

UTAH UTAH POLICE/COURTS

Snowmobiler killed by avalanche lived life 'to the fullest'

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BOUNTIFUL — Stace Fleming was a daredevil.

Be it motorbikes or snowmobiles, the 48-year-old Morgan resident rode into danger with joy — living life to the fullest, family and friends said.



Stace Fleming Fleming Family Photo

"We knew the danger," said longtime friend Chris Palmer. "This was what we loved to do. He died doing what he loved."

The Morgan father of three, who just 8 months ago became a grandfather, passed away Sunday morning from injuries sustained when an avalanche buried him under 6 to 8 feet of snow Friday afternoon.

Fleming and four snowmobiling friends were riding in the Grandview Peak Canyon area above Bountiful when Fleming and one of the other men decided to ride down an area that was free of tracks, triggering an avalanche that cascaded down the mountain.

Palmer watched from the top of the mountain as one of the men escaped the onslaught of snow; Fleming didn't.

"Stace has been in avalanches before, he's always been able to outrun them," said Palmer, who rode with Fleming for 23 years. "But for some reason, this time, he wasn't able to."

Friends and members of the adventure ski tour group Wasatch Powderbirds, who were nearby, spent nearly 30 minutes locating and digging Fleming out before the injured snowmobiler was flown to University Hospital in Salt Lake in extremely critical condition.

Sunday morning, amid friends and family members, Fleming passed away.

Fleming's mother, Trillis Fleming, said he's been riding motorbikes since he was just 6 or 7 years old.

"He started out when he was really small. It was just something he loved to do," Trillis Fleming said. "We bought him a small minibike when he was little. He always had really good balance. He could ride a unicycle all over the neighborhood."

Friends said Stace was the mechanic, the "Kingpin" of the group of 20-30 riders who dubbed themselves the "Grandview Gang."

Be it motorbike or snowmobile, when one broke down, it was always brought to Stace, Palmer said.

"He loved the snow. It was his favorite time of year," Trillis Fleming said. "He loved to go out and play in it. He was doing what he loved to do when he died, riding in the bowls, jumping over the cornices."

Stace gave his mother a few scares riding his motorbike.

Riding out by the family's campsite near Preston, Idaho, Stace rode off a cliff and broke his pelvis and knocked half his teeth out, Trillis Fleming said.

Another time in the mountains above Bountiful, which Palmer dubbed the group's home turf since he and Stace grew up there, the Morgan father rode head-on into a jeep when it was coming down a hill and couldn't stop. Stace left with a shattered kneecap.

Stace also raced motocross at Rocky Mountain Raceways and once placed in hill climbing for snowmobiling.

But it was an avalanche where he met his downfall. And he isn't the only one.

Fleming is the third person in the past week to be killed by an avalanche.

The series of avalanche deaths started with 42-year-old Todd Bell of South Weber, who was died in Hell's Canyon — an out-of-bounds area adjacent to Snowbasin Ski Resort.

Avalanche Center director Bruce Tremper warned that snow-related outdoor enthusiasts need to be careful in backcountry areas.

"Out of bounds, there's no one watching out for you," he said in an interview with the Deseret News last week. "If you go out there, you need to carry all the proper rescue gear."

Although Bell didn't have rescue gear, Stace Fleming and another man killed in an avalanche near Big Cottonwood Canyon, Ricardo Presnell, were prepared but still didn't make it.

Presnell, a 51-year-old Cottonwood Heights man died when he was caught in a large slide near Solitude Ski Resort. He was thrown into a grove of trees and buried under four feet of snow.

Craig Garden, a forecaster with the Utah Avalanche Center, said at Wednesday's accident when Presnell died that conditions in the backcountry the past week could fool even the most experienced recreationists.

For Stace Fleming's family, his death is horrible, but he did live life "to the fullest."

"He lived more in his 48 years than most people do in 100 years," Trillis Fleming said. "I'm grateful he lived such a fun-filled life."

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