

Sunday, Jan 19, 2020

Sunrise Hot Air Balloon Ride with Sunrise Balloon Miami, LLC

██████████

Pilot – Mark Kersten

Chase crew – Bob (last name unknown)

Gina Falish Uhle statement

I planned this hot air balloon ride for myself and my daughter as a surprise college graduation gift for my daughter, Victoria. We arrived at ██████████ ██████████ Miami, FL 33177 at 5:30am. We along with 4 other passengers rode to the launch site with Kyle and the other two passengers rode with the pilot in his truck. There were eight passengers total.

Prior to take off, we were given positions in the basket by Bob, the pilot's partner. He pointed to us and said "you two will be here, you two will be here" and so on until we all knew our positions. When we were all in the basket, prior to take off, our pilot, made the comment that his nickname is Captain Fly Low. I think someone noticed the patch on his shirt that says Capt. Flylow and asked him about it. I responded "I paid for a hot air balloon ride and am not expecting to be flying low".

We left the ground at 6:57am. Within the first few minutes we had already brushed the top of a tree. When that happened the pilot laughed and said we had just cleaned off the bottom of the basket. When we hit the second tree he said same thing and laughed again. When we hit the second tree we actually had to duck our heads to avoid getting hit by the branches. I wasn't really scared at this time but I was getting angry. He seemed to be flying very low without explanation. I became scared when we hit a third tree and skimmed the top of a telephone or electric pole of some kind.

The pilot and the chase crew started considering places to land around 7:30am. Even though we had hit the trees and skimmed a pole neither the pilot nor anyone on the radio/ground mentioned an issue. Once they chose a place to land the pilot flew us into a tree that had several branches and greenery wrapped around live power lines. The pilot stated yelling over and over "fuck, fuck, fuck" as we were headed toward the tree. We crashed into the tree and the lines and sparks flew all around and on us.

The sparks burned my hair and skin. The smell of burning hair and skin seemed immediate. A portion of the basket caught fire. One passenger was yelling that they were on fire. Another seemed to be trying to jump out. The tree could not hold the basket and we dropped a few feet out of the power lines. The tree continued to drop us, maybe three or four plunges until we were on the ground. We turned the basket over trying to get out and crawled on our stomachs until we were out and away from the basket. I suffered multiple burns from the sparks and fire.

Once on the ground and away from the basket the pilot asked if we were ok then said something to the effect "OMG, we are all alive, we will all live another day" then he asked if we still wanted our champagne. At the pilot's direction, Kyle started to get the champagne glasses out but Bob stepped in and put a stop to that. The police and fire truck could be heard in the distance and a couple of people who lived nearby came running over. I believe they were the ones to contact 911. I did hear Bob tell the police that the balloon hit a down draft. I never noticed any adverse weather conditions before, during or after the flight or heard the pilot or ground crew mention anything about down drafts.

Sunday, Jan 19, 2020

Sunrise Hot Air Balloon Ride with Sunrise Balloon Miami, LLC

[REDACTED]
Pilot – Mark Kersten

Chase crew – Bob (last name unknown)

Victoria Falish statement

The hot air balloon ride was on January 19, 2020. There were eight passengers and one pilot, nine people in total in the basket. When we were getting in the basket, we were not weighed and didn't sign any waivers. He looked at us, and then assigned us positions in the basket. We were told that there were 4 propane tanks in the basket.

Once we were in the air, the pilot said that his nickname was Low Flyer or Fly Low, it was written on his shirt as well. That seemed odd. We ended up brushing the tops of two or three trees and the pilot joked that we were "just cleaning off the bottom of the basket". After this, we also hit the top of a power line pole. The bottom of the basket hit the top of it. That was startling and the basket swayed a bit back and forth after we hit it. We also ran into two or so trees head on and got hit by leaves and branches in our faces.

After only 30 minutes, the crew was trying to find a spot to land. While trying to follow the chase crew and land at the chosen spot, we headed straight into power lines surrounded by trees and crashed. The pilot was saying "f [REDACTED] f [REDACTED] f [REDACTED]" and then told us to get down as we were crashing into power lines. As we were tangled in them I felt sharp stabs starting in my legs and then traveling up to my arms and chest. At first, I thought they were thorns from the tree, but it was sparks from the power lines. I felt something different on my arms and chest and it felt like I was on fire. A male passenger was yelling "I'm on fire! I'm on fire!" I could smell burning skin and hair. While all of this was happening, we fell down to the ground through the tree. There were a few jolts while falling until we reached the ground. Once we were on the ground, we did an army crawl out of the basket.

A few minutes later, the pilot was saying something similar to "We all survived and will live another day!" He offered us champagne and the crew was setting up the glasses, but the head crew member (Bob) told them to stop. Police officers and firefighters came quickly and some neighbors ran over.

One man had a severe burn on his leg that was completely white all over and was hospitalized. Another man was in the van having a panic attack. I had burns on my arms, chest, and many marks from the sparks on my legs. Our clothes had holes where we were burned. My hair was falling out in handfuls and my mother along with another woman had the same problem. The police/firefighters told us to use some antiseptic soap and then apply Neosporin. On the ride back in the van with Bob, he claimed that hitting trees was just part of the ride and not abnormal.

Gunther Todd

From: Gunther Todd
Sent: Friday, March 11, 2022 10:04 AM
To: Gunther Todd
Subject: FW: Regarding your call

From: JanyL M [REDACTED] >
Sent: Wednesday, March 4, 2020 11:59 AM
To: Gunther Todd <[REDACTED]>
Subject: Re: Regarding your call

[CAUTION] This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click any links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Below is a statement my fiancé and I gave to someone that called us from FAA. If you need anything else please let me know

On the morning of January 19th, 2020, my fiancé (Janyl Martinez) and I (Martin Vazquez) met with the owner and operators of sunrise balloon miami at our preselected meeting location, [REDACTED], Miami 33177, at approximately 5AM.

Upon arrival and after a brief wait, we were told that we would be taking our hot air balloon ride with three other couples. Once everyone arrived, we were loaded onto a passenger van and escorted to a launch site. We exited our van and were briefed on how the hot air balloon filling process worked. First, the owner released a small lantern into the air to judge wind and direction. Then his crew rolled out the balloon and the carrier basket. The basket itself seemed small for 8 passengers and and 1 pilot. The owner assured all of us that his company had a 20 year perfect safety record because they put safety first. He then pointed at each couple and then pointed at each corresponding compartment within the basket where we would be riding. At no point were any of the passengers weighed on a scale or on any device.

Once the balloon was sufficiently filled the basket stood up and we all loaded ourselves into our compartments and off we went. Within the first 19 minutes of our ride it became apparent that our basket was over weighted and that fact was making it very difficult for the balloon pilot to maintain a consistent altitude. We would drop quickly and go up slowly. Eventually, this overweight issue caused us to hit a few tree tops. The pilot reassured us that this was a normal part of the balloon flying process. Then we hit a 25 foot palm tree head on. The whole basket jerked violently forward and backwards and we slowed down dramatically. The pilot again reassured us that this was normal. He then began communicating to his ground crew (whom were chasing us in their vehicles) his insistence on landing the balloon. The pilot struggled to find an appropriate landing sight with the sufficient space to land safely until he spotted a farm field. He proceeded to lower our altitude but the combination of our overweight and wind resistance forced him to abort this attempt. He fired the propane unit and we gained just enough altitude to clear a large tree patch. The balloon dropped again suddenly and he again fired his propane unit but we hit the top of a power line pole. We were able to clear that hit but now all of the passengers were concerned about our pilots ability and our safety. Approximately 6 minutes later our balloon again dropped and our pilot delayed in firing the propane unit until he realized that the wind was not going to carry us the sufficient altitude to clear a series of power lines and tree patches quickly approaching. He fired the unit but it was too late and we crashed head on into the cluster of power lines. As soon as we hit, the basket became electrified. All of us were feeling electric currents. The basket bounced several times on the high voltage power lines. All of us were being showered with electrical sparks which caused burns. The basket

then dropped about 7 feet onto a patch of tree tops. I turned to the pilot, who was in complete shock, and asked him if we should jump. He couldn't answer. At that moment the basket fell about 10 feet to the ground and landed on its side. We all stumbled out of the basket. I grabbed my fiancé and dragged her away from the wreckage. At this point the surrounding area was on fire and the balloon company crew was working on putting out the fires. All of us ran away from the wreckage on our own afraid of what would happen if the propane tanks where to explode. We were all in shock and all of us had electrical current injuries and burns. The paramedics and police arrived about 15 minutes later and we were checked out. After a short wait I secured a paid ride (Uber) back to our car and went home.

P.s I've been going to therapy 3 times a week and I just got my MRI results and was told I have a [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] from the fall.

Janyl M.

Statement of Karen T. Smith and Robert W. James regarding Air Balloon incident of January 19, 2020 with Sunrise Balloon Ride Miami.

Today's Date: January 24, 2020

Joint Statement:

On July 28, 2019, Karen Smith booked an air balloon ride for December 28, 2019 for two passengers, herself and Robert James through a third-party booking agent, Adrenaline Inc. (adrenaline.com) for \$ [REDACTED] on Sunrise Balloon Ride Miami. As instructed in the booking confirmation, Ms. Smith reached out to "Captain Mark", Mark Kersten, on December 23, 2019 to confirm the time and date of the balloon trip on December 28th. The balloon ride was later postponed to January 19, 2020 because of poor weather.

We were instructed to meet at [REDACTED], Miami 33177 by 5:30 am on the morning of January 19, 2020. We were running about 12 minutes late, so as soon as we arrived we were ushered into a white passenger van with the other passengers. We were followed by an older beat-up light-green pickup truck that held the air balloon basket, canopy and other gear in the bed. We were driven to another parking lot near a Sabor Tropical Supermarket located at [REDACTED], Homestead FL, 33033, approximately 20 minutes into Homestead, FL. We were then introduced to the other passengers and the crew. The flight basket was to include a total of 4 couples including us, two other male/female couples, and a mother and daughter couple for a total of 8 passengers and one pilot. There were 4 men total setting up the balloon, we do not remember their names or know if they had job titles.

An older male crew member gave us a quick safety briefing and said that safety was their #1 priority and that they had not had an accident in 20 years. He gave the impression he was in charge of the operation as a manager or perhaps owner, though we cannot confirm if this is true. There were not many details or instructions given other than this older crew member telling us that between him and the pilot they had a combined experience of 50 years flying hot and hydrogen gas balloons around the world. He also mentioned that if we asked a question during the flight to the pilot and he did not answer that it was because the pilot was concentrating and to not take it personally. The older crew member also said that the pilot might ask Robert or another male passenger to assist with dropping the guide rope attached to the rear of the basket to the ground crew when landing. The passengers were advised to listen to the pilot for instructions during the flight.

While the crew set up the balloon the older crew member explained how the balloon was inflated. The crew member assigned each couple a part of the divided basket they should stand in and to use indicated indented spaces on the outside of the basket as a ladder to climb in as the basket height was quite tall (about 4 feet). At no point did any member of the crew ask us to sign any kind of waiver or documents, ask us our weights, or if we had any health or other concerns. The crew let off a Chinese Wish Lantern to

judge which way the wind was going and mentioned they had a complex computer instrument that told them the different wind speeds at different altitudes. Robert noticed a broken antenna on the handheld radio that the pilot was using and no other data collecting instruments in the actual balloon.

Karen took pictures of the balloon set up while Robert set up his GoPro video camera on the hood of the old truck. While the balloon was being set up, Karen noted some rips in the edge of the balloon silk and mentioned it to another of the male passengers, named Martin. He said he saw it too. When the propane gas was ignited it was obvious to Karen that during previous launches this is where the silk must have been scorched at some point I surmised as it must be safe enough as they were still using the balloon canopy with the rips. When the balloon was inflated sufficiently, the older crew member gave a signal and we all jumped into the basket without issue on our own accord and took off within seconds. The beginning of the trip went smoothly without incident and we headed in a north-west direction. There was no noticeable strong wind and the weather was calm.

The pilot had a very relaxed attitude during the entire trip. There were two chase cars, the older truck for the equipment and the white passenger van. The pilot was in touch with the truck by a handheld radio, though sometimes he had to call several times to get a response. We flew very low almost the entire flight. The pilot said it was because the wind at the higher altitudes was too fast and he radioed the truck that he made that decision to fly low with that reason. The older man in the truck copied that information. We were low enough to be able to communicate easily with people on the ground who came out of their homes to see the balloon go by. We were flying through/around the Homestead area with a lot of agricultural fields and homes with animals. We were scaring a lot of these animals by flying so low. At one point three horses in a corral broke through their gate in panic and Karen was concerned that they would get into the road but saw there was a secondary gate around the property and there was nothing that could be done to alert the owners.

Issues started to happen about halfway through the hour-long trip, with the basket hitting three separate low-lying objects before the final incident. First, the balloon basket swept through a grove of mango trees hitting the tree tops causing the passengers to protect their faces from the tree branches. Secondly, we then hit a single large palm tree, breaking off at least one branch in a home's yard. Thirdly, we then hit what was either a power line or a power line pole with the bottom of the basket. None of these strikes seemed to concern the pilot. The pilot communicated with the truck to identify a field to land in but then the pilot saw a single wire and pole running halfway through that field and decided to abort that landing spot so he would not hit the wire. The pilot then identified several more fields and communicated their locations to the chase vehicles as possible landing spots. However they were either inaccessible to the chase vehicles or had just been newly planted so did he not go for them.

At approximately 7:40 am a dirt unplanted field was identified by the pilot as a landing zone. It was hard to tell from the passengers' perspective which field the pilot was

aiming for as there were two; a smaller and a larger field. The pilot came in very low and fast and we headed directly into the lower power lines. In the last feet the pilot yelled for all the passengers to "get down get down!" The pilot turned on the propane gas burner to try and rise above the lines but it was too late. We hit the power line with the lower part of the balloon canopy and chords that hold the basket to the canopy. The basket was in a small group of trees directly below the lines about 10-12 feet in the air. The power lines instantly arced loudly and sparked. You could hear the electricity arcing about us and we were being showered by the sparks. As soon as we hit the lines the pilot gave one more shot of propane gas into the balloon to try and get us above again but I think he realized the balloon canopy was too tangled in the wires and trees. I don't know why he did that as there was a real possibility for the propane igniting and it was obviously a life-threatening situation.

Karen was directly next to Robert in the same basket section with him closer to the outside edge of the basket and Karen towards the inside. The basket section we were in was only a couple feet across. Below are our separate accounts of what we individually experienced:

Karen's experience: I was down on the floor of the basket when we hit the wires and heard Robert screaming "It hurts, it hurts" over and over again. I could not see what was hurting him, but I then saw a small broken uninsulated power wire, about half an inch thick, directly between us. I assumed that this wire was touching Robert and he couldn't move away from it. I knew it was live but I tried to move it away from him with my hand and arm though it burned me so he could get away. I could not see, what later I found out that his pant leg was on fire and he put out the fire with his hands. He then stood up and threw himself over the side of the basket yelling at me to follow him. We were about 10 feet in the air and Robert fell through the trees onto the ground. Robert was yelling up from the ground to me to jump. I quickly threw my purse and camera that had been around my neck over the side of the basket not wanting them to impede me as I tried to follow Robert. However, the height of the basket and the vegetation made it difficult for me to see the ground, and most importantly the live wire was still there preventing me from going in the same direction that Robert went. I was trying to get a foothold on the basket to jump over the side, but I believe that when Robert jumped out the basket the total weight must have been redistributed and the basket tilted towards me and it could not have been more than 20 seconds later than the basket fell on its side to the ground. I believe the basket falling so we could escape saved us. I bolted out of the basket landing on top on the couple, Martin and Janel, who had been in the section next to us. I ran as fast as I could into the field away from the balloon, afraid the propane tanks were going to ignite. The dry vegetation under the basket, and I think some of the trees, was on fire from the sparks. Robert immediately found me and we could not believe we were alive. I received numerous small burns from the electrical wires on my right arm, back and hand. The worst burn was on my right forearm, about the size of a quarter. Robert's left pant leg had caught on fire and he was injured from that. His thick hooded sweatshirt had numerous spark burns on it but it had protected his head and upper body from the burns. I was very calm through this experience and remember everything.

Robert's experience: We directly coasted into the wire stopping when the impacted the power lines causing the top of the balloon to fold over the top of the wires. I threw myself to the bottom of the basket when I saw what was going to happen even before the pilot said to get down. I curled into a protective position to protect my head and face as best as I could. Immediately I could hear and see flashes of the loud surging and sparking electricity. There was sparking all around and one spark landed on my left leg catching my pant leg on fire. I did not realize it at first what was happening, but when I felt the intense pain I saw the flames and I put it out with my hands. The sparking seemed to reduce after the initial impact and I remember the pilot telling everyone to "Get out, get out, get out!" I immediately tossed everything I had in my hand over the side and threw myself over the side. My GoPro camera dropped to the floor of the basket and I left it. I used the trees to break my fall to the ground. Once I landed on the ground I started to yell for Karen thinking she was right behind me but I could not find her. I realized she was still in the basket. I yelled for her to get out. I could see the trees on the ground just below the basket were on fire. I turned around to yell at the arriving three crew members to use a fire extinguisher to put the fire out. They said something to the effect that they could not use it or it was already spent. I don't know if there was an extinguisher on the balloon or if there was any available at all. But they did not have one to put out the fire on the ground. It was not a small fire but it must have burned itself out eventually. Karen somehow joined me about this point. I do not remember the basket falling but she said that was how she got out. A bald-headed crew member later retrieved Karen's purse and camera and another crew member retrieved my glasses and GoPro camera.

Joint statement continued:

Onlookers to the accident from the adjoining neighborhoods had called 911 and rushed out to help. Robert asked one of the onlookers if 911 had been called and he said yes but it would take them a while to get there because of the rural location.

The chase trucks had come up and the older manager tried to take charge of the situation, however we do not remember if any of the crew members directly came up to us to ask us if we were alright. There was no first aid care given or offered by the balloon crew. We do not know if the balloon crew had a first aid kit or not. The only thing offered was water to drink. The pilot threw his hands up in celebration for some reason, perhaps for surviving. The crew had set up champagne, we believe this is normally what they do post balloon ride, but we did not take any and we believe the owner/manager asked them to take it down. The Miami-Dade County police and ambulance arrived about 10 - 15 minutes after we were on the ground. The police took our contact information though they did not ask for a statement on the scene.

One of the EMT asked all the passengers to gather so we could be checked out. No other passengers were severely hurt that we know of. Robert's burn injury was the worst with a more than 3 inch burn on his left leg calf muscle. One of the other male passengers, a man in his late 20s wearing a white Nike track suit, was having an

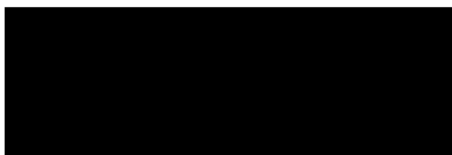
anxiety attack and was in shock and was also being treated by the EMTs. As a side effect, all the women with long hair their hair began falling out due to the electricity. One of the passengers, the daughter of the mother/daughter couple, pulled out a handful of her long hair right there. Karen had the same issue. The paramedics loaded Robert into the back of the ambulance and Karen accompanied in the front seat. The EMTs asked the rest of the group if anyone else wanted to go to the hospital for treatment and we do not know if anyone else did. Florida Power and Electric arrived on the scene to shut down the power lines so they could get the balloon down around the time we left for the hospital. Both Karen and Robert were both able to answer questions asked by the paramedics. When arriving into the hospital, Robert was immediately admitted for treatment. Karen was admitted very shortly after when the Emergency Room attendants found out her burns were electric. Karen had 1.5 inch burn on her right forearm and several wire burns on her hand and right bicep where the electric wire burned through her clothing. Robert and Karen was given treatment for second degree burns. Karen was also given an EKG and blood work to test for cell damage because of the electricity. The admitting officials noted a burning smell coming off Karen when entering the room. Both Karen and Robert were discharged after about two hours after being admitted with wound care medication and instructed to keep the burns clean, bandaged and if there was any sign of infection to go to their primary care doctors. Both Karen and Robert were told by the emergency room attendants that they will likely have scars from their second degree burns.

Robert had his GoPro video camera running through the entire experience, though a camera case issue makes it difficult though not impossible to hear voices on the video. The date stamp on the video is also wrong, dated 2012, however the passengers on the video are the ones listed for January 19, 2020. A total of six video files were taken of the experience. Karen and Robert took many photos of the balloon set up, trip and after the incident. The first date stamp on the photo that Karen took was of the balloon accident site at 7:51 am, and that was very shortly after she was on the ground so the balloon flying into the power lines was around 7:45 am.

Sunrise Balloon Ride Miami pilot, Mark Kersten, did not contact Karen until January 21st by text to ask if we were alright so they could file a FAA report. We have not responded. We have contacted a lawyer to represent us moving forward.

Signed:

Karen Smith



Robert James



Statement of Passenger Annette Dominguez W. James regarding Air Balloon incident of January 19, 2020 with Sunrise Balloon Ride Miami.

On Sunday, January 19, 2020, my boyfriend Pablo and I met with some of the team members from Balloon Miami, Dave and another man at Eureka Plaza (██████████, Miami, FL 33177) around 5:30am. The intention was to make sure everyone is ready early and can take a restroom break and or quick breakfast at the McDonald's there before we fly in the hot air balloon. About 15 minutes later while waiting in McDonald's, the pilot Mark Kersten notifies me that everyone else we were waiting for arrived and that they are ready to commute to the location when we were. I was waiting for Pablo to finish utilizing the restroom. A few minutes later we walked out of McDonald's and found Mark waiting for us. We parked my car in that plaza while we went on the ride. Mark drove Pablo and me in his truck to the location where they were going to set up the hot air balloon and we would go in to start our flight there. We three conversed on the way about our careers and the experience Mark has with hot air balloons.

Upon arriving to the location Pablo asked if it was okay to set up here, or something similar, and Mark responded, "maybe." It was at another plaza where there was open grassy space. We met the other passengers, and between Mark and Dave they explained what the other team members were doing to set up the balloon. Before setting up the hot air balloon, they lit up a Chinese lantern and let it fly to see where the wind was blowing, to have an idea what direction the hot air balloon would take. The direction was northeast. The basket of the hot air balloon was on its side, the bottom facing south. They explained that they were going to use a fan to inflate the balloon with cool air first, then use what I think was helium to help the balloon rise gradually. They mentioned that they've never had any accidents with hot air balloons. Before the team began, they explained to us that the basket had 5 compartments. The middle one is for Mark and two propane tanks. All of us passengers came in pairs and were assigned a compartment to climb into as soon as the basket was right side up to distribute weight evenly. The mother and daughter were in the front right section, in front of us based on the direction the balloon flew. Pablo and I were in the rear right compartment. The couple with the gentleman who helped with preparing the balloon and went to the hospital stood in the front left section, and another couple in the rear back. We were told to climb the steps on the sides of the basket to enter our compartments. We were also told of the rope-like handles inside the basket to hold onto when we land. We were told that one of the passengers would be assigned to hold to rope (between Pablo and another tall male passenger) when we start looking to land and when Mark would tell the person to drop the rope to do so immediately. The team driving in the truck would grab the rope and pull the hot air balloon to the ground. Also, while flying Mark would be in contact with the rest of the team driving in the truck through walkie talkie and to not take offense if we ask a question and he doesn't answer right away because he's focusing on piloting. We were told that in the landing, the basket might jump or hop a few times until it officially stops.

We were allowed to take pictures throughout and during the setup. The setup involved all the team members (3 or 4) and two of the passengers, including Pablo and the gentleman who went to the hospital holding the edges of the balloon to help fill the balloon with cool air and hot air later.

I think it was close to 7:00 am, or nearing sunrise as the hot air balloon almost filled with hot air, almost of all us helped flip the basket to stand upright, and we all entered our assigned

compartments. Dave took quick photos of us, passengers, with our phones before we took off. We slowly began rising and flying northeast. The distance in height between and the ground was enough for us to see people and hear them greet us back when we flew over houses. The flying was peaceful, no rush. Sometime during our flight, it looked as if we were about to hit or crash into a shorter palm tree because we were not too far from it, but we rose before doing so and might have brushed it from the bottom of the basket. Another instance occurred where the basket brushed other trees as we flew. We were closer to farming areas when Mark was looking to land. I don't remember if before or while the team tried to choose a location to land is when I recorded the video of my boyfriend and me and a bit of the hot air balloon. Around this time Mark assigned Pablo to hold the rope to prepare to drop the rope when given the cue. The first time the team tried to establish a landing spot I think the farm or open area was prohibited.

So, we continued flying. There was one time when the basket hit or brushed against an electricity post from the bottom. A few minutes afterward we crashed into an electricity pole and trees by a farming open area. It caught me by surprise because I literally did not see it coming since I was facing the opposite direction in the rear end of the basket. The balloon stopped got stuck and was tilted. Until the crash, Pablo was standing and holding onto the rope that we would use to be pulled down toward the ground by the team. He had no time to guard himself. Someone, maybe Mark yelled and told us to duck, so I did so and held onto the handles inside the basket. I was looking down almost the entire time, thus not seeing if there was any fire. Almost right away Pablo pushed my head lower to dodge an electric cable because at least one cable broke and entered our basket or was hanging around or above us. I recall hearing and feeling some sparks from what I thought was electricity from the cables. At some point Pablo covered me, me facing him and with my head down toward his chest. I hear Pablo yell that there's a fire or his foot is on fire, and he begins panicking because of the sparks and cables in our compartment and or above us. At least one cable broke and felt hot. I said, "hold on," stood up in the basket and tried to push the cables out of our compartment with my sleeve so I didn't feel the burn. I considered jumping the basket before the situation worsened. I don't know if the basket gradually fell, reaching the ground, or if the team pulled us.

We eventually reach the ground and are pulled one by one by the rest of the team. I was pulled out before Pablo. He was sitting with his arms around his knees, restless, shaking, breaking heavily and fast. We walked slowly to more open space, away from the hot air balloon. I stood next to Pablo, as he placed his hands on his knees and continued to breathe. Dave asked if he's all right or we needed water. We were given water, and I responded that he was feeling anxious. Dave told us we could sit in the van and he escorted us there. Dave informed us all that the emergency rescue was coming to check up on all of us. I felt stings on my neck and wrist, and slight one on my lower back, but mostly tried to comfort Pablo who was experiencing a panic attack but at the time I thought was an anxiety attack. He was breathing fast and heavily, feeling restless, denied wanting water or anything. I tried hugging him and holding his face, so we had eye contact and I kept saying that "we're on the ground, we're here, we're okay, I'm right here," and that we'll be home soon. He had burns on his neck, hand, and one of his shoes was burnt from what I saw. I told him I'm sorry that we went through this.

The rescue arrived, and one of the first people they attended was Pablo. The one who attended him asked what happened, checked his blood pressure, basic health, asked if he has any health

problems, and Pablo mentioned that he has really bad anxiety. The rescue asked Pablo if he wanted to go to the hospital, and Pablo replied no. Another passenger from the hot air balloon sat in the front passenger seat of the van and spoke with another person from the rescue.

The police arrived as well, asked us each what happened. From overhearing the officers' talk, there was mention that the person who sat in the front of the van was dragged out of the basket face down because his back was severely burned or electrocuted. He decided to go to the hospital. The police approached us with a paper and clipboard for us to each write our name, phone number, address, and email for the police report. We were given a case number and told we could buy a copy within 14 or 30 days, I don't recall.

It was around 9 something in the morning when Dave drove the mom and daughter, Pablo and me back to the plaza where we left our cars and initially met. The other couple who did not go to the hospital decided to ride an uber.

Dave said, "So much for a perfect record." He also uttered that the wind did a downburst, pushing the balloon downward and I think that it's sometimes out of our control. I don't recall if he said this in the van or while we were on the ground at the site of the accident. Some time while we were at the site of the crash, I recall Mark saying that he tried to make the balloon rise with the helium/hot air, but the wind's downburst was stronger.

During the ride, we discussed a bit about what happened. Pablo reflected, saying that there were two propane tanks, fire, and electricity cables, that we could have been electrocuted or burnt. I recall the mom saying that she had ridden hot air balloons before and that this was a graduation gift for her daughter. We reached the parking lot where our cars were, and Dave helped us step out of the van. He apologized for what we went through. Pablo and I walked to the McDonald's in the plaza to use the restroom. I had a brief chat with the mom and daughter in the restroom about us being overall okay minus some burns, and that we got lucky.

I eventually met with Pablo and we walked to my car. He was serving as copilot to direct me to drive us back to my dad's house in Homestead. I took a few wrong turns or missed a turn or two. I was mentally distracted, or not entirely mentally present, as if stunned and in shock of what just happened. When we arrived at my dad's house, we both sat and leaned on each other on the couch, then lay down on my bed and napped. It was around noon when we awoke, and Pablo asked to be dropped off home, that he wanted to decompress. I dropped him off home in Miami and met with a few friends of mine as a surprise for my birthday in the afternoon.

Fast forward to nearly 10:00 pm, Pablo called me and told me he wasn't feeling too well, that he wanted to go to the hospital to get checked out. I asked him if he wanted me to go with him, and he said if I don't mind. I agreed to drive from my friend's house near Coral Way to his house in Allapattah. I picked him up and drove to Mercy Hospital. I accompanied him as he registered to the emergency room. He explained to the front desk what happened, and we were attended quickly. During our stay at the hospital, he received CT scans, was given a pain reliever, and maybe x-ray as well to make sure he had no severe harm despite still feeling some shocks in his body. I spoke with his mom who lives in New York briefly over the phone, telling her he's doing okay and was being scanned at the time. She said to keep her informed. Around 2:00 am

he was discharged. He was suggested to take two days off work and was given a pain reliever prescription.

From: [REDACTED]
To: [REDACTED] (FAA)
Subject: Report
Date: Tuesday, January 21, 2020 10:40:48 AM

I had been flying for about 50 minutes and I began looking for an appropriate field to land. While passing over the intersection of SW [212 Ave and SW 240 St. in Miami, Florida](#), I noticed the power lines ahead. I had more than adequate altitude for clearance and continued my level flight, forward progress. As I was about to cross overhead the power lines, I felt a strong down draft, which began to push my balloon into a rapid descent. Appropriately, I applied max continuous burner heat, to stop the abrupt descent in progress. The balloon made contact with the power lines and I followed the established emergency procedures of deflating (ripping out) the envelope, while simultaneously shutting off the propane tank valves. The basket slid down to the ground, while the envelope lay across the power lines. 911 was immediately called requesting police, fire, EMS, and Florida Power and Light (FPL). The FAA emergency desk in Washington DC was also notified. EMS checked out the 8 passengers of which 4 sustained minor burns and 4 were not injured. I was not injured as well. As a precautionary measure one couple (2 passengers) decided to go with EMS to get evaluated. The other remaining 6 passengers went back to their vehicles to ride home. After FPL and first responders clearance, the balloon was packed up and transported from the site.

[REDACTED]