

# Risky Business

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Just a few months ago I was watching television, ESPN of course, and there was the Winter X-Games. You can't help but get excited watching these guys fly through the air on a snowboard, jumping over moguls on a snow machine, or doing flips on a motorcycle. For some of us these high-risk activities are like a magnet pulling at us until we give in and try them. I'm not sure why, but high-risk activities just seem to be more attractive to us than other activities.

Courtesy Photos



Although I'm known to take a few risks here and there, I do try to think things through before I do them. Just last month my family and I were skiing over a 3-day weekend. I have been skiing on and off for about 20 years. However, the last time I went skiing was about 7 years ago. I have two young boys that are caught up in the extreme sport stuff and wanted to go snowboarding. My oldest son went snowboarding last year for the first time with another group; so, of course, he was now a self proclaimed expert snowboarder. My youngest son, although very eager to go snowboarding, was still a little scared since he had never been before. I told both of them that we all needed to take lessons once we got there and then we could hit the bunny slope. After some major whining, we all attended the lessons ... then off to the bunny slope. I was already in pain; my feet hurt like they had never hurt before, but that was not going to stop me. I must tell you the biggest feat for a new snowboarder, in my opinion, is just getting on

and off the lift. I fell on both ends. The first day was uneventful; however, things soon to changed.

It was now our second day of snowboarding, and I was cruising down the bunny slope. I had already fallen about 10 times by now and was getting a little upset. All I could remember was seeing those kids in the X-games doing all kinds of tricks on their snowboard. Why was it so hard for me? Could it be that I was 42 years old and had never snowboarded before? Na! Could it be that I'm out of shape? Na! Could it be that I live in the past and think that I can do anything? Yep! Well, I finally made it back up on my board, and I was doing pretty well before I fell again only this time I hit hard, real hard, on my left shoulder. When I finally pulled myself together, I had decided to exchange my snowboard for a pair of skis, something I would feel comfortable on. After skiing awhile, I decided to go in for a break. My two boys went back up the slope and were heading down for one last run when my oldest son, the expert, fell. I could see him sitting in the snow. Eventually, I



saw my youngest son flagging down a ski instructor for assistance. At this point, I put down my hot chocolate and went out to find out what was going on. Once I made it out to the slope, I realized that my son was in pain. The rescue folks assessed him, loaded him on a sled behind a ski patrol snowmobile, and took him to the first aid station. After a few minutes, they loaded him in an ambulance and took him to a local hospital. There we found out my son had a fracture in the

growth plate of his hip and a detached muscle in the same area. I guess you can imagine his skiing time was up. Well, we headed back to the condo where he spent the rest of the weekend.

Each year, numerous individuals in Air Combat Command are injured when they participate in extreme sports (high-risk activities) with little or no training or experience. These folks see only the fun and excitement the activities bring and often fail to realize the risks associated with them.

As I look back at my family's ski trip, I realize that sometimes you can get the training, follow the rules, and still be injured. Although we see folks flying off jumps at the Winter X-Games, we must realize they have been doing this for many years and probably started with baby steps. Regardless of the amount of training though, these type activities are high-risk because even well trained, experienced individuals are exposing themselves to above average risk when participating in them. An example would be riding an off-road motorcycle over jumps and through the mud. Last year, ACC experienced 30 reportable dirt bike mishaps with a total cost of over \$130,000.

If we are to reduce the number of accidents related to extreme sports, then everyone must be involved. ACC's policy on high-risk activities was established by a message from ACC/CV, dated December 10, 2002. The policy is simple: get educated and trained before you participate in high-risk activities. Use Personal Risk Management to determine if the sport is really worth the risk. Also commanders get involved to be sure your subordinates are educated, trained, and have thought about the possible ramifications of participating in the high-risk activity. This team approach is sure to turn around the negative trend of injuries from high-risk activities. 🦋



Courtesy Photo

