

## Nursing Student Helps Two Patients at 30,000 Feet

Mikaela Mackey

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/voice>



Part of the [Christianity Commons](#), and the [Higher Education Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Mackey, Mikaela () "Nursing Student Helps Two Patients at 30,000 Feet," *The Voice*: Vol. 69: Iss. 1, Article 5.

Available at: <https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/voice/vol69/iss1/5>

This News is brought to you for free and open access by the University Publications at Dordt Digital Collections. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Voice by an authorized editor of Dordt Digital Collections. For more information, please contact [ingrid.mulder@dordt.edu](mailto:ingrid.mulder@dordt.edu).

# NURSING STUDENT HELPS TWO PATIENTS AT 30,000 FEET

Over the summer, Austin Van Donge, a senior nursing major and men's basketball team manager, had his nursing skills put to the test.

The Dordt men's basketball team spent a week in Ecuador visiting schools, hosting children's basketball camps, and playing games against professional Ecuador teams in the evenings. The flight back to the Midwest began as any other; about an hour in, Van Donge was dozing as he listened to a podcast. Suddenly, over the intercom, a flight attendant asked for someone with medical experience to come to the front of the plane.

Van Donge, a 21-year-old hailing from Orange City, Iowa, didn't hear anything through his headphones.

"My buddies know I'm a nursing major, and so they were hitting me and telling me what was said over the intercom," he says. "I didn't see anybody going up to the front of the plane, so I decided to walk up there and see what was going on."

He found a small child who had a high fever and was having difficulty breathing.

Van Donge realized there was no other medical professional on the plane; if anyone was going to help, it had to be him.

"I took the patient's vitals, talked with the parents, and figured out what was going on and then had to relay that information to the doctor over the phone," Van Donge says.

Van Donge was not allowed to enter the cockpit where the doctor was calling in from. He went back and forth between the child and phone, sharing information with the on-call doctor.

After Van Donge made sure the child's oxygen levels were healthy again, he went back to his seat. Less than five minutes after sitting down, Van Donge heard more noise.

"There was some commotion in the front of the plane again. They called for me, and I ran up there," Van Donge says.



JAMIN VER VELDE (99)

**Austin Van Donge can no longer play basketball, as he had three knee surgeries. The team still voted him as captain for the 2023-24 season.**

A man was having a seizure.

Van Donge immediately laid the man on his left side and waited beside him for the seizures to stop. He then checked the man's oxygen levels and his pulse.

"His oxygen levels were low," Van Donge says. "I looked for a tongue depressor to put in his mouth to see if his airway was blocked, but there wasn't a tongue depressor in the medical kit, so I had to use a spoon."

Van Donge pressed the patient's mouth open and found that his tongue was flipped back, blocking his airway.

"I had to use the spoon to flip his tongue back. We got oxygen on him, and he started doing better, but then the tongue flipped back. So, I did the process again," Van Donge says.

Van Donge never went back to his seat after that. He stayed by the patient's side

and kept oxygen on him, even as the plane landed.

Van Donge did not know if the pilot ever discussed the possibility of making an emergency landing. "Thankfully I was able to keep the patients stable enough that we could keep the plane on track."

When the plane landed in Minneapolis, staff rushed stretchers onto the plane to take the two patients. When the patients were escorted off, everyone on the plane clapped. Walking off the plane, Van Donge said his teammates all gave him high-fives and fist bumps.

"As people walked past me, a lot said thank you," says Van Donge. "It was only by the goodness of God that we were able to get everybody off the plane safely."

Men's Basketball Coach Brian Van Haften was not surprised Van Donge

# ZOOMING IN ON ZEBRAFISH FINDINGS

could step up to the task of helping others in need.

"He has the ability to help, and he did it well in a stressful situation," Van Haaften says. "Austin is certainly one of my favorite people. He is a quality guy and someone everyone wants to be around."

Dr. Debbie Bomgaars, professor of nursing, thinks the reason Van Donge helped the people on the airplane is partly because he can remain calm in any situation.

"He doesn't panic when faced with an emergency," she says. "What I really like about Austin's experience on the plane is that he knew what to do without much background information about either patient. He didn't fully know what was wrong with either patient, but he was able to assess the situation, intervene accordingly to assist his patients, and evaluate how well what he did was working. I am proud of Austin and how he served two people he didn't know; he showed the love of God to strangers."

Van Donge plans to finish his nursing degree in May and stay in Sioux County for the time being. Someday, Van Donge wants to gain critical care experience and go back to school to become a certified registered nurse anesthetist.

He says the experience of helping two people on the plane reminded him that he is on the right career path. It also gave him an even stronger appreciation for the work nurses do.

"I get to help people and can use my gifts and abilities that the Lord has provided me with to help people in need at some of their worst times," he says.

---

MIKAELA (WEGNER, '23) MACKEY

*This story was originally published in The N'West Iowa REVIEW in September.*

Senior Biology Major Hannah Landman spent her summer trying to understand the role of the gene *memo1* in the development of zebrafish.

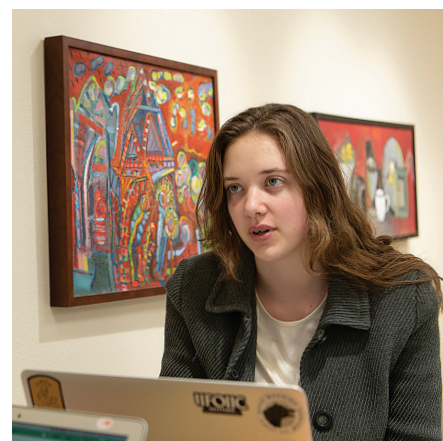
Landman worked at the University of Iowa, collaborating with Dordt alumnus Dr. Eric Van Otterloo ('05), an assistant professor in the College of Dentistry and the Department of Anatomy and Cell Biology, and with Dr. Tony Jelsma, professor of biology at Dordt. During his postdoctoral work, Van Otterloo observed that mutations in *memo1* in mice caused their young to be born with cleft palates and live only briefly. Jelsma and Landman replicated this work in zebrafish to determine whether *memo1* mutations produced the same developmental challenges in zebrafish as they had in mice. It seems like they don't, but scientists find that knowledge valuable, too.

Jelsma, whose Developmental Biology course at Dordt sparked Van Otterloo's initial interest in this field, reached out to Van Otterloo last year to discuss possible topics for a summer research project supported by University of Iowa's FUTURE in Biomedicine Program.

The FUTURE Program aims to foster research collaborations between University of Iowa faculty and professors at other Iowa colleges and to mentor undergraduates who hope to pursue careers in medicine or biomedical research.

"I approached Hannah about being involved in this project because she wants to go into research," explains Jelsma. "She had taken my Advanced Lab Techniques course as well as Developmental Biology. Though developmental biology is not her main area of interest, she had the skills and knowledge required to jump right into this project."

Landman says she gained new research skills through her work on the project.



JAMIN VER VELDE ('99)

**Hannah Landman hopes to further explore microbiology in the future.**

"I learned how to do a Western Blot, which has been on my wish list for a while!" she says. "While I can't say this experience has convinced me to pursue developmental biology research in graduate school, it was a very valuable experience. I found the process and work intriguing, and it built skills that will serve me in many fields. It cemented and strengthened my decision to pursue biological research in graduate school."

Jelsma and Van Otterloo intend to continue to collaborate and provide zebrafish research opportunities to Dordt students in the future. Dordt recently acquired the lab equipment required for zebrafish research, which enables Jelsma, Landman, and future Dordt students to continue this and other developmental biology research on Dordt's campus. Two biology majors already plan to use the zebrafish as the basis of their senior research projects. Jelsma also has plans to develop a Dordt Discovery Days course that focuses on zebrafish.

"This equipment will introduce students to the principles of animal research," says Jelsma. "Having it on campus opens up a lot of possibilities for us."

---

LYDIA (MARCUS, '17) POST

