



Fear, Failure, & Faith

I remember approaching graduation from the Kennedy Center with a feeling of abject terror. I'm sure part of it was unpaid parking tickets or library fees that I'd have to cover before I got my diploma. **The real unease came because I had a sense that I was now making decisions for real.**

The reality of sitting where you are was, to me, like the one time I went skydiving. Calling it "skydiving" makes it sound like an amusement park ride, and that is what I thought when my roommate suggested the idea. David yelled from the kitchen, "Hey—what do you say we go skydiving this Saturday?" "I'm in," I yelled from the bathroom, without truly considering what I would be doing. It was conceptual and distant on Tuesday. It became staggeringly real the instant our jump master pushed open the flimsy metal door of our single engine plane and screamed over the engine noise for me to "step out onto that small metal plate down there, grab ahold of the

strut of the plane, then drop your legs out the door. The wind will catch your legs," he explained, in a perverted attempt at clarity, "and will lift you like a flag." The Tuesday commitment and the Saturday reality were worlds apart.

In the Tuesday of my college career, graduation sounded like an exhilarating breaking of the tape at the finish line. As the reality approached, I felt panic at what lay after the tape. For years I could dabble in this or try that. Now I was deciding on a career, choosing where to live, starting a family—so much was happening that was real.

When I sat in your chairs my biggest fear was not plummeting to my death, it was abject failure. At first I continued the cruise-control version of life I had driven from potty training through high school. My mother always wanted me to be a physician. I rather liked the idea, too. On the way to medical school, I encountered people who changed my view of my options and profoundly affected my life. I am who I am today, in part, because of these people. I'd like to share what I learned from three of them in hopes it might reduce your terror and increase your confidence as you face Monday morning.

The first was Norman Van Duker. He was a redheaded, freckle-faced, returned LDS missionary who moved in with my family when I was thirteen.

No Events