

Skydiving Over Newport



By
Stephan
Rose

For as long as I can remember, I have wanted to jump out of a plane. I love heights, and am somewhat of an adrenaline-junkie (without getting into anything that would get me arrested, luckily). Years turned into decades and I still never attempted my dream of skydiving. Until last October.

Being a landmark year of my life, I decided I needed to do something special to commemorate the event. Also, someone MUCH older than me was about to skydive. Enough was enough!

On the suggestion of a friend, I contacted "Skydive Newport." I wanted to be able to have a breathtaking view of the beaches, not a dull one of fields. There were plenty of customer ravings on the site. The safety record sounded great. In fact, the owner contacted me the actual day of my jump because the weather conditions had turned unfavorable! That sort of thing will bolster your faith in ANY business. I called the next day to re-schedule.

My friend suggested I go for the full package, which included pictures and video. I'm very glad I didn't cheap-out on that. Every time I look at the pictures and video, I fully recall the excitement, adrenaline – and yes – fear I felt when I took my jump. I shared them on Facebook, to the delight of my friends...at least one of whom plans to do it herself.



I arrived early, so as to watch the very brief training video, which basically suggested to let the instructor do all the work and not interfere. Tandem jumps have become the norm in the last few years, reducing the risk of injury and ripcords pulled too late. But don't take all this safety talk to mean that skydiving is without risk. The MANY forms I had to sign made it abundantly clear that I *could* very well DIE. That sobered me up quickly.

I put on my Elvis royal-blue jumpsuit and loaded into the plane. The Cessna seemed about the size of a large SUV. We had room for the pilot (who had the only chair), two instructors and two jumpers. We got up to 10,000 feet. At that height, I could see the tip of Long Island, New York! Before I knew it, the other jumper and his instructor were GONE. I had my first flush of fear when I realized I was next. It was really happening, after all these years.

Fortunately, male pride and the expense stopped me from chickening out and asking to be flown down. Instead, I jumped! At that height, you can see the curvature of the earth VERY clearly. I screamed.

The free-fall was at 120 mph. My contact lenses popped out immediately and were saved by the goggles they provided me. The ground below looked like something from a train set. Patches of land rushed at me and the wind whipped loudly in my ears.

Suddenly, the parachute opened and the descent was slowed. I was told to put my hands in the loops that hung from the chute, and pull the left one. I did so, lightly. We turned

slightly. My instructor tugged it HARD, and we spun out of control. I screamed again and immediately tugged the other loop to repeat the experience.

I lifted my feet up, and we landed on his. He unhooked us and I fell on my butt, smiling. Skydiving was crossed off the bucket list. Except, I wanted to do it again. I was jealous of my instructor Nicky, who got to do it everyday. The adrenaline rush was incomparable. On the very short walk back to the hanger, I felt as though reality was blurry around the edges. I remember thinking that, if I were to put my fist through a wall, I wouldn't feel a thing.



I'm not at all sure whether this will sound cliché or inspiring. That day changed my life. Facing death directly tends to arrange priorities VERY quickly. The small day-to-day worries seem to blow away with the wind. Nothing that seemed important was any longer. I drove home slowly, in no rush to do anything. My confidence in myself went through the roof.

I'd encourage everyone who has ever been curious about it to try skydiving. I found the folks at Skydive Newport to be courteous, professional, friendly and kind. The experience will be remembered by you for the rest of your life. It will temporarily give you the excitement that may have been missing in your life. Next up, I am going to try to fly one of those Cessnas!

Addendum: the day after I made my jump, Felix Baumgartner set

the new world record for skydiving at a height of 128,000 feet above the earth (that's 24 miles)! Oh...and he broke the sound barrier. He was monitored by video by his proud family, and the former record holder, Joe Kittinger, whose record was set in 1960.