

He had an appointment with the ground. Part of me always knew that he was destined to die young. He soared high, and he fell hard.

He was probably flying at close to stall speed when he made the steep turn approaching the landing strip. Aviators say that rapid reduction in speed after passing the critical angle of attack means the wing doesn't have enough lift to balance the plane's weight. If one wing stalls before the other, that wing will drop and the plane will fall out of the air. The ground waits below.

Taylor had an appointment with the ground. Part of me always knew that he was destined to die before he reached old age. He soared high—always pushing the envelope in every part of his life—and he fell hard. Everyone who really knew him was not surprised that his cause of death was “traumatic injury from aircraft crash.”

He was never afraid to stall. Skydiving was a favorite hobby of his. He water-skied until his shoulders ached from holding the ropes. He snow skied the black diamond slopes in Colorado, often taking the ungroomed and uncharted back of the mountain. He drove recklessly. His side mirror was always hanging off his car from backing into stationary objects. He took risks all the time.

He was also a heart surgeon—a career that involves life-and-death decisions. He was never afraid to crack open a patient's chest to get to the heart. He was a pioneer in new surgical techniques, like keyhole incisions for heart surgery in the early 1990s and, more recently, robotic surgery.

Some might say he was self-destructive. He was intense both in life and in death. He was an alcoholic, and he was drinking again. His second marriage was in trouble. He was deep in debt. He had two planes and carried mortgages on four houses he couldn't afford. He had been recently fired from his job. He had hit the figurative bottom. Then he hit the ground.

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Last September, after nine months of talking and praying over the possibility of a move, we drove away from our home. Every conversation had brought us closer to taking this step we never intended to take. We wrestled and second-guessed even as the car left our assigned parking spot, embarking on Google Maps' shortest toll-free route to our destination.

For three months before we left, we culled. Our goal: to be as lean and flexible as possible for whatever came next. Friends insisted we didn't have much to begin with. An 1,100-square-foot townhome imposes limits. But we had filled nooks and crannies with more belongings than we needed to keep.

We had lived in Albuquerque for 20 years. We loved the sunshine, big skies, and warm weather—four seasons with extended summer. We loved the geography and took full advantage of having the Sandia Mountains as our backyard, enjoying regular exercise on foothill trails and weekend hikes to the crest. We loved nurturing relationships over decades to build real community. And we loved exploration: habitually seeking solitude and sabbath in remote campsites on public lands by navigating color-coded maps.

We drove away from New Mexico with carefully selected tangibles of our four-decade marriage packed into a small trailer hitched to our Honda Passport. We returned to the Chicago metropolitan area, the backdrop of our childhoods and first half of our life together, to help aging parents with significant transitions. This was, and is, a temporary destination with no end in sight.

Chicago initially greeted us with unseasonable warmth: People were still going to the beach in early October. Although delayed, the fall foliage offered a spectacular show. Then a sudden storm system covered the area with snow—more snow in just a couple weeks than had fallen in the previous year. Three consecutive arctic vortices followed on the record snowfall's heels. Perpetual gloom kicked in. Twenty years ago we had left the Midwest to follow the sun, and we returned just as the sun took its annual vacation.

There has been no need to acclimate, given our long muscle memory. Our reality is disconnected; everything seems familiar, but we don't belong. We have deep roots here, but we're as barren as the trees around us. We lack motivation to invest in local relationships because we're transient. We gave up our routines, our community, our privacy, our independence. Our packed-up life remains in bins stacked against my mother-in-law's garage wall.

We neither imagined nor planned to spend any portion of our autumn supporting my in-laws' winter. Our faith affirms that God is with us in this wilderness. God, more than Google, routed us here. And though it feels like our own journey is on hold, we've just taken a detour on a map that's still unfolding.

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