PARACHUTIST

2ND EDITION

STARTER MAG

YOUR INTRO TO THE SKY

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE
UNITED STATES PARACHUTE ASSOCIATION

Performance Designs

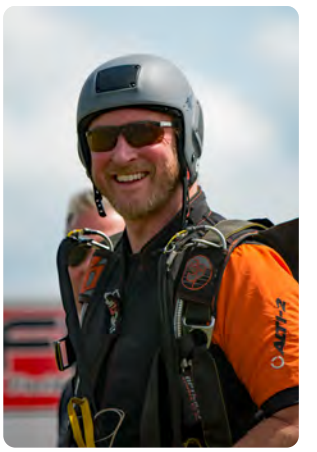
YOUR LICENSE ISN'T THE FINISH LINE...
IT'S THE STARTING POINT.
WWW.PERFORMANCEDESIGNS.COM

Welcome

My first skydive was in 1999, and I still remember that day. I remember the people who introduced me to this sport and the feelings that swirled in my head the entire day. The tired arms and back from practicing on the ground once I got into the AFF program. I remember the smell of aviation, the jet fuel that used to stink but now takes my thoughts right to skydiving. I remember the feeling of freedom the first time the door opened—then finally stepping out. It was the day my life changed, and I remember it as vividly as you remember that first jump you took just a short time ago.

> **"Once you have tasted flight, you will forever walk the earth with your eyes turned skyward, for there you have been, and there you will always long to return."**
>
> *—Leonardo da Vinci*

There might be a million questions running through your mind. Can I jump again right away? How do I get my license? What is freeflying? Can I become an instructor and do this every day? Some of these questions will be answered in the pages that follow, and others will take some time and soul-searching to answer. But the best advice I can give you as you ask yourself these questions is to enjoy the process. Take in every step. Enjoy every moment. Skydiving is a life-changing experience, and like many activities in life, it has no finish line. Enjoy it. Meet new people. Make new friends. Learn things about yourself. Take deep breaths. Accomplish feats you never believed possible. Be you.



On behalf of the 41,000-plus United States Parachute Association members in the U.S. and around the world, please accept a warm welcome into our community. Parachutist, skydiver, jumper or whatever term you use to describe yourself, you're now part of our family. Enjoy your journey in skydiving, and I hope to meet you one day at a drop zone somewhere around the world.

Blue Skies,

Albert Berchtold D-27832
Executive Director

STARTER MAG | 2ND EDITION

Cover Photo & Centerspread

by Mark Kirschenbaum/Hypoxic D-28511

Sisters In Skydiving boogie participants cheese big while preparing to exit the plane at Chicagoland Skydiving Center in Rochelle, Illinois.

by Jesse "Tex" Leos D-35377
Canopy pilots flock into the sunset glow at Skydive City Zephyrhills in Florida.

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Parachutist Starter Mag, 2nd Edition, an official publication of the United States Parachute Association.

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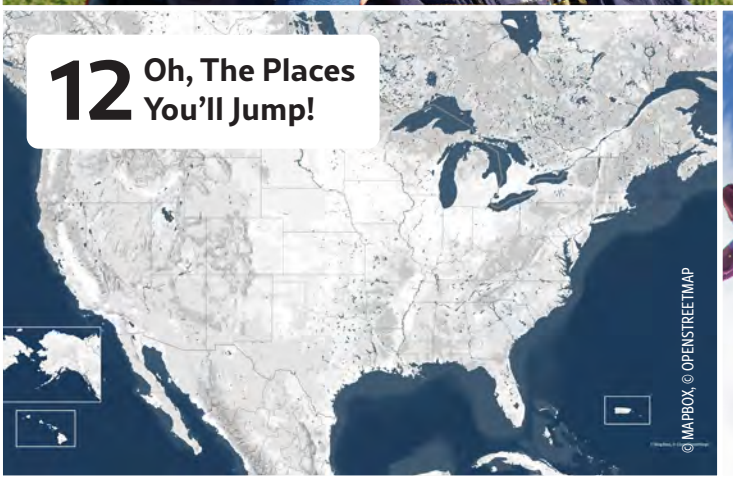
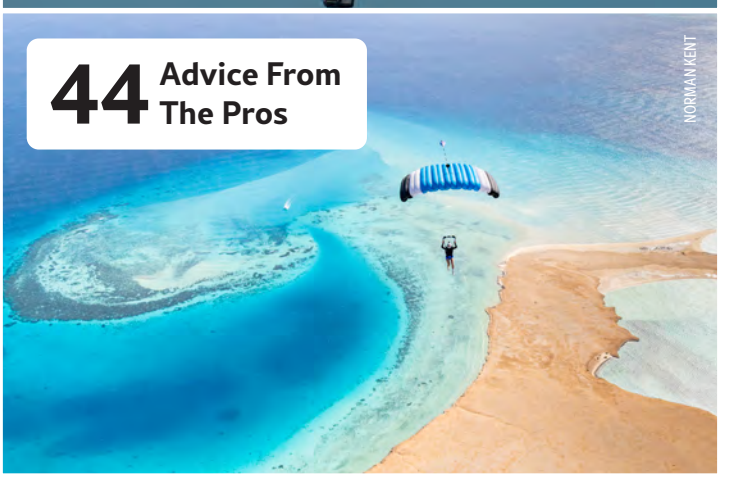




BOBBY PAGE

So ... WHAT NOW?

If you're reading this magazine, it's safe to say you're curious about becoming a licensed skydiver. When you showed up at the drop zone to complete your first jump, it's likely that there was also a licensed-jumper community there, sharing the jump plane with you, packing parachutes on the ground and enjoying the day in the sky.

But how do you advance from first-time jumper to licensed skydiver? And once you're licensed, what happens next? If you pursue your license, when will you get to strap on a camera and take videos of your jumps, or soar between clouds in a wingsuit, or jump into a music festival in front of thousands of people?

This road map should answer some of those questions. Learning to skydive is a marathon, not a sprint, but hopefully you're excited for more after touching the ground under canopy for the first time. It's only natural to wonder: So ... what now?

YOUR FIRST TRAINING JUMPS

ACCELERATED FREEFALL

Accelerated Freefall, or AFF, is the most common way for new students to work toward their A licenses. It begins with a jump during which you'll be joined by (but not harnessed to) two instructors in freefall, then guided to the ground, usually via radio, after pulling your own parachute. As you progress through several jumps—typically fewer than 10, depending on your drop zone program—you'll require less and less physical assistance from your instructors.

AFF includes thorough ground-school training, as well, preparing you for everything that can happen in the sky. That includes flying both your body and parachute, hand signals for instructor communication, procedures for handling an emergency and much more.

INSTRUCTOR-ASSISTED DEPLOYMENT/STATIC LINE

Your other options, depending on what's available at your drop zone, may be instructor-assisted deployment (IAD) and static-line (SL) progressions. Both of these paths are less freefall-oriented than AFF, but require roughly the same number of jumps, and will get you to the point of being cleared to jump solo or with a coach or instructor.

Both of these methods are designed to build you up slowly to a full freefall, beginning with jumps that include almost no freefall at all. At the beginning, your parachute will open almost immediately upon exiting the plane, with the delay before opening increasing gradually over five or more jumps. In the IAD program, an instructor in the jump plane will handle your pilot chute, releasing it for you as you exit the plane. In the SL program, your deployment system will be attached directly to the jump plane. Your body exiting the door will begin the process!

TANDEM

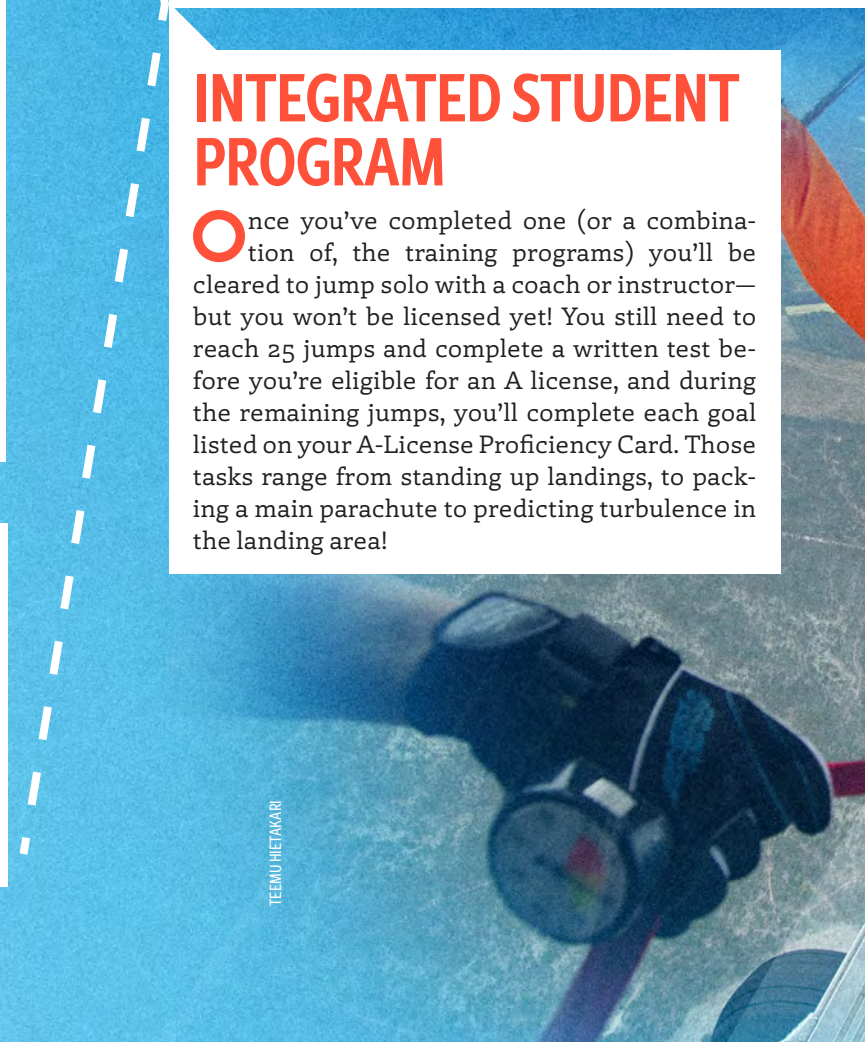
If your first jump was a tandem skydive, you're in good company. Tandems are the most common way that skydivers enter the sport. And they aren't just joy rides—they are a terrific way to begin the student program and learn some of the basics of skydiving. In fact, you can check off the first two categories of AFF or IAD/SL jumps on tandem skydives. Ask your instructor how you can cross them off the list!

IOANNIS VLACHIOTIS

YOUR PATH TO GREATNESS

INTEGRATED STUDENT PROGRAM

Once you've completed one (or a combination of, the training programs) you'll be cleared to jump solo with a coach or instructor—but you won't be licensed yet! You still need to reach 25 jumps and complete a written test before you're eligible for an A license, and during the remaining jumps, you'll complete each goal listed on your A-License Proficiency Card. Those tasks range from standing up landings, to packing a main parachute to predicting turbulence in the landing area!



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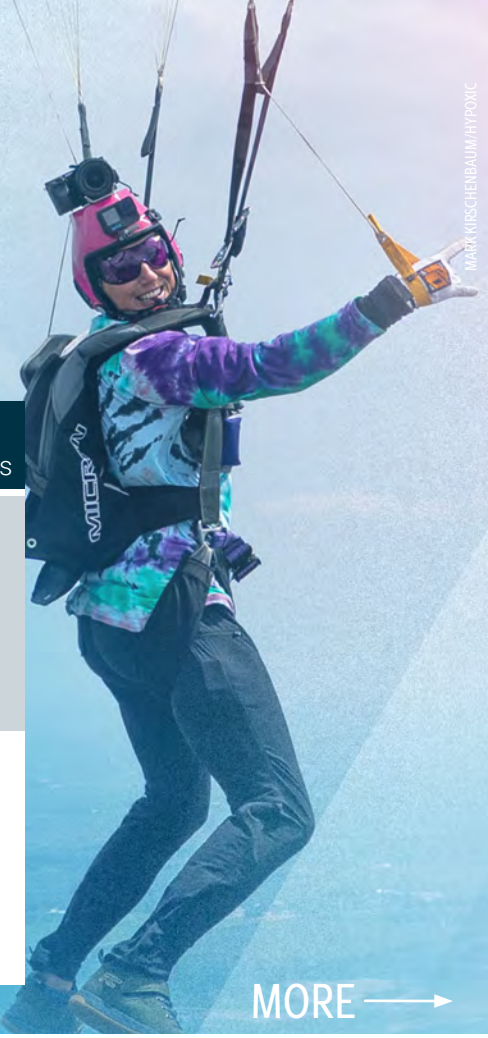

MARK KIRSCHENBAUM/HYPOXIC

B LICENSE

Min 50 Jumps

Requirements:

- Cumulative 30 minutes of freefall time
- Ten accurate landings (within 33 feet of a target) and 10 formation skydives
- One canopy course
- Training for water landings

Your B license is the next level, and it comes with extra privileges. Many drop zones, especially those close to water, have landing areas that are only for B (and higher) license holders. You'll also be able to jump at night and out of certain specialty aircraft, such as helicopters and hot-air balloons!

MORE →

A LICENSE

Min 25 Jumps

Once you've completed your AFF or IAD/SL program, reached 25 jumps and passed your test, you're licensed! With an A license, you'll be able to skydive with no supervision, pack your own main parachute and get together with other licensed jumpers for group skydives. But the A license is just the first step in your skydiving journey ...

COMPETITION

As you gain confidence in your flying skills, seek out opportunities to explore the competitive side of skydiving. There are local competitions for jumpers of all experience levels, but once you've earned your B license, you qualify to compete in certain disciplines at the USPA National Skydiving Championships. If you're curious about how skydivers compete, check out "Ways to Fly" on page 30!

HENNY WIGGERS

ALEX SWINDLE

FLYING A CAMERA

USPA recommends jumpers have a minimum of 200 jumps before they begin flying with a camera. Once you've reached that threshold, ask experienced camera flyers around your drop zone for advice on getting started with developing a new skill!

C LICENSE

Min 200 Jumps

Requirements:

- Cumulative 60 minutes of freefall time
- 25 accurate landings (within seven feet of a target) and 50 formation skydives

Have you ever wished you could skydive into an event in front of a roaring crowd of people? With your C license, you are qualified for certain kinds of demonstration jumps into large landing areas! You'll also be able to pursue certain instructional ratings as well as ride as student during tandem training and currency jumps.

COACH RATING

After reaching 100 jumps, you'll be eligible to obtain your first rating—the coach rating. To do this, you'll need to audit a first-jump course as well as complete a USPA Coach Rating Course. Once you've achieved this rating, you can start assisting instructors at the drop zone by conducting certain parts of ground school and freefall training with students who have been cleared to jump solo but have not yet achieved their A license. A coach can also supervise a currency jump with a skydiver who has been out of the sky for too long!

JC LEDBETTER

WINGSUITING

According to USPA's Basic Safety Requirements, a skydiver must log 200 jumps before they're able to fly a wingsuit, though a C license is not required. Many drop zones offer first-flight courses for those wanting to try it out, so once you hit jump number 200, ask around and see what all the hype is about!

INSTRUCTIONAL RATINGS

After your C and D licenses, depending on the rating, you are able to take courses to earn different instructional ratings. They require different skills, so ask those who've already achieved that rating what you should work on during your skydives to be the best instructor you can be. Once you've earned your USPA AFF Instructor, IAD/SL Instructor, Tandem Instructor or Tandem Trainer rating, you can start sharing all you've learned with another generation of skydivers.

ZACH LEWIS

D LICENSE

Min 500 Jumps

Requirements:

- Cumulative three hours of freefall time
- Completed two of the following:
  - ¬ A night jump
  - ¬ 100 accurate landings (within seven feet of a target)
  - ¬ A canopy formation of three or more
  - ¬ An intentional water jump
  - ¬ 100 formation skydives

You've made it! The D license is the highest level of license in the United States, and historically speaking, only 11% of USPA members have gotten this far. But this isn't the end! You are now eligible for all instructional ratings, including USPA Tandem Instructor and AFF Instructor. It's on you, now, to not only keep learning but to pass on all you've learned so far to a new generation of skydivers!

PRO RATING

While D is the highest level of license, reaching that point means you can go for your PRO rating! The C license qualifies you to jump into certain events with large landing areas, but why stop there? A PRO rating means you can jump into events in smaller areas, as well as stadiums. To obtain this rating, you must:

- Possess a D license.
- Make two night jumps.
- Make a series of jumps demonstrating consistent accuracy within a small landing area.

Show that your canopy skills are second to none, and go for the PRO rating. One day, you may be jumping into the Super Bowl!

Once you have your license, you can travel across the world to USPA International Affiliate Drop Zones and other special events. Here, Michael and Carla Brey watch the sunset under canopy while they fly high above the Parque Nacional dos Lençóis Maranhenses in Brazil.

Photo by Norman Kent

Why choose **CYPRES**?

Innovation rooted in passion for the sport.

Helmut Cloth, German inventor of the **CYPRES**, set out to change the sport of skydiving after the tragic loss of his very good friend in a 1986 skydiving accident.

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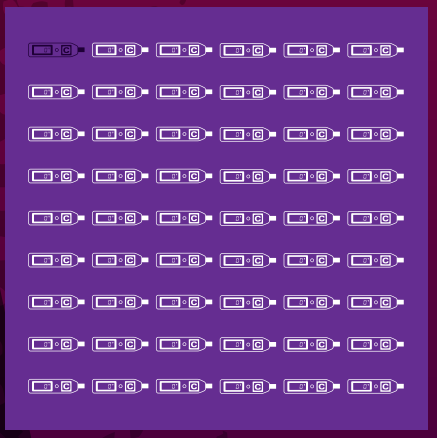

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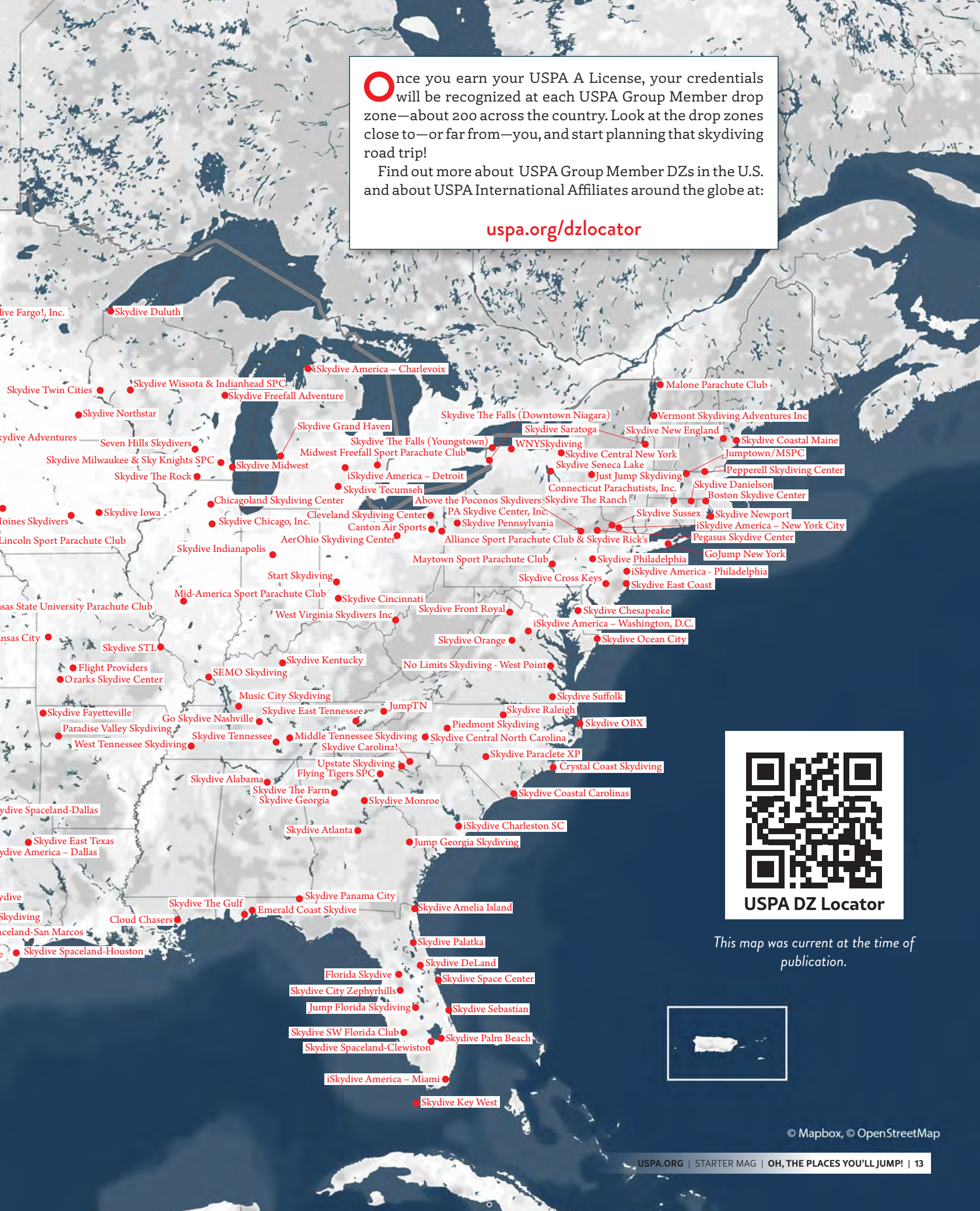
Oh, The Places You'll Jump!

Once you earn your USPA A License, your credentials will be recognized at each USPA Group Member drop zone—about 200 across the country. Look at the drop zones close to—or far from—you, and start planning that skydiving road trip!

Find out more about USPA Group Member DZs in the U.S. and about USPA International Affiliates around the globe at:

uspa.org/dzlocator



USPA DZ Locator

This map was current at the time of publication.

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International Affiliates

Angola
Skydive Angola

Argentina
Skydive Chascomus
Paracaidismo Alta Gracia

Armenia
Skydive Armheli

Belgium
Skydive Spa

Botswana
Skydive Botswana

Brazil
Federacao Paulista De Paraquedismo
Martinfly Paraquedismo
M2 Ratings
Sky Company Clube e Escola de Paraquedismo
SkydiveThru Quero Saltar

Bulgaria
Skydive Bulgaria
Skydive Sofia

Canada
1000 Islands Skydivers/Skydive Gananoque
Airborne Petawawa
Alberta Skydive Central
Parachute Montreal Rive – Nord
Parachute Montreal Rive – Sud
Parachute Victoriaville
Parachutisme Adrenaline Trois-Rivieres
Parachutisme Atmosphair
Skydive Burnaby
Skydive Ontario
Skydive Vancouver
Skydive Vancouver Island

Chile
Skydive Andes

China
BT Chengdu Skydive
China Skydivers – Yingfei
Gaokongshijie Skydiving Base
Skydive Beijing
Skydive Hailing Island
Skydive Hainan
Skydive Have Fun
Skydive Riyue Bay
Skydive Sanya
Skydive Tarhe
Skydive Weland
Wanning Coffee Skydive
Xi'An Bluesky Skydive
Yan Huang Skydive

Colombia
Epico Skydive
Xielo Skydive

Costa Rica
Desafio Vertical

Croatia
Skydive Croatia
Skydive Zadar

Czechia
Dropzone Prostejov
DZ Pribram
International Pink Parachute Club

Denmark
Dropzone Denmark

Ecuador
Los Garrapateros Paracaidismo
Skydive La Celeste

Egypt
Skydive Egypt – Jump Like a Pharaoh
Skydive Pharaohs

El Salvador
Skydive San Miguel

Estonia
Skydive Estonia

Finland
Skydive Karjala

France
Air Play Parachutisme
Fly 974 Tandem
ParisJump

Germany
Aircrew & Airfox Skydiving Academy
FSC Suedpfalz E.V.
Skydive Saar (FSZ - Saar)
Skydive Saulgau

Greece
Hellenic Skydivers
Skydive Attica
Skydive Greece
Skydive Thessaloniki

Guatemala
Gravity Skydive

India
Skyhigh India

Ireland
Irish Parachute Club Ltd.
SkydiveThru Ireland

Israel
Sky Kef
Go Jump(Sky-JumpGroup)

Italy
Body Fly University
Fano Sky Team S.S.D.
Skydive Costa D'Argento
Skydive FlyGang F4F DZone
Skydive Lucca
Skydive Salerno
Skydive Sardegna
Skydive Thiene
Vzone S.S.D.

Japan
Nanki Shirahama Sky Resort Ocean Skydiving
Skydive Fujioka
Skydiving Kansai
Skydive Nippon

Kenya
Go Jump Kenya

Kuwait
Kuwait Skydive

Latvia
Skydive Latvia

Libya
Skydive Benghazi

Lithuania
Skydive Klaipeda

Mexico
Skydive Cuautla
Skydive Monterrey
Skydive Paracaidismo Nuevo Leon
Skydive Puebla

Moldova
DZM Skydive MoldAVIA

Morocco
Beni Mellal DZ
Skydive Taroudant

Netherlands
Paracentrum Texel

Peru
Paracaidismo Paracondor Peru
PARACAIDISMO VOLAMOS PERU

Philippines
Skydive Santa Fe – Cebu
Skydive Siquijor

Poland
Olimpic Skydive

Portugal
Skydive Algarve
Skydive Dunas
Skydive Portugal

Republic of China
Skydive Taiwan

Republic of Korea
Skydive Korea

Romania
Skydive Transilvania
TNT-Brothers Dropzone
TNT-Brothers Seaside

Russia
Goodsky
Krutitcy
Skycentre Perm
Skydive Vatulino

Slovakia
Skydive Slavnica

Slovenia
Skydive Bovec

Spain
Skydive Aircruz – Totana
Skydive BCN
Skydive Empuriabrava
Skydive Madrid
Skydive Spain

Sri Lanka
Eagles' Skydive Sri Lanka – Koggala
Skydive Sri Lanka

Sweden
Skydive Aros

Switzerland
Skydive Switzerland

Tanzania
Skydive Zanzibar

Thailand
Bird's Paradise Drop Zone
Dropzone Thailand Co. Ltd
Skydive Chiang Mai
Skydive Thailand
Thai Sky Adventures Ltd.

Türkiye
Skydive Manavgat

United Arab Emirates
Abu Dhabi Skydive
Skydive Dubai Desert Campus

Venezuela
Skydive Caribbean

If you see a camera flyer in the air, smile! Here, photographer and videographer Norman Kent flies below a formation skydive at Skydive Perris in California. If this seems like a lot of skydivers in the air at once, it is! Kent is capturing a world-record attempt by the group Skydivers over Sixty, or SOS, whose members are all over the age of 60.

Photo by Craig O'Brien

How Skydiving Changed *My Life*

I have always been shy and introverted. I was a quiet kid, and I grew into an even quieter adult. In college, my introversion escalated into social anxiety. I started to avoid social situations because interacting with people made me so anxious. Speaking in class, making phone calls or even just casually talking to people was terrifying. There were so many mundane things I wanted to do, but I was paralyzed by irrational fear. I missed classes and events, and I didn't make many friends, but I somehow survived college.

After graduating and going through a few horrible situations caused by my crippling social fears, I started making strides to step outside of my heavily restricted comfort zone. I told myself that if I didn't work to face my fears, they would only get worse. I made a list of things that I dreamed of doing but had been too afraid to try. Skydiving was one of the challenges on that list.

I made my first tandem in June of 2015. I was honestly more nervous about talking to my instructor than jumping out of the plane, which felt bizarre and stupid. But as soon as I met my TI and he harnessed me up, my anxiety melted away. I got this weird feeling of belonging in that Cessna 182, because I felt more comfortable crammed in that tiny plane with my instructor and two other skydivers than I'd felt around people in a long time. On the ground, the adrenaline overpowered my social anxiety, and everyone was extremely kind and answered all of my excited questions. They sincerely said, "You should come back," and that stuck with me.

In the following weeks, I couldn't stop thinking about skydiving and that feeling I had in the plane. I researched the AFF program and kept thinking, "This is ridiculous; I can't be a skydiver." Even if I could physically and mentally do it, I was worried that I wouldn't fit in. But there was a little voice in the back of my head that said, "Why not?" So, I decided it was worth a try.

I started AFF that July. The first day, my instructor said with no hesitation, "Yep, you're a skydiver; you're one of us." I didn't believe him then, but he was right. A month later, I was carried to a dunk tank to "celebrate" my A license. That night, I slept on a couch in the hangar because I wanted to make the first load in the morning. At that moment, I knew I found a home. I took $10,000 I had saved—intended as a down payment for a house—and instead spent it all on training, gear and jumps, and I moved into a friend's basement.

Taking that leap changed my life. I didn't realize it then, but learning how to skydive taught me methods to manage my anxiety. You learn and plan for the jump on the ground. Whatever fear and doubts build on the climb to altitude go out to the sky when the door opens, and you have to just go for it. At the end of the day, even if everything didn't go as planned, you are happy that you did it instead of succumbing to the fear.

Going through this over and over taught me that the feeling of fear doesn't mean I should stop, it means proceed with caution. The best feelings in life are past that barrier of fear, on the other side of that door. Through learning to skydive, I gained the confidence to repeatedly throw myself out that door and many others.

BRANDI DANIELEWICZ

BRANDI DANIELEWICZ

I have now done countless things that would've been unfathomable for me five years ago by applying the mindset that I learned through skydiving. I got my motorcycle license; I traveled with friends and alone; I tried many things on that original "scary things I want to do" list; and I even performed aerial arts in front of crowds of people. I went from being too anxious to talk to a cashier at a grocery store to literally performing in front of a room packed with people. It still blows my mind. I never would've been able to do any of this without my amazing family at WNY Skydiving in Albion, New York, who welcomed me in with no hesitation and supported me along the way, from my first solo skydive to my first aerial arts show.

It's weird to me now that people call me "fearless." I am absolutely not fearless; I still get anxious all the time. I'm just better at being afraid, and I often chase that feeling instead of hiding from it. I'll admit it's super cheesy, but I live by it now: If your dreams don't scare you, they aren't big enough.

Robin Basalla | D-39612
Rochester, New York

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Who Are Skydivers?

JEFFRY JOHNSON

"Many of us—I'd say even most—dreamt of flying as kids. With imaginations peaking, we watched birds soaring overhead and movies with superheroes, dreaming about how fabulous it would be to fly like they do, past the clouds, using our arms and legs as wings, unattached to any man-made flying machine. But even at a young age, we realized that our dream would never be more than a fantasy. Human beings can't fly.

Then one day we saw pictures, videos or social media posts about skydiving and realized it was the closest we could come to true human flight. Maybe one percent of the kids who saw those actually wanted to skydive, and maybe one percent of those that wanted to skydive actually made it to a drop zone. One percent of those became skydivers.

Who are skydivers? We are the one percent of the one percent of the one percent. We are dreamers who aren't just dreamers. We're dreamers who backed it up with action and made that dream come true—action that was hard for us to take.

There is every reason not to skydive. It's expensive, terribly inconvenient, scary as hell, dangerous and usually something few, if any, of our friends want to do with us. But despite all of that, our dream of flight was so strong that we made it happen. In the process, we discovered the most amazing sport in the world, and met friends from every walk of life.

Welcome to the family. It's only just begun for you."

—Dan Brodsky-Chenfeld
Drop Zone Manager at Skydive Perris and author of "Above All Else"

When it comes to skydiving, it truly takes all kinds. Walk into the hangar of your local drop zone, and you'll see people of every occupation, gender, ethnicity, political ideology and personality, all there to share their love of the sky. While your drop zone community—from the instructors to the other new jumpers—will be supportive of you on your path to becoming a licensed skydiver, there are other groups that span the globe, offering resources for new and experienced jumpers alike. Here are just a few of them!

USPA.ORG/SIS

U.S. PARACHUTE ASSOCIATION
SISTERS IN SKYDIVING

MARK KIRCHENBAUM/HYPOXIC

SISTERS IN SKYDIVING

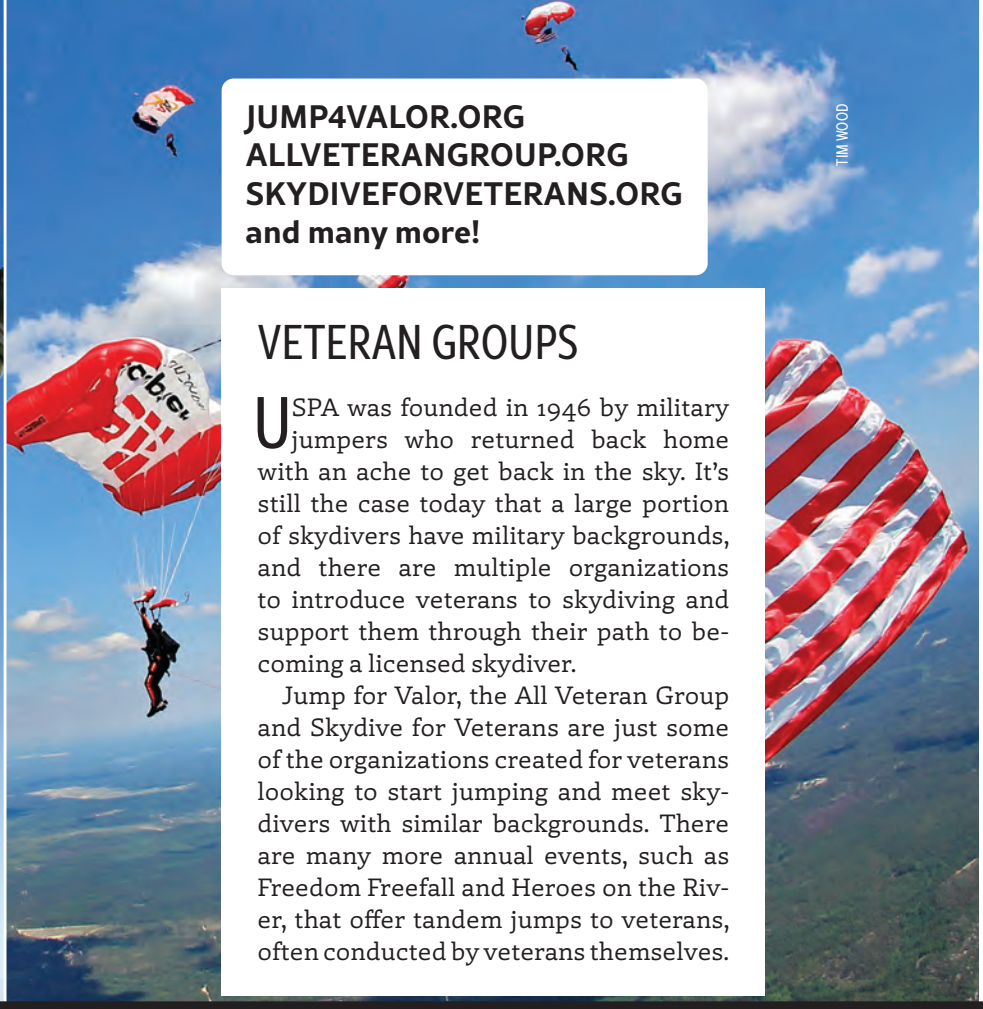
The core idea behind Sisters in Skydiving, or SIS, is to create one-on-one mentor relationships between experienced female skydivers and those women who've just started in the sport, with the goal of getting more women to stick to the sport and continue to progress. It provides a strong support network. A Big Sister can be a friend, role model and mentor, giving her Little Sister someone to talk to about issues she may face as she learns the ropes.

With everything from weekend-long SIS events to simply meeting together at the drop zone to jump, Sisters in Skydiving has created lasting bonds between female skydivers, often those spread out across the country and world who would never otherwise have met. And you don't even need to have made a jump to reach out to SIS! Women interested in pursuing the sport are encouraged to reach out to USPA to learn more about connecting with a Big Sister. The community is here to support female skydivers with any level of experience.

NORMAN KENT

DAVID CHERRY

TIM WOOD



TIM WOOD

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and many more!

VETERAN GROUPS

USPA was founded in 1946 by military jumpers who returned back home with an ache to get back in the sky. It's still the case today that a large portion of skydivers have military backgrounds, and there are multiple organizations to introduce veterans to skydiving and support them through their path to becoming a licensed skydiver.

Jump for Valor, the All Veteran Group and Skydive for Veterans are just some of the organizations created for veterans looking to start jumping and meet skydivers with similar backgrounds. There are many more annual events, such as Freedom Freefall and Heroes on the River, that offer tandem jumps to veterans, often conducted by veterans themselves.

ALICIA MOOREHEAD

POPS-USA.COM

PARACHUTISTS OVER PHORTY

Since 1966, Parachutists Over Phorty, or POPS, has been a community for older jumpers, and its membership is now in the thousands. Many POPS members have hundreds or even thousands of jumps, but the community is supportive of skydivers with all levels of experience.

POPS is one of the largest subgroups of skydivers, and holds events and world-record attempts multiple times a year, all over the world. There are even subgroups of POPS—including Skydivers Over Sixty (SOS), Jumpers Over Seventy (JOS), Jumpers Over Eighty (JOEs) and even Jumpers Over Ninety (JONs).

ANTJE GRUBE

FRESH HEIR ADVENTURES

Fresh Heir Adventures is a community-driven organization dedicated to inspiring and empowering African Americans to live without limits by breaking barriers in skydiving and other adventure sports. Founded by a group of passionate skydivers who recognized the importance of representation, mentorship and connection, Fresh Heir Adventures exists to create a welcoming space where people can see themselves reflected in the sky and know they belong there.

Through various engagement efforts, Fresh Heir Adventures helps introduce more people to the sport while supporting their growth long after their first jump. Their goal is to create pathways for participation, progression and leadership within skydiving by connecting newer jumpers with experienced mentors and fostering a culture built on encouragement, safety and shared success.

At the core of Fresh Heir Adventures is the belief that skydiving is more than just jumping out of airplanes, it is about challenging perceived limits, building lifelong friendships and discovering what is possible when fear is replaced by courage. Values of safety, community, authenticity, mentorship, progression and representation guide everything they do.

For tandem students considering their next step or anyone interested in skydiving, Fresh Heir Adventures serves as a reminder that there is a place for you in this sport. Whether your goal is to earn your license, learn a new discipline, travel the world through skydiving, or simply find your people, we are committed to helping make that journey possible. Fresh Heir Adventures is building a future where adventure is accessible, representation is visible, and the sky truly belongs to everyone.

ADRIAN CRUZ

HAPPY HAPPY

ADRIAN CRUZ

How Skydiving Changed *My Life*

Ever since I was a little kid, doctors told me that I would be limited to certain activities because I was born with spina bifida. I never even entertained the idea of jumping out of a perfectly good airplane, and anyway, skydiving was something that terrified me. That all would change after going to Skydive Perris in California.

CRAIG O'BRIEN

I moved near Perris in 2015, and for years I saw and heard planes flying overhead all day long. One day at the beginning of 2019, I thought I'd go check it out and see what it was all about. As soon as I arrived, I felt a warm, welcoming feeling from people. It was a busy day, but everyone was nice and approachable and made me feel at home. It was a place I loved to be and didn't ever want to leave.

In the coming weeks, I would go back multiple times and watch large events, including big-way formations, P3 camps and Skydivers Over Sixty gatherings. I also saw the Canadian Army demo team, the Skyhawks, in training. They made the hardest tricks under canopy look effortless. I met J.P., the man behind the Skyhawks program, and Craig O'Brien, who was filming the Skyhawks doing their aerobatics under canopy. Each event was like nothing I had ever experienced before. It was incredible to watch all the ground operations leading up to formations in the sky. I just couldn't get enough of it.

I constantly talked with anyone and everyone at Perris about the sport and learned all I could about what I was watching, I must have talked to hundreds of people—new jumpers, as well as world champion skydivers. Over time, it changed my whole view on the sport, and I started thinking that I should get in the sky and do what all these other crazy people were doing! If they could do it, then I could, too. I just had to get past the mental block. Each person I came into contact with helped crack that barrier a little bit at a time. But one person I came into contact changed a lot of things for me.

One morning, I introduced myself to a guy I saw riding around on a bike a day earlier. Someone had told me that he was Dan B.C. (Dan Brodsky-Chenfeld), the DZ manager. I approached him, introduced myself and told him how much I enjoyed the place. He told me that the drop zone was one of the busiest in the nation and to stick around watch some events they would be hosting later that month. The next couple weeks I attended the Aussie Big-Way Camp and met even more accomplished skydivers. That pretty much did it for me ... I was sucked in and ready to make my own skydive a reality.

On a quiet afternoon a few days later, I asked Dan if it would be possible to make a jump, even though I was in a wheelchair, and also if he'd go with me. He said, "Yes, it's 100-percent possible! They have straps they can use to help with landing, and we have the best instructors, so let's do it!" I asked Craig O'Brien if he could join, and he said "Absolutely!" So, we made a date for the jump and it was a go.

On June 5, 2019, I experienced the closest thing to human flight possible. It was one of the highlights of my life. I did lose both of my shoes when I pulled the parachute, but it was all worth it. It may have taken six months to build up the courage needed, but with the help of Dan, Craig and my instructor James Perez, it became a reality.

CRAIG O'BRIEN

Skydiving changed my whole view of life. It taught me that we need to chase our fears, because on the other side of fear is greatness and growth. We should do what we fear because life is short, and we should look to grow daily. We shouldn't let anything limit us from achieving what we set out to do in life. Just because doctors told me that the things I could do were limited, it didn't mean I had to listen. I wanted to skydive, so I did.

Spencer Hopp
Perris, California

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JESSE LEOS

WELCOME TO THE

UNITED STATES PARACHUTE ASSOCIATION

USPA'S MISSION:

Founded in 1946, the U.S. Parachute Association is a not-for-profit membership association run by skydivers, for skydivers. It is led by a volunteer board of directors that provides direction to a paid staff. Dedicated to supporting safe skydiving and those who enjoy it, USPA serves its approximately 41,000 members by promoting safe skydiving through training, licensing and instructor qualification programs; ensuring skydiving's rightful place on airports and in the airspace system; and promoting competition and record-setting programs.

A FEW EXAMPLES OF WHAT USPA DOES FOR SKYDIVERS:

- Develops and administers training programs for beginner skydivers and produces the **Skydiver's Information Manual (SIM)**, which outlines the Basic Safety Requirements for members, provides recommendations and contains in-depth information on both getting licensed and enjoying skydiving as an experienced jumper. The SIM is essential reading for students and experienced jumpers alike!
- Sets standards and develops training programs for skydiving instructors and produces the **Instructional Rating Manual (IRM)** to ensure that instructors are well qualified and have access to educational materials that address concerns, questions and best practices. USPA's training programs are the gold standard worldwide!
- Interacts with local, state and federal government officials, including those of the Federal Aviation Administration, U.S. Congress, state transportation departments and legislators to monitor bills and regulations that would affect skydiving. Administers the **Airport Access and Defense Fund** to help support drop zones that are facing regulatory action.

USPA.ORG/JOIN

LASZLO ANDACS

- Holds the **USPA National Skydiving Championships** and the **USPA National Collegiate Skydiving Championships** annually.
- Selects the **U.S. Parachute Team** that represents the country internationally at competitions such as the World Games and the Fédération Aéronautique Internationale (World Air Sports Federation) World Championships. Supports the Team through the U.S. Parachute Team Trust Fund and the U.S. Parachute Team Inc. funds.
- Provides the framework and materials for drop zones to host **USPA Safety Day** annually and administers the U.S. Skydiving Safety Foundation to fund programs that enhance skydiving safety.
- Appoints a **USPA Safety and Training Advisor** for each skydiving location so that members always have a trusted source for the most up to date safety information.
- Staffs a **Membership Department** on weekdays from 9 a.m-5 p.m. Eastern. The Membership Department issues USPA memberships, licenses, ratings, appointments and awards and maintains a database of credentials that members can access and update 24/7 at uspa.org/me.
- Keeps members up-to-date on the latest in skydiving news and shenanigans through ***Parachutist* magazine**, parachutist.com, uspa.org, social media sites and e-newsletters.
- **Promotes skydiving** through national and local public relations efforts.

YOUR BENEFITS AS A USPA MEMBER:

- Eligibility to earn licenses, ratings and awards offered by USPA
- Your license and rating credentials recognized by skydiving associations worldwide
- Ability to skydive at USPA Group Member drop zones in the United States, and International Affiliate drop zones around the world
- A subscription to *Parachutist*, USPA's monthly magazine covering skydiving activity, safety and advice from expert competitors and educators
- Third-party liability insurance while skydiving at Group Member drop zones
- Ability to vote for your representatives on the USPA Board of Directors

USPA'S VALUES STATEMENT

USPA is committed to promoting an atmosphere that allows our sport to be safe, inclusive and fun. We advocate for the dignity and well-being of all individuals and respect diverse traditions, heritages and experiences. We value inclusivity and reject discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religious belief or any other attribute not related to performance or merit. USPA affirms its vision of a safe and healthy skydiving environment free of violence and any form of discrimination, including sexual or racial harassment.

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How Skydiving Changed *My Life*

July 22, 2013, was the day that changed my life. A week earlier, a coworker and I had received a briefing that a new drop zone was opening in our patrol area. The owners had invited troopers from our station to come out and make a tandem skydive. The two of us showed up at the brand-new drop zone, Skydive Sussex in New Jersey, on the 22nd to start on our paths to becoming skydivers. From the moment I landed with my tandem instructor, I knew I had found a new passion. My instructor said he knew from the look on my face that I was hooked. He couldn't have been more right.

Over the course of the first few months of jumping, the staff at the DZ flooded me with information and advice. I slowly developed into a young skydiver who would beat the drop zone manager to the manifest office in the morning. The staff would frequently find me snoozing in my car in the parking lot after a night shift, eager to make the first load of the day. The first second out of that open Cessna 182 door was all the motivation I needed to keep coming back. There was nothing I looked forward to more than that split second.

Our AFF class had eight or nine people from various walks of life in it, and within two weeks we were all ready for our solos and looking forward to jumping with more people and experiencing new things together. No one seemed to care what anybody else did for a living, which was a nice change. As a law enforcement officer, family and friends constantly introduce me by saying, "This is my daughter. She's a state trooper," or, "This is my friend. She's a cop." Our DZ family didn't care. They just wanted us to jump and have fun, and they made sure we were welcomed into their community. They taught us to be safety-conscious jumpers, so when I and some junior jumpers decided to attend our first boogie in Puerto Rico, we had the voices of our drop zone operator, as well as the senior jumpers, echoing in our ears to be safe and smart.

Over the past 15 months, the people at my DZ have been a constant source of encouragement, support and inspiration.

Through good times—both personal and professional—as well as bad, they have been there to lend an ear, give advice or point out how far I've come. From my first beer-rules violation to becoming a USPA C-License holder with a coach rating, these last 15 months have been a period of growth for me. I have enjoyed becoming a Big Sister with Sisters in Skydiving to welcome new women into our sport, developing into a productive member of the DZ and giving back.

The friendships that I have made and the skills that I have learned from this new family are priceless. All of them in their unique ways have opened my eyes to a whole new world. I owe so much to the DZO who trained me through AFF, the coaches who helped me study for my rating and the riggers and tandem instructors who cared enough to take the time to teach me. I can only hope to pass the knowledge and passion along to new skydivers when they show up with the same looks in their eyes that I had. My family at Skydive Sussex is just that: my family. We may all come from different walks of life, but in the air we're all the same: people with a passion for skydiving.

Shauna Finley | D-34907
New Market, Virginia

How Skydiving Changed *My Life, Again*

When I first wrote for Parachutist's "How Skydiving Changed My Life" section, I was still new enough in the sport that everything felt fresh, loud, and life-changing. My first tandem skydive was on July 22, 2013, at Skydive Sussex in New Jersey. I showed up as a complete "wuffo" who had been invited to make a jump, and I left knowing something in my life had shifted.

At the time, I thought skydiving had changed my life because it gave me a passion. More than a decade later, I understand it gave me much more than that. It gave me a community, a profession, a few hard lessons, and, ultimately, a purpose.

Like many jumpers, I first fell in love with the freedom of the sky and the community of people on the ground. The drop zone became the place where job titles, stress, and the outside world faded into the background. I was just Shauna, another jumper trying to learn, be safe, and get better. That feeling mattered to me then, and it still matters to me now.

Over time, that love for skydiving led me into parachute rigging. At first, I wanted to understand my own gear. I wanted to know how everything worked and why. That curiosity slowly turned into a craft. Then the craft became a responsibility.

Rigging changed the way I saw the sport. It taught me to slow down, pay attention, and respect the small details that most people never see. It taught me that confidence should never be louder than competence. It also taught me that one of the strongest things a person can say in this sport is, "I don't know, but I'll find out."

Eventually, skydiving became more than something I did. It became the life I built. I helped open Skydive Shenandoah with the belief that I could create a place where people could experience the same sense of belonging and possibility that skydiving had given me. Owning and operating a drop zone taught me things no license, rating, or logbook ever could. It taught me about leadership, responsibility, risk, sacrifice, and the weight of making decisions that affect other people.

It also taught me that not every chapter ends the way we hoped.

Closing Skydive Shenandoah was one of the hardest parts of my skydiving journey. When you pour yourself into something, it is painful to admit that the path has changed. But skydiving has a way of teaching resilience, whether we ask for the lesson or not. You learn to handle the malfunction in front of you, make the best decision you can with the information you have, and keep flying the canopy.

Today, I run my rigging loft from Paraclete XP in Raeford, North Carolina. My days look different from when I was a new jumper sleeping in my car after night shift so I could make the first load. Now, much of my work happens in the rigging loft or at a sewing machine.

I am now a Master Parachute Rigger, a Designated Parachute Rigger Examiner, a business owner, and an educator. I

inspect, pack, repair, teach, mentor, and have the occasional hard conversation when the safe answer is not the convenient one. I help jumpers understand their equipment, and I help new riggers understand that this work is about far more than passing a test.

That is how skydiving changed my life again. It turned passion into service.

The longer I am in this sport, the more I believe our future depends on humility, education, and honest communication. New jumpers need to feel safe asking questions. New riggers need to understand that shortcuts do not belong in a loft. Experienced skydivers need to remember that none of us is done learning.

When I look back at the person who wrote that first article, I recognize her. She was excited, wide-eyed, and completely hooked. She was right to believe skydiving had changed her life. She just could not have known how many times it would keep changing.

Skydiving gave me a family first. Then it gave me a craft. Then it gave me a business, heartbreak, resilience, and a new direction. Most importantly, it gave me the chance to serve the community that raised me.

More than a decade later, I still believe skydiving changes lives. I am grateful it changed mine, and I am even more grateful that it keeps asking me to grow.

Shauna Finley | D-34907
New Market, Virginia

Ways to Fly

At its core, skydiving is simple: exit the aircraft and fly back to earth. But there's more than one way to fly. From formation skydiving and canopy piloting to wingsuiting and freestyle, the sport offers a wide variety of disciplines that skydivers enjoy every day for fun, skill development and personal challenge. Many of these disciplines also have a competitive side, with local, regional, national and world championship events where athletes test their abilities against the best in the sport. Whether you're interested in flying with friends or standing on a podium, each discipline offers its own unique challenges. Let's explore the many ways to fly.

JUAN MAYER

Wingsuit Flying

Next time you're in a jump plane, look behind you, closest to the pilot, for a wingsuiter! Competitive wingsuit flying is split into two categories—"Performance" and "Acrobatic." In acrobatic wingsuit flying, a team of two performers flies through a set of maneuvers, filmed by a videographer. Performance wingsuit flying, however, is an individual discipline. These skydivers fly through a predetermined 1,000-meter altitude window and are judged by how fast they go, how far they fly and how long they stay in that window.

RANDY SWALLOWS

Formation Skydiving

Teams of skydivers exit the plane with a set amount of time to complete formations and earn "points." Depending on the level of competition, these teams can be as small as two and as large as 16 (or even larger in specific competitions). While there is usually a pattern of up to four formations that are repeated, these competitions have their own rules depending on where you are. Jumpers compete in formation skydiving on the national and world stage, but you're likely to find informal competitions, welcoming to jumpers of all levels of experience, at a drop zone close to you!

Vertical and Mixed Formation Skydiving

Once you've spent the time building up your belly-flying skills, try something different! Vertical and mixed formation skydiving differs from standard FS in that skydivers turn on all axes while falling through the air. Turning to the side to grab your instructor's foot is already difficult—now give it a shot while you're upside down!

ANTHONY ARMENDARIZ

Canopy Formation

While freefall might seem like the most glamorous part of your skydive, it doesn't end when you open your parachute—just ask any canopy formation skydiver. These jumpers also complete formations, but it's while they're under canopy! In national and world competition, they compete in teams of two or four, and have to be experts when it comes to piloting their parachutes. If you think flying a canopy is fun, imagine doing it within earshot of several friends!

ANTHONY ARMENDARIZ

ANTHONY ARMENDARIZ

Speed Skydiving

It might sound easy—point your head toward the earth and fly downward as fast as you can—but an incredible amount of calculation and math goes into speed skydiving. These skydivers reach speeds over 300 miles per hour as they fall, using a special device to measure their fastest vertical speed. Speed skydiving is the fastest non-motorized sport in the world!

EDDIE PHILIPS

Accuracy Landing

It's exactly what it sounds like: Land on the target! Accuracy landing is one of the oldest forms of skydiving competition and is something you can practice on each and every jump. At the highest levels, an automatic measuring device (or AMD) is placed at the center of a large air-filled tuffet. Landings are scored based on how close the first point of contact (hopefully your foot) is to the center of the target.

Artistic Events

This category, consisting of freeflying and freestyle skydiving, is where some of the most talented flyers in the world go to showcase everything they can do in the air. While both are team events, freeflying is executed by a pair of performers and a camera flyer, while freestyle skydiving features one skydiver and a camera flyer. In both, the camera work is an important part of the score. Artistic competitors design creative routines that take advantage of every dimension of flight.

DAVID CHERRY

Canopy Piloting

If some skydivers look forward to a gentle and easy landing after deploying their parachutes, canopy pilots aren't among them. These skydivers pick up an incredible amount of speed while under their parachutes, then level off as they approach the ground to "swoop" a pond. In standard canopy piloting, they're judged by their speed, distance after completing the length of the pond and the accuracy of their landing (with different jumps devoted to each). Canopy piloting also includes freestyle, in which these skydivers attempt certain tricks as they glide across the water. Though most drop zones don't have a dedicated pond, you might see veteran skydivers practicing their swoops in a separate landing area!

LEAH LEVY

Though competitive skydiving might not be on your radar yet, it's one of the most fun ways to advance your skydiving skills and meet new people. Once you've earned your A license, ask other skydivers about casual competitions at drop zones near you!

How Skydiving Changed *My Life*

November 2, 1968, was a beautiful clear Saturday. I had just turned 19 and was a 145-pound freshman at the University of Houston when I went to the Galveston Skydivers in Dickinson, 30 miles away. That day I did about a two-hour ground school that primarily involved jumping off a 4-foot-high platform, crudely perfecting my parachute landing fall. I soon found myself in an old Cessna 195 climbing to 2,800 feet for my first jump, a static-line jump using a modified 30-foot round military parachute, commonly referred to as a cheap-o. I hit the ground fairly hard but did an OK PLF. It was so amazing!

In the next few weeks, I finished the required five static-line jumps followed by one jump-and-pull and two five-second delays. I was able to buy and begin packing my own cheap-o rig ($35) after my third jump. I was beginning to feel like a real skydiver.

It was around this time that I met Deborah, a beautiful girl from a small town in Tennessee. She was visiting her relatives in Houston. I invited her to the drop zone for our first date. When we got there, it was too windy to jump, so we continued on from Dickinson to Galveston, where we took a romantic ride across the bay on the Bolivar Ferry.

Deborah returned home to Tennessee, and I finished the semester and prepared for two years of active duty in the Navy Reserve. I continued jumping, even though the weather seldom cooperated. Everyone at the drop zone was great, always giving tips and looking out for my safety. Deborah returned to Houston in the spring, and in early April she finally got to see me jump. I was working on 20-second freefalls, so I told her to lie on the ground and count. I was the third person to leave the plane at 5,500 feet. I didn't have an altimeter, so I counted. Deborah spotted me leaving the plane, counted to 18, and I pulled. I told her, "You count faster when you're falling at 120 miles per hour."

I was lucky that day and made a second jump. This time, they let me progress to a 30-second freefall from 7,200 feet. Again, I was the third person out of the plane. Unfortunately, I forgot to tell Deborah that this jump was 30 seconds. She counted to 19 ... 20 ... 21 ... 22 and started to panic. I finally pulled, but you can bet I got a lecture on the importance of communication.

I ended up with 17 jumps before leaving for the Navy. Deborah and my relationship grew, and we were married later that year while I was stateside. When I returned from a tour in the Philippines and Vietnam, Deborah and I restarted our married life together. After college and a few years fighting the Houston traffic, we moved to Chattanooga, Tennessee, where we raised a family and eventually retired.

I often dreamed of skydiving again, but I didn't pursue it due to other priorities. Then Deborah passed away unexpectedly in 2020 after 50 years of marriage. She was buried in her hometown of Jasper, Tennessee. One day after visiting her grave, I stopped by the Marion County Airport, the drop zone for the Chattanooga Skydiving Company. I soon signed up for their AFF package, which consisted of ground school, two tandem jumps and seven AFF jumps. Everyone there was fantastic, especially the couple who did my training. Darcy was my tandem instructor, as well as the second AFF instructor on my first few AFF jumps. Michelle was my ground-school instructor and my AFF instructor on single-instructor AFF jumps.

MICHELLE KING

I now have a new A license, A-97544. Reconnecting with skydiving has challenged me to be a stronger person and has given a new purpose to life. I am fortunate to have good health, because I have so much more to learn. I look forward to improving my skydiving skills and meeting new friends.

Jack Flack B-54820
Hixson, Tennessee

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Selections from past issues of *Parachutist*

DAVID CHERRY

FROM "PEAK EXPERIENCES IN SKYDIVING"

By Mike Horan | April 2016 Issue

Visit any drop zone and you'll soon start enjoying the good vibes. Skydivers are friendly, possess high energy and are extremely passionate about freefalling through the sky. Excitement is in the air, and it's easy to see why. Skydivers take premeditated risks by leaping out of perfectly good airplanes. It's what we do, and we love it. The daily camaraderie on drop zones is compelling and is one of the major things that attracts new skydivers to the sport. It's an activity filled with confident, competent and enthusiastic people.

However, there is more to it than that. New skydivers soon begin to understand what almost everybody on the DZ realizes: It isn't just surviving each skydive that matters; it's what happens during the skydive. And what happens on the next skydive could be that very special time when everything comes together for a great experience.

Special jumps can occur without warning and without any predetermination. It could easily be your first skydive. Perhaps it was the time you flew into your biggest formation. Whatever the particulars of the jump, if it positively changed the way you feel about yourself, chances are you were having a peak experience. These experiences can be some of the happiest and most thrilling moments of one's life. Without a doubt, peak experiences are people's healthiest moments.

Most skydivers fall into the category of healthy people. Self-actualizing skydivers use the challenges in this sport to develop their potential. The first jump is usually a remarkable experience. That first jump opens the door and lays the foundation for succeeding challenges. There is always a challenge on every skydive, some aspect that is new and different that the jumper could do better, faster or higher. It is overcoming the challenges of deliberate risk taking that helps skydivers develop individual potential and become more self-actualizing.

DAVID CHERRY

The full, original versions of these articles can be found at parachutist.com under the "Back Issues" tab when you search their respective issues of the magazine.

MARK KIRSCHENBAUM/HYPOXIC

BERT NAVARETTE

FROM "GETTING PAST THE DOOR MONSTER"

By Brian Germain | July 2015 Issue

New skydivers often need help to get through a seemingly impenetrable barrier of fear, especially the common obstacle that many people have affectionately termed the "Door Monster." Although no single answer helps everyone, solutions do exist.

Fear is normal. In fact, if you are in danger and aren't feeling a heightened level of arousal, you are not executing your survival skills as powerfully as possible. We need a certain kind of adrenaline that wakes us up and prepares our bodies for action. This is healthy fear.

If you are feeling fear, your mind is telling you that you are not ready to move forward with the situation as it is. But if a few parameters changed, you might feel quite differently. The human brain can shift from terror to optimal experience quite quickly once certain aspects of safety are addressed. You may just need to take a step back and do things in a more organized fashion in order to soothe the fear. It is also possible that you simply need to move more slowly, breathe more fully and not let the situation cause you to go any faster than your brain can think. It is also possible that your fear, which has arisen to assist you in saving your life, is providing exactly what you need. If you remember while you're standing in the door that it is your intense, sane desire to survive that is causing your heart to race, you may decide to simply enjoy the sensation and ride the wave of emotion into a feeling of empowerment, increased awareness and preparedness. Our interpretation of our reality is ultimately what decides our experience.

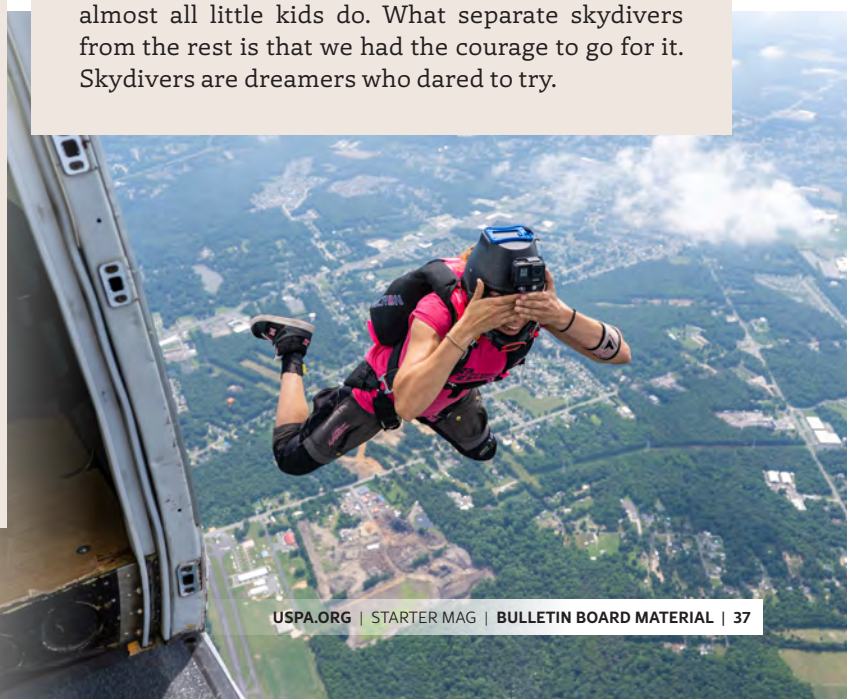
In skydiving, the biggest dangers do not usually come from outside but from within. Stay calm and keep thinking. Sometimes the right thing to do will be to ride the plane down. Sometimes it will be to charge into battle with your hair on fire and a wild smile upon your face. In the end, you will figure out what to do if you simply slow down and rationally consider what you can do to feel better. If you make feeling good your number-one priority, you aren't likely to find yourself in a situation that you cannot handle. If you use fear as part of your emotional guidance system that leads to safety, fear can become a tool and even a friend.

FROM "PROFILE: DAN BRODSKY-CHENFELD"

By Brian Giboney | July 2009 Issue

It is funny when you think about the public's perception of skydivers. They look at the adrenaline junkie, psycho-criminals they've seen in movies and figure that this must be a good example of who skydivers really are. Then they come to a drop zone and see men and women between the ages of 18 and 80 from around the world, people from every conceivable walk of life and not a psycho in the bunch (well, just a few, anyway).

When friends ask me about skydivers, I explain that as kids we dreamt of flying. To some degree almost all little kids do. What separate skydivers from the rest is that we had the courage to go for it. Skydivers are dreamers who dared to try.



FROM "SAFETY CHECK"

By Dan Brodsky-Chenfeld
November 2022 Issue

"Just relax." I think all of us have been told this by our instructors and coaches. Chances are, when you first heard this, you thought, "Are you f-ing crazy?! I'm jumping out of an airplane! I am anything but relaxed!" It probably seemed like the craziest thing you'd ever heard, but it's true.

As soon as you actually learn to relax, everything becomes easier. Everything. This is true for students, as well as competitors and world-record participants. But how do you make it happen? You want to relax. You intend to relax. Then you leave the plane and are so focused on the jump that you never even think about relaxing. You forget completely. During the ride to altitude, you usually become more and more anxious and amped up as you get closer to jumping. The excitement and anxiety builds as you get closer to the door, peaking as you start climbing out. By the time you exit, you are boiling over, only to be hit with the sensory overload you get from the exit.

However, there is a strategy that works at all stages of a skydiving career. Try this: During the ride to altitude, focus more on calming down and controlling your energy level, especially as you get closer to exit. If you are an AFF student, you probably are going through the jump in your head, being sure you remember every detail, worried you'll forget. Trust me on this, being calm is more important than remembering the jump. If you forget the sequence, your instructor will remind you, and if you're calm enough, you will be able to easily respond. So, spend your time calming down during the ride to altitude. The last few minutes before exit, slow yourself down, breathe and don't worry about the dive sequence. You learned it on the ground, and you will be able to bring it up if you're calm enough.

Once you're in the exit position, pause. Take a slow, deep breath; you have time. Calm yourself down. Then begin the exit count.

Most new jumpers exit the plane and take a few seconds before they realize they're stable. Usually there is a count something like this, "Out, in, go, arch one thousand, two thousand, three thousand." At the moment when you realize you are stable, instead of beginning the sequence, pause, take a deep breath, wiggle your fingers and consciously calm down. Let the wind blow your body back into a nice arch. Then begin the jump. You have time.

LEAH LEVY

JESSE LEOS

By doing this, you make calming down—relaxing—part of the skydive rather than a hope, wish or prayer. It becomes part of the sequence ... and the most important part.

The proper amount of calm is way calmer than you think. Consider that if you were unconscious and lying on your belly in freefall, your body would blow back to your perfect, comfortable arch. Your core is where the weight is; like a badminton birdie, it will always go to the low point. Your extremities will blow back to whatever your level of flexibility will allow. Your perfect arch is what the wind wants to do with your body if you're calm and relaxed.

As competitors, my teammates on the original Arizona Airspeed 4-way formation skydiving team used almost the same process. The team always used the term "on the line" to describe our best jumps, where we were calm enough to go as aggressively as possible while still able to stay completely under control. "Over the line" referred to the jumps where we weren't calm enough and were too aggressive, and "under the line" referred to when we were too cautious and not flying strongly and confidently enough. When we were debriefing after the first day of a training camp, we realized we had been over the line all day. We made it our goal for the week to calm down and put ourselves right on the line. But despite that goal, we were over the line on every single jump on every day that entire camp. At the end of the week, we truly couldn't believe it. We had one goal for the week and made literally zero progress toward it. We discussed why we weren't able to calm down as we had intended. I suddenly realized that not once after exit did the thought of calming down ever occur to me. We planned to be calm; we wanted to be calm; our goal was to be calm. But we never actually did anything to make it happen. We came up with a plan to fix this.

Our team completely prepared for the jump prior to getting on the plane. On the ride to altitude, we'd focus on creating the calmness we strived to have on all the jumps. During the last few thousand feet, I would just repeat the sequence of formations as a calm, quiet little meditative mantra: "A, L, 11, 7; A, L, 11, 7." When we were lined up in the door and ready to exit, right at that moment where our adrenaline would peak, we'd all stop together and take one more breath and remind ourselves to be calm. We would then exit and work through the first page of five or six points. At that moment before starting the second page, we would literally stop, breathe and again remind ourselves to be calm. It worked! We made the thought to stay calm part of the jump sequence! From that point on, we were able to far better control our mental state on the jumps. It didn't take any time at all. No one could look at the video and see us stop, because it was just a thought to be conscious of choosing to be calm.

I promise you, this works. In any type of skydiving, have a plan for when during the jump you will stop to remind yourself to be calm. It won't happen just because you wish it to. You need to make it happen. Please give it a try. Everything—I mean everything—will become easier. Learning to do this in skydiving will open the door to being able to calm your mind down in any stressful situation and will help you face any challenge, even outside of the sport. It is one of the many invaluable life lessons we learn as skydivers!

LEAH LEVY

How Skydiving Changed *My Life*

I waddled my way to the edge of the plane door with a strange man strapped to my back. I thought to myself, "What did I sign myself up for?" My tandem instructor screamed, "Out! In! Out!" and as quick as that, I was plummeting to the earth at 120 mph. I didn't know that this moment would be the beginning of an unforgettable journey.

At the age of 19, my parents surprised me with a tandem skydive, as they always knew this was something I wanted to try. I had talked about going for years. When the opportunity presented itself, I felt naturally hesitant. Although I was cautious, the thrill seeker within me pushed forward. I can remember that day like it was yesterday: It was cloudy, chilly and quiet. I played it cool and acted fearless, but in all reality I wanted to turn and run. Needless to say, I fought through the apprehension, and when I returned to the ground safely, I felt slightly intoxicated and liberated. I stumbled over to my parents and said, "Yup, I'm getting licensed."

The AFF course was everything but easy for me. I questioned myself constantly, and fear was a common emotion on every jump. In fact, most of my fellow skydivers would notice my instant change on the plane. I would quietly sit there, face pale white, close my eyes and play the skydive in my head from start to finish. But every time I exited the plane, it reiterated that this was where I belonged. I underestimated myself,

JULIE HOPKINS

ALEX KELLY

as I performed well on almost every jump and obtained my license within two months. I was determined and dedicated to the sport.

When I came off student status, it was nerve wracking. No one was there to hold my hand anymore, and I found myself wondering if I was really cut out for this sport. I was a young girl and felt intimidated and overwhelmed. But what I found in myself that I never knew I had before was my will. I had the will to continue, to progress and to test every limit possible. Before I knew it, I was sit-flying at 45 jumps, obtaining my B license and jumping as much as I could. I set goals for myself, and I would reach them and exceed my own expectations.

Skydiving didn't change my life, it defined my life. It has opened a whole new adventure and given me self-awareness. It was the first time in my life that I felt confident. I found strengths within myself that I did not know I possessed. I didn't want to work hard just in the sport; it motivated me to do better in general. I became more productive and goal driven in my overall life.

Aside from that, skydiving gives me an indescribable feeling that I am so grateful for. It is an ultimate escape from all my troubles and makes me appreciate the beauty and peacefulness of the world in a different perspective. After all, how many people can say what the world looks like from 14,000 feet in open air? The person I was before never viewed life as a gift. I now see every day as an adventure and have the ability to feel like I can accomplish any challenge, goal or obstacle that comes my way.

Samantha Hopkins | B-36043
Vernon, Connecticut

Skydivers travel from near and far to “boogies,” which are multi-day events with lots of skydiving during the day and music, food, parties and prizes at night. They may coincide with a holiday—as you can see here with Cienna Stover and Michelle Daimion feeling patriotic at the 4th of July Boogie at Skydive Cross Keys in New Jersey—or might be a local tradition. They’re always a great opportunity to meet other skydivers, especially at boogies specifically for newly licensed jumpers!

Photo by Bert Navarrete

No matter what kind of plane you jumped from during your first skydive, it's one of many types of aircraft you'll have the opportunity to exit from once you've earned your license! There are Cessna 182s, turbine-powered Twin Otters, tailgate-exit Skyvans, PAC-750's and more designed specifically for skydiving. At boogies and other special events, it's common to see more specialty aircraft like helicopters and hot-air balloons! Here, Doug Barron and Jamie Caldwell celebrate one year of marriage with a jump from a Huey helicopter at Skydive Arizona in Eloy.

Photo by David Cherry

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Advice From The Pros

For more than 25 years, columnist Brian Giboney, author of the monthly *Parachutist* Profile, has been asking the same question to the greatest skydivers in the world: "What advice do you have for students?" If you've made it this far into the *Starter Mag*, we sincerely hope you're ready to get back in the air and pursue your A license, but before you board that jump plane, take a moment to heed this advice from the best of the best!

Take your time. The sky will always be there. Better to take time and respect the risks of the sport so you can have a long career with it instead of having to get out due to an injury.

–Monica Adams
June 2024 Parachutist

Enjoy every jump, even if you struggle in the beginning! Learn how to filter all the incoming info from different people at the drop zone and do not compare your progression with others. We are different! Be humble, have fun and go slow if you want to stay in the sport for a long time.

–Ioannis Vlachiotis
July 2024 Parachutist

Enjoy where you are in your training, and don't get ahead of yourself. Someday, you'll have gobs of jumps and long for those early jumps again. If you can't wait to be an ace skydiver, then get coaching and tunnel time and as much advice from active, experienced jumpers as you can. Don't cut corners—you will pay the price.

–Chris Salcone
March 2006 Parachutist

I've heard so many new jumpers say things like, "Once I get my license (or once I can freefly, or once I can jump with those ninjas, etc.), I'll be able to start having more fun." There is no end goal in skydiving. As soon as you get to that level, you're only going to want to be able to do the next thing. No matter how good you are, it's never going to be good enough. That's the great thing about skydiving—there's always a new challenge. If you don't have fun tackling all the steps along the way, you're missing the whole point. Besides, if it were easy, it would be boring.

–Nancy Koreen
December 2020 Parachutist

NORMAN KENT

Always ask questions if you are uncertain about something.

–Doug Barron
January 2021 Parachutist

Ask all the questions you're embarrassed to ask. Ask them until they make sense to you. Be a lifelong student. Set goals, micro and macro. Walk the jump like you mean it. Find a good mentor(s).

–Alethia Austin
June 2026 Parachutist

Try different disciplines enough so that you become a well-rounded skydiver. And at some point, even if you are not a competitor at heart, pick one discipline and compete in it. You will be amazed as your skill level skyrockets and the quality of your dives will go through the roof, all the while increasing the fun you have.

–Ed Ganley
August 2024 Parachutist

Mind over matter. We are participating in an activity that goes against all our natural instincts. The faster we can relax, the sooner we will experience a surge in success. Flying in freefall is subtle, and over-effort will work against you. Relax and enjoy the experience.

–Rob Laidlaw
February 2025 Parachutist

To truly appreciate skydiving, go beyond the social aspect and grasp the dedication required for learning, progressing and staying safe. Resources are readily available, and the community is eager to help you.

–Robin Jandle
August 2025 Parachutist

Do not ask, "What happened?" from a gurney; Ask, "What could happen?" from the picnic table.

–Matt Cline
March 2010 Parachutist

Seek out advice from qualified people but not around the bonfire at night. Also, listen to their advice; progressing is fun but takes time. Don't walk around asking the same question until you get the answer that you want; it's probably not the right one.

–Logan Donovan
December 2017 Parachutist

Advice from the Pros

Find and bond with a mentor or advanced instructor, ask as many intelligent questions as possible, and jump, jump, jump. Remember, if you're smiling, you're learning—that's what the greatest part of our sport is all about, laughter and life. Emphasize the positive, forget the rest.

–Mollie Mercer
March 2003 Parachutist

Fly in the wind tunnel as soon as you can and as often as you can afford. You'll learn at an accelerated rate and will avoid any bad habits. Get good coaching to improve skills in the air and under canopy. Jump a lot!

–Eliana Rodriguez
June 2004 Parachutist

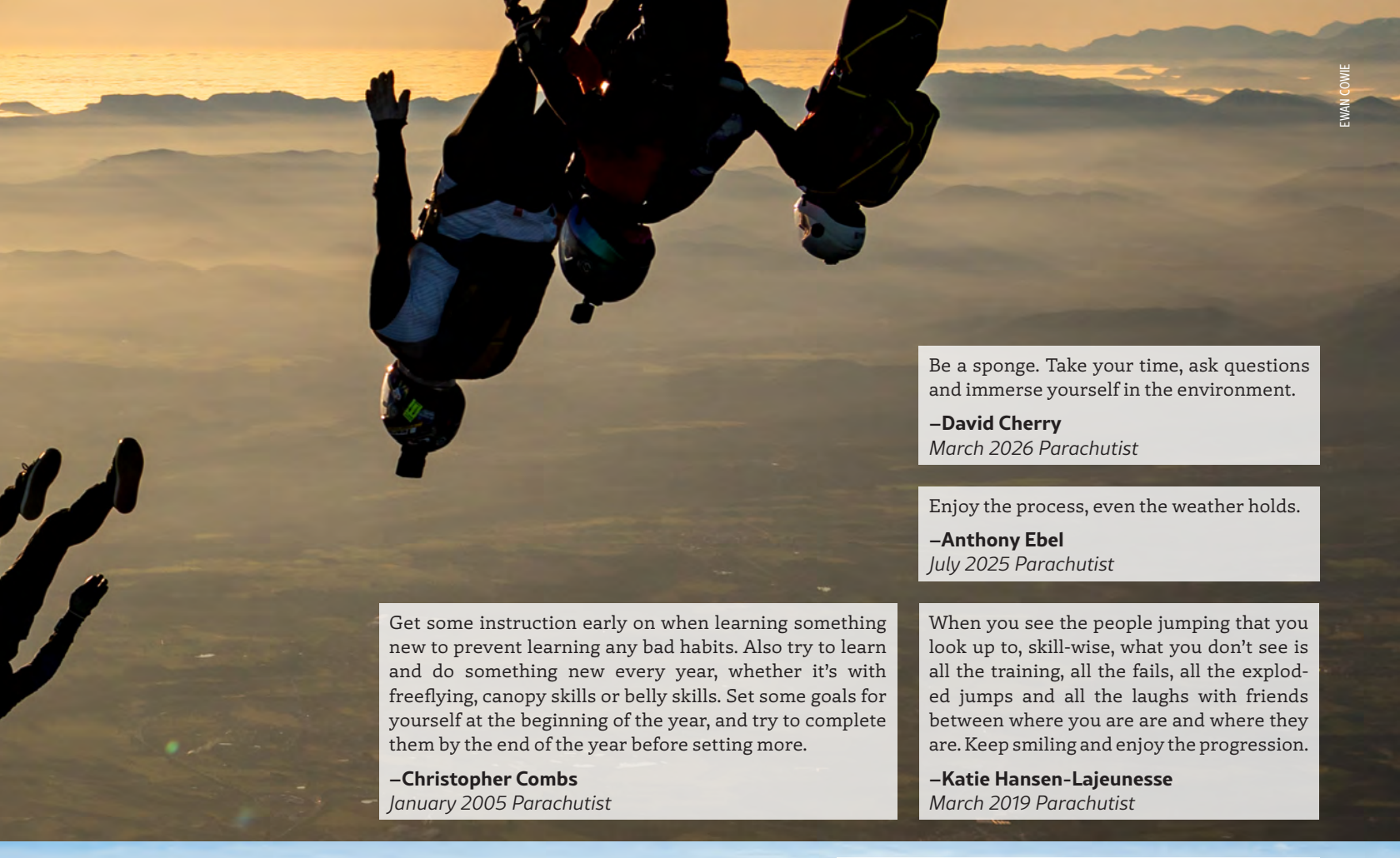
EDDIE PHILLIPS

Beware of your ego. It's easy to get caught up in what others are doing when you need to focus on the most important part of your skydiving career—building a good foundation. Also, make sure you're in the sport for no one except yourself.

–Melissa Nelson
February 2005 Parachutist

Be a sponge. Never stop being a student. Always ask questions. The moment you think you know it all, you're about to get hurt or hurt someone else.

–Angela Hsu
June 2012 Parachutist



EWAN COWIE

Be a sponge. Take your time, ask questions and immerse yourself in the environment.

–David Cherry
March 2026 Parachutist

Enjoy the process, even the weather holds.

–Anthony Ebel
July 2025 Parachutist

Get some instruction early on when learning something new to prevent learning any bad habits. Also try to learn and do something new every year, whether it's with freeflying, canopy skills or belly skills. Set some goals for yourself at the beginning of the year, and try to complete them by the end of the year before setting more.

–Christopher Combs
January 2005 Parachutist

When you see the people jumping that you look up to, skill-wise, what you don't see is all the training, all the fails, all the exploded jumps and all the laughs with friends between where you are and where they are. Keep smiling and enjoy the progression.

–Katie Hansen-Lajeunesse
March 2019 Parachutist

DAVID CHERRY

Learn as much as you can; remember that we do not grow wings on our shoulders; and the ground is hard for everyone, no matter how many jumps we have.

–Maria Kambourova
April 2026 Parachutist

Don't give up because your friends do. I think a lot of us who have stuck around in the sport have gone through that transition where our friends who we thought were going to come along decided not to. It's totally acceptable for this sport to not be "your thing," but if it is something you are passionate about, don't let going alone stop you.

–Braden Roseborough
December 2025 Parachutist

Experienced skydivers will often get creative and push the limits of what's possible by engineering and modifying objects they can launch out of a plane and skydive with safely. Here, (top to bottom) Adam Beech, Kiara Baugh, Roberta Mancino and Scott Muckleroy ride a couch in freefall during the Guardians of the Drop event over a clear landing zone, dubbed Area 51, 20 miles east of Skydive Arizona.

Photo by Mark Kirschenbaum/Hypoxic

ANTHONY ARMENDARIZ

So now you've learned a little about the basics of the skydiving world—but this is just the beginning. There's so much more to learn and experience, and there always will be. Look around your drop zone and you'll see skydivers who can't wait for you to join them. Ask questions. Make friends. Enjoy the wind on your face two or three miles above the planet. And most importantly, have fun.

The sky is waiting for you.

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