

Leap of Faith -- Air minister performs skydive stunt at Dayton airport

07/14/2010, 1:02 am

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It was locks, leaps and the Lord Tuesday afternoon at Skydive Chicago.

As an exhibition of his daring, escape artist, skydiver and evangelist Anthony Martin, of Sheboygan, Wis., jumped from an airplane wearing handcuffs that were locked to a chain draped around his neck and connected to leather cuffs fastened above each elbow.

That this story does not have a different headline tells you he made it.

Martin has been at the skydive facility just north of Dayton the past week, participating in the facility's ministry, Seraphim Fellowship of Jesus Christ, as well as taking practice jumps, being he is both sky pilot and skydiver.

"Skydivers deal with mortality every day," Martin observed in explaining the connection between the big picture and parachuting.

The handcuffs worn by Martin belonged to Joliet locksmith and security expert Bob Oestreich, who noted they once were used by Detroit Police. Oestreich and another locksmith from his company, Spero Ventsias, vouched for the cuffs and inspected the restraints after Martin was secured with them on the ground. Oestreich pointed out Martin had never seen the cuffs before.

To make the stunt more death-defying, Martin had Skydive Chicago owner Matthew "Rook" Nelson turn off the safety device attached to Martin's parachute that automatically deploys the chute at 700 feet. Without such backup, Martin had to remove the handcuffs and reach to his right rear to pull the release handle and deploy the canopy — in 45 seconds.

Martin's plane took off, reaching 13,500 feet, with Nelson wearing a video camera to record him. After the landing, the video was shown in the Skydive Chicago hangar.

The 44-year-old Martin was seen being helped to the plane's door and then jumping. Falling in a sitting-back position, Martin began rapidly spinning as he appeared to struggle with the lock for about 25 seconds, before becoming free, hitting the silk and reaching Mother Earth. Martin said it was disorienting to try to focus on his hands while spinning. He will use the video as a tool in his ministry.

Martin noted the last time he did the skydiving-handcuff stunt was 10 years ago, having done it four times before in all, at least one of which at Skydive Chicago. Martin added he went to the "school of hard locks." He is also about slipping earthly bonds — in more ways than one.



Photo: Doug Larson

Escape artist and evangelist Anthony Martin, middle, walks toward the Skydive Chicago hangar near Dayton Tuesday afternoon after a midair escape from handcuffs and other restraints. On the left is Laurian Lazarescu, pastor of the ministry at Skydive Chicago and on the right is Matthew "Rook" Nelson, owner of the facility. They jumped with Martin.



Photo: Doug Larson

Anthony Martin jokes as he waits to board an airplane Tuesday at Skydive Chicago for an airborne escape stunt. The two men on the right are Bob Oestreich and Spero Ventsias, locksmiths from Joliet.



Photo: Doug Larson

Escape artist Anthony Martin sails to Earth after freeing himself from chains during a free fall Tuesday above Skydive Chicago.



Photo: Doug Larson

Laurian Lazarescu, pastor at Skydive Chicago, fastens restraints to Anthony Martin, with Joliet locksmiths Spero Ventsias, left and Bob Oestreich, bearing witness.