medusa, the wingsuit pilot. We pick in around the 27th minute, after discussing how Medusa got involved in the sport, what important progressions he has made and what feelings he has just before jumping.

Excerpt

C: okay okay [pause] let’s see...can you take me through your mind a little more, so let’s say from the moment you arrive at the jump spot to the moment you step off the cliff. Can you just take me mentally through your mind? Like, if you can choose whatever jump you’re thinking of maybe even your latest jump in the (name of competition). How, what was going through your mind? Could you do that?

[26:55]

M: yeah sure. Well, what what happened in (name of competition) was actually something pretty amazing that I’ve only experienced once before. And for some reason, uhm, my best performances they only come out whenever I’m under st— under... like ‘make it or break it’ you know? Like I would never make it... [distant clattering] on the other, on the other jumps wasn’t making good performances but the jump before everyone gets passed to the next round that’s when I do the fastest jump. The jump before the competition is over, that’s when I do the best jump.

C: okay

M: I don’t know if it’s I can only perform better under pressure? But what happened to me during those jumps was I actually...uhm stood on the platform on that last jump and I just give up. I just surrender to competition, I said like ‘I’m not gonna try to fly faster, I’m not gonna try compete, I’m just gonna go jump and do what I love. And I just close my eyes and I just take a deep breath and get super calm. Super super calm. And relaxed that’s why I do some exercises like...uhm like going with my mouth and doing like [lets lips vibrate while exhaling], like trying to relax all the muscles of my face and then I check my body a little bit, trying to relax my arms and legs. And then I stood up on the platform and I was like ‘okay, just do what you know how to do and just go out and have a good time’. It was during that jump that I was able to blank everything away. I wasn’t looking at the other competitors, I wasn’t thinking about time, I wasn’t actually planning this strategy like ‘oh this time I’m gonna fly here and I’m gonna do this and I’m gonna do that’. I wasn’t. I was just... in the moment. And and during that jump, I was super calm. And

everything just happened, everything just unfold. Without having the pressure.

C: uhum, okay. You menti--...

M: [tries to say something]

C: yeah? Say... go ahead

M: so it was like, it was like, it was kind of like I was in zen, you know? In completely, completely tuned to the universe, you know? If that makes any sense.

C: yes yes yeah [pause]. You mentioned for the breathing part that you sometimes do like the exercises, you said, like blowing out of your mouth with the lips [tries to imitate it] [chuckles]

M: uhu

C: is this something you practiced outside too, consistently to make it more regular for you?

M: actually I only do that during competitions

C: okay

M: or whenever I am, no actually, no I've done it whenever I'm in a high stress situations.

C: okay

M: like we're doing a jump and it's a complicated jump and uh I feel myself tense, I do that. Whenever I feel myself tense, that will be the best description.

C: okay okay. Uhm and how did you discover this works for you? Trial--

M: I saw one friend of mine doing it and I thought he was—I asked him what he was doing and he told me he was trying to calm himself. And I thought that was a good idea.

C: okay [pause]. And then you kind of—did you then developed it further in your own way, personalize it?

M: yeah I added kind of like some movements. Uh to to to my uhm my my—that kind of ritual you know. Not only doing this with your mouth, not only doing the [vibrating lips while blowing out air] while trying to relax your face muscles, but also kind of like checking your body like twist your body from side to side and let your arms kind of like whip around

C: yeah yeah. So it's a whole body routine, almost.

M: well, actually you can see it in the video of the competition of the last race. You can see me doing some weird

shit and that's what I'm doing

C: okay I will definitely check it again and watch the details. Uhm you also mentioned that you—you, you said that you didn't think of the other competitors that you just gave into the competition. I don't know if these are the things you told yourself to do or did it just happened?

M: it just happened.

C: okay

M: it just happened. I stood up there and I uh wasn't doing good times. I was not gonna get in the top 3 to be honest. And I just decided 'you know what?' I'm gonna accept that, I'm not gonna be stressing, I'm just go out and do what I love to do and just have a good time

C: yeah [pause] the example that I asked for now was a competition one. Is there mentally a difference between jumping in competitions and other maybe complex wingsuit proximity flights but when there is no competition factor?

M: uhm, I would say it's the same. It's the same level of uhm of actual uhm kind of a stress or a...anxiety per se [pause] [sniffs]

C: so if I would ask you...let me think of another example. The (name project) jumps, can you take me through your mind on, from one of those jumps because I've seen those online as well. Were also very, I think technical and difficult jumps.

M: yeah well, we kind of like, you kind of look at the mountain and then you try to uh decide which way you want to go, which kind of like in the ground, which lines look good. And then you, you kind of—I visualize myself flying it. I visualize myself coming around corners, making turns. And I make the moves with my body as I close my eyes. You know, at the mountain I'm like 'okay I'm gonna jump off', and then I go like 'I'm gonna dive' and I put my head down like if I'm diving. 'And then I'm gonna make a turn' and then I keep my shoulders like I'm taking a turn and I kind of visualize all these movements before I go and on the first jumps I try not to get close to stuff. I only, I only swoop by features, you know? Features that stick out from the mountain and I uhm...on the helicopter there is a lot of anticipation and it's kind of a different feeling just because you are not hiking the mountain during a helicopter so a lot of mental preparation that you have to do kind of in a nutshell, you know? And uhm then, once the door opens you just go to this auto-mode, and you just tell the helicopter pilot which way to go for your optimal drop and...you just drop.

C: okay okay. Uhm okay now, I'm hearing some things here that I would like to get in a little deeper. Yeah first off,

maybe we—I started too far. I was already, the first time I asked you you were already on the mountain top or in the helicopter, but now you mentioned that you look at the mountain on the ground and then start visualizing your lines. That’s interesting to hear about. Can you tell me a little bit more on visualization?

[35:45]

M: yeah well, you try to read the mountain. I don’t know if you are familiar with professional climbing? But when professional climbers stand up in front of the mountain they start devising a line and they start making movements with their hands as they are climbing in the mountain. We kind of like do the same, but we look at the line that we’re gonna fly and we try to visualize ourselves flying that line. The only problem is that sometimes that visualization is actually flawed because you see a two dimensional mountain and when you get up in the helicopter and you get up the the mountain you realize that the line is not as steep as you thought or as flat as you thought, so you have to make arrangements.

C: on, on the spot?

M: on the spot. Yeah, well and that’s why you want to give yourself plenty of room at the beginning.

C: uhum uhum. Okay. Uhm how did you develop this habit of visualizing, where did you pick it up?

M: I, I picked it up from jump 1. One of the things that that uh, that we teach people is how to visualize their jump, you know. Before, for example, for an AFF [Accelerated Freefall, a method of skydive training] inst—a student you have to go, you have to count ‘one thousand, two thousand, check your altimeter, three thousand’ and what you teach the students is to close their eyes and actually visualize themselves doing this. Cause that creates kind of like a mas—a mind, a mind list of things to do and also it ties it to the body.

C: yeah...so you were taught it in the skydiving courses uhum?

M: yeah

C: yeah. Uhm, and how exactly then did you learn to improve it or adapt it to the situation of wingsuit flying?

M: yeah it’s just by transferring, it’s something that skydivers do actually on regular basis is whenever you go on skydive and you guys have a routine like ‘oh we’re gonna go out and we’re gonna form a star, gonna turn right’ everybody in the group actually in—inside the airplane they will close their eyes and they will visualize and you will see people moving. Like they are pretending they are in the sky

C: yeah yeah

M: so it's a common practice among skydiving...

C: okay okay

M: ... and BASE

C: uhm...good... a little bit more details missch—maybe about the visualizing is...I—do you only do it visually or do you try to use other senses as well?

M: what you mean?

C: other senses like hearing, uh smell, uhm not just the eyes. Do you also use--

M: yeah yeah, no. actually we utilize our—we close our eyes and we actually visualize, so we're using our mind and we're also using our body. So you will turn and you move your hands, and you will move your head around the place you will need to turn.

C: yeah. And is this in the real speed or slow motion?

M: uhm, hold on. You try to make it as real speed as you can

C: and from, and from your own eyes, or do you sometimes also visualize yourself flying like somebody flying behind, watching you?

M: no, I visualize it first person

C: first person, okay. Uhm...you mentioned there is a lot of mental preparation to do in a nutshell. Can you give me an overview of the nutshell because uh I have—because I would like to know what that includes all of these things.

[40:35]

M: well, when uh...when you're going BASE jumping and you're climbing a mountain, you're actually walking through all these like 'okay I'm gonna jump over here, I'm gonna move over here' and you kind of like, you conquer (?) the mountain per se. When you're in a helicopter you kind of like, you don't have all this different stuff. So you, you you kind of like have to prepare quicker.

C: yeah [long silence] and what aspects are there? Can you go through it? Through the different aspects because now you've mentioned visualizing already, you've mentioned the breathing. Are there any others that you think of, that you do?

M: yeah well, the equipment checking is really important. We [stumbles for words] well talking about me, I'm obsessed

with, with uh, with my equipment you know, like checking once, checking twice, making sure everything is in place, making sure everything is connected, making—so, I, I, we become obsessed with checking once, twice, three times, six times, and that's—I will have it to have so (? 42:01) the checking. Also I I kind of like tune in to why I'm doing this. Like why why, what is so special about this and why I do this. And it's quite often that I find that I'm doing it because I love what I'm do and and the feeling of flying is something that I can't live without, you know? I'm I'm actually—I thank the universe for providing me the opportunity of living the life that I live and doing the stuff that I do because I truly love what I do and I feel truly honored about being able to do it.

C: uhm. This last thing you tell me is interesting. How did that start? This awareness if I can call it like that?

M: [pause] how the awareness of which part? The awareness about the universe and all this stuff?

C: or, yeah. Maybe more specific the fact that you consciously on purpose tune in to—before you take a jump. How and why did this start?

[43:16]

M: well, my wife is actually been one of my biggest mentors in this aspect and uh she has taught me actually how to enjoy what I do and actually look at the bigger picture and get kind of connected with my true self and actually I've—when coming to this kind of realizations and I stop and I continue doing what I love to do I found that I—that's when I do the best and this is when I shine the most doing so, it has to be that I'm I'm...I'm meant to be doing this you know? And and I mean everybody has that sole purpose on earth and some people take a longer time to discover what I—what they were sent here to do. For me I just feel fortunate to know that flying and doing this is what I'm supposed to be doing.

C: okay okay [pause] uhm, great. So then, you think...you've taking me through a few different ones now already. From the helicopter, from (name of competition), uhm maybe can you take me through a preparation for wingsuit BASE? Because I have the feeling these are longer—then you have more preparation time right?

M: uh, when you're climbing the mountain? Yes.

C: yes. And can take me through one of those climbs, those preparations to give me an idea what might be different with the other jumps?

M: well, the basic idea is that you have more time to be on the mountain, to walk the mountain, to see the different profiles of

the mountain

C: uhum

M: and...uhm and, actually you have more time to come into uh kind of self-soothing, kind of area where you know what you are about to do and you have calmed yourself like by walking on the mountain for like 3 hours, you know?

C: uhum [pause] yeah yeah. In all the things you've told me so far uhm of some elements you've told me where you picked it up, from in flight school, from your wife,... can you tell me any other stories about significant persons in your life who taught you something about this sport? Not necessarily technical aspects, but like the mental aspects of it.

[46:23]

M: yeah well the entire [vibrating lips] and kind of relaxing my body I picked that up from (name wingsuit pilot), from (repeats name and last name), the (nationality pilot). Uh, we we I don't remember when we were jumping and he was telling me like, he was telling someone else actually that they need to calm themselves before they jump, they needed to like relax their muscles and all this stuff and then he was telling him the exercises like 'just go like [vibrating lips]' and he start telling him and I'm like 'okay well that sounds like something I would like to do'. And I just started doing it.

C: okay okay. Any other things?

M: uhm [pause] yeah well, (other name wingsuit pilot) also like before jumping he would just tell me to grab a big air and to look around and see where we were and...uhm that's something pretty cool, cause once you look around you realize 'holy fuck, I'm on top of a mountain, how unique is this?'

C: yeah

M: I'm about to jump off a mountain using a suit made of nylon. That's completely stupid! That has allowed us to go and see and live all these