

Ashley Maxfield Essay
Flyin Ryan Foundation Application
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Nine summers ago, I made the plunge into the world of big mountain skiing. I still remember getting out of the taxi at the Blue Tambo in Farellones, Chile. I remember how nervous and excited I was, I remember hoping that my taxi driver found the right place, and I remember not knowing what to expect. When I got out of the car there was a smiling face that came to greet me.

That smile was so inviting, I instantly felt like I was with a friend. That smile belonged to my first and best friend on the Freeskiing World Tour, Ryan Hawks. Ryan's simple act of kindness made all the difference for me. As ski racer at a big mountain competition I felt like a fish out of water. I had no clue what I was doing or what was going on, but Ryan took me underneath his wing and showed me the ropes.

Freeride skiing has given me the most amazing experiences in my life, as well as some of my darkest hours. This world that I became a part of has challenged me in more ways than I ever thought possible. I have found friends, family and a community in this sport and with that some of the most shared love I have even known. Though with the nature of this sport I have also suffered some of the biggest heartbreaks and losses, such as when we lose a member of the community to the mountains. This sport has taught me more about life, who I am and who I really want to be than anything else that I have been a part of.

On January 31, 2015, while competing on the Freeride World Tour in Fieberbrunn, Austria, I found out just how unforgiving big mountain skiing can be. The snow conditions were less than ideal to say the least. The normal venue was out, same with the women's start, too much ice and not enough snow. I had a bad feeling going into the comp, I really wanted to pull out because I didn't think the venue was safe, but I didn't want to be the only one not to compete.

I drew the last bib for ski women, which happened to be the first category that day. When I started the comp, I was having a good run, my skiing was strong, and my speed was there. It wasn't until I got about half-way down that I started hitting rock throughout my turns. I slowed my speed as I came into the bottom part of the line. I dropped in planning for a double out to the left when my ski got caught on a rock and small tree and it kicked me to the right, straight into the gnar.

I was flying at a rock wall and there was nothing I could do about it. It was the worst amount of pain that I have ever had in my life by far. When I was free falling down this mountain with my face looking up at the sky, all I can remember thinking was this was it, in that time I remember asking Ryan for help. It's not something that I have said to many people and still makes my tear up to this day. Having the feeling that this might be the last thing you do in your life is scary.

The months after the accident while recovering in Vermont, I got the chance to be the head judge for the *Ski The East Freeride Tour*. It got me thinking about my accident, along with the safety of the other athletes. It motivated me to find ways I could be a part of making Freeskiing safer and more accessible for the next generation. Something inside of me started to change from wanting to be back on the Freeride World Tour, to wanting to be a part of teaching athletes about safety and becoming a person who ensures the safety of athletes at competitions. The next two seasons I competed in order to get my head back to being ok with going out of a start gate on my own terms, but I knew that I now had new path in freeskiing. Around this same time the IFSA came out with a new structure for junior development in the Americas which included new coaching guidelines, rules and judging. That was perfect for part of what I wanted to do, but I still felt I had more to contribute.

The same year as my accident I won a Heli trip with Alaska Heliskiing from a *SheJumps* raffle. I went up to Haines, Alaska with about 40 percent of my normal skiing capacity, due to ongoing recovery from my crash in Austria. Initially, I thought I would go to Alaska for a soul skiing trip with lots of fellow lady rippers, but I found so much more. During the trip, some of the Alaska Heliskiing guides asked me if I ever considered being a guide, until that point, I never given it much thought. Throughout the next year, during my physical therapy and road to recovery becoming a guide was always in the back of my mind.

It wasn't until seeing a couple more friends crash hard that I made the moves to pursue my ambition. In the 2016-2017 winter season I went to the Alaska Heliskiing Guide School, taught by Mark Kelly. This experience encompassed all the goals and challenges I set for myself after my crash. I was on track to go into the next season with an excellent start on utilizing what I learned in guide school, but life had other plans. That October, while playing in a fundraiser co-ed softball tournament I dislocated my knee cap. I had to take last winter fully off (first time ever since I started skiing) and had to have surgery in March of 2018.

Now on the road to recovery, I want to continue my education so that I can finish the transition from competitor to guide. Over the years since Ryan's passing, and my multiple injuries I have wanted to do something more with the sport I love so much that would help impact others. I have coached the juniors and judged several freeskiing events. Now it is time for me to continue to pursue my objective of impacting more people in the freeskiing community. The next steps in this journey are a Wilderness Advanced First Aid Bridge to Wilderness First Responder class this year. In addition, I want to continue my AIARE education, which that I began at Alaska Heliskiing Guide School in Haines, Alaska during the 2017 season. In addition to bolstering my guide credentials, I am continuing my education as a freeride coach by completing a Level 200 IFSA coaching certification this month (March 2019). I have also continued to judge IFSA/FWQ events on the East Coast.

With the knowledge and experience these courses will provide, I am aiming to become a certified Heli guide for both skiing and mountain biking and continue my development

as a freeride coach. By doing this I will share my passion for the mountains with a greater range of people, with the intent to show them how to safely have fun in the mountains I love.