



By Lt. Paul Flores,
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My first air-wing detachment in Fallon, Nev., also was my first time to ski. Squadronmates and I were excited at a chance to hit the slopes in Lake Tahoe, and we wasted no time going there once we got on deck from our last hop of the week around 1600 on Friday.

We gambled all night at Nero's, then had breakfast about 0700 and headed for the slopes. One of my friends suggested that I take a lesson. I liked his idea and signed up, but, before I could take my first lesson, some other friends convinced me they could teach me. They weren't as worried as I was about my first time on skis. They persuaded me to join them on the steepest blue slopes they could find. I'm surprised they didn't suggest a triple-black-diamond slope.

When I got to the top of the first slope, I thought it looked pretty steep, especially after I looked down a cliff on the left side of the mountain. I figured there was a 70-percent chance of dying if I fell off that cliff, but my friends insisted I would be fine.

I immediately embarrassed myself by falling as I climbed off the lift, then my friends

shoved off down the hill. I watched them glide gracefully, thinking to myself, "I can do that." I looked around for some support but found none. My only choice was to head down the slope alone.

I did well for about 20 yards, but then I started accelerating and lost all control. Unable to slow down and terrified at the thought of what might happen, I could hear my friends yelling in the distance for me to go down. I looked ahead about 20 yards and saw a fence, with a cliff on the other side, and knew that's where I would be going if I didn't quickly do something.

I let my legs give out and tumbled about 30 yards. A trail of gear led to where my limp body ended the fall, with my skis sticking straight into the air. By the time I managed to get to my feet, a stranger had been kind enough to pick up my gear and greeted me. He shook my hand and said, "Thank you. That was the greatest fall I've ever seen."

After that near-death experience, I sought the professional advice of a veteran skier and a true friend, who taught me everything I needed to know. I'm now an avid skier, and I have a strong respect for safety on the slopes. My advice to you is, "Don't let peer pressure lead you over a cliff." ❏