



Photo by Greg Snyder

Throwing your body off a bridge in a bungee jump combines terror with an incredible rush of adrenalin. As suicidal as it

appears, bungee jumping in Oregon has resulted in only a few minor injuries.

Bungee jumpers take a 'ticket to terror'

At least 300 University students have plunged off a bridge, and lived

By James Vlahos
Emerald Contributor

"Today is a great day to die," the Cherokee Indians would say to greet each new day, but I doubt they had bungee jumping in mind when they said it.

I was perched on a tiny platform 140 feet above the ominous river, preparing to leap and trying hard to think like a Cherokee.

Reporter's Notebook

Ninety percent of facing your first "leap of faith" is panic, and the other 10 percent is sheer terror.

I had faith no more. I did have four bungee cords, or glorified rubber bands, strapped to my chest, which would let me fall 100 feet before bouncing me out of death's clutches, but that didn't seem to help.

Fear strangled any sense of logic as the people on the bridge shouted my countdown. "Five, four, three...." In the final moments, I felt strangely alone.

"One."

My legs pushed me off the platform.

The next two seconds were a blinding explosion of terror and speed. The air thundered by me and my body hurtled downward, as if being sucked through the hose of a gargantuan vacuum cleaner.

A long scream was ripping

out of my chest.

Casey Dale of Eugene, who runs the only commercial bungee jump operation in the state, described the scream as "a primal, guttural sound. The sound of bungee."

Then - boing! the bungees snapped me back upward for the first of four giant bounces. No longer did I fear an early day of reckoning with the big guy upstairs; he was dribbling me like a human basketball instead.

I cursed and flailed through the air with each bounce, feeling like a foolish mortal who defied the eternal laws in an ancient Greek myth.

My first bungee jump was exactly as jump emcee Dale had warned: "a ticket to terror."

I loved it. The bungee fad - at least the best fad since streaking - traces its roots to the Pentecostal Islanders in the South Pacific. Males of the Bunlap tribe practiced "land-diving" from 90- to 150-foot bamboo towers as a rite of passage.

Springy vines (low-tech bungees) attached at their ankles stopped their plunge just short of the ground.

In 1970 the "Dangerous Sports Club" of Oxford, England substituted bungee cords for vines, and any high structure for bamboo towers, thus creating a free-falling rite of passage for the modern man or woman: bungee jumping.

Dale, who leads jump expeditions at various sites every weekend, believes there is more to bungee jumping than attaching yourself to a giant



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rubber band and leaping from a bridge.

Conquering your fears to make the jump is what Dale calls an "empowering activity," and an experience which gives you inner power to face other challenges in daily life.

Assuming you walk away from your jump intact.

The basic nature of the sport - leaping from a bridge - implies substantial danger, yet it can be quite safe with proper equipment and set-up procedures.

Bungees have been indicted

for causing a variety of minor injuries, from the common "bungee burn" to the short-term trauma of "bungee groin."

No one has been seriously injured in Dale's operation, however.

The key piece of equipment, of course, is the bungee cord.

Bungees, those oh-so-useful cords dad used to secure luggage to the roof-rack when the family drove to Disneyland, are now on the forefront of human-

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