

My name is Elayne Humphrey. I am a Certified Flight Instructor at Cape Fear Aviation Flight Training. I was helping with the event on Monday, February 17th and witnessed the accident. This is my account of what happened and what I saw.

It was a beautiful day at the time of the flight. The wind was coming from about 020 degrees at less than 5 kts, the sky was clear and the visibility was clear. I remember this because right before the flight, I was explaining about the windsock to Justin as he waited for the airplane that he was going to be riding in to come to a stop in front of us.

Vanessa had just returned from a flight with Stephen Biddinger in 5185R. She was so happy and excited about that flight (I took her picture in front of the plane right after the flight). She wanted to ride again so she got in the back of the plane.

Justin was the last person from the group who had not gotten to sit in the left, front seat of a plane to experience being a pilot. He went over to the Cessna 172 N5185R plane and got in.

Dominiqu had just finished a flight in another plane and wanted to go with Vanessa because they had been together for the whole day and wanted to get to fly together in the back of the plane.

Stephen Biddinger was going to take the flight but he had a headache and when Jake Parsons walked up they decided for Jake to take the flight.

Stephen walked back towards the flight school. Jessica Davis and I were standing there watching the run up and take off. The run up and ground roll were totally normal. They took off with no flaps, going down Runway 35. They took off in the same amount of runway as that plane usually takes off.

However, once they were airborne, the airplane appeared to be pitched up more than a regular take off attitude. From my point of view it had the same angle of attack as if you were teaching a take off climb over a 50 foot obstacle - which is steeper than a regular take off. It continued to have a steep angle and what appeared to be about 100-150 feet off the ground the airplane's nose dipped slightly. The airplane then started to tilt down and to the left. It continued in a nose down attitude to the left and turned 270 degrees around as it dove downward so that it ended up crashing into the ground facing to the east.

As soon as the plane's nose started to come down to the left and it was diving to the ground, I dialed 911 and told them that there had been a crash and I didn't know if there were survivors or if everyone was ok.

I ran to the maintenance hanger to get the Dale Smith, Culhain McDaniel, Matt Denton and Scot Smith, who I knew would be able to help the people in the plane and they rushed out there. They were at the airplane within minutes of it hitting the ground.

This is my best memory of what happened that day.
Elayne Humphrey

My name is Elayne Humphrey. I'm a Certified Flight Instructor at Cape Fear Aviation and I witnessed the plane accident.

I went to Cape Fear Valley Hospital on Monday, February 17th at around 6:00pm. I went there to visit Justin Elliot and Vanessa Leal after the plane accident since I had been with them that day and had seen the accident. I wanted to extend my sympathies to him and his family for the situation he was involved in. I wanted to see how he was feeling and if there was anything I could do for them.

When I walked in the Emergency Department Room 62, he was lying on the bed with staples in the top of his head, his left eye was swollen and he was resting. As soon as I walked in and said hi to him, he started thanking me for the day.

He said that he had really enjoyed the day and learned so much. He said that he was thankful that he got the chance to see what it took to become an airplane mechanic and he wanted to come out as soon as he was better and learn more about that.

I asked him how he was feeling. He said he was "ok". I told him I was so sorry for what happened to him. He said "it's ok". He then went on to say what had happened.

Here's what he told me - his first cousin (who said she is like a sister) was also in the room:

We were going down the runway and then we took off and I was on the controls. I was pulling back and kept pulling back. Jake told me to let go but I didn't. Then the lights started all flashing and then I let go. Jake tried to fix it but I guess it was too late.

I told him I was so sorry he was hurt and that I could come visit him again to see how he was recovering.

Then I went up to see Vanessa Leal, she had returned to her room after surgery. She was awake and able to talk also. Her case worker, Falcon Home Cottage mom and a nurse were in the room when I got there. The nurse walked out and I was able to talk with Vanessa and tell her the same things I told Justin.

I asked her how she was feeling. She said "ok". I asked her what was hurting. She said "everything but my arms". We were able to joke about at least something not hurting. She had a collar on her neck to keep her still, she had IV's in her arms. She said her stomach was sore. The case worker said they had just removed a couple of inches of her intestines.

I told her that Jessica (another pilot at the airport) and I were wanting her to know that we cared about her. I wanted her to know that I would be there for her if she needed me to do anything for her. I asked her what she remembered from the accident.

She said:

On my flight right before this one, I didn't get to touch the controls until we were in the air over the airport. But Justin was on the controls when we were taking off. He kept pulling back and I got scared because we were going up and up. Jake kept telling him to let go and let him have it but Justin kept pulling back. I started screaming and I think Dominiqu was also. Then the airplane was going down and I don't remember the rest.

I told her everything was going to be ok and that she would recover and hopefully feel better soon.

This is my memory of what was said to me at the hospital.

Elayne Humphrey