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Skydiving by Gert Duursema

My first jump wasn't really my first...

When we got up there in the plane, it all got a little too much for me and I felt it was a tad too high too jump. Besides, I also had concussion and my doctor had advised me against jumping. The concussion was due to my diving into a swimming pool at Delareyville on New Year's Eve. There was a "no-diving"-sign, but it was in English and unfortunately I don't read English...

On that day, I was supposed to jump first, but when the door opened all I wanted was to be with my mommy. It was total sensory overload and an overwhelming fear took hold of me.

When the plane landed I really hated myself for being such a chicken. And it felt like everybody at the drop zone knew that I had just chickened out from jumping.

After giving it some more thought, I decided that I had to do at least one jump before I die and so I booked myself for a tandem-skydive with Skydive Joburg. A tandem is basically where you are attached to an experienced skydiver who does all the work while you relax and enjoy the free-fall.

On the morning I arrived, I got something like a five minute briefing, had a short interview with the camera guy and then we walked out toward the runway. It felt like the long walk to hell with my legs getting heavier and heavier as we got closer to the plane. I don't even remember getting into the plane. I do remember the plane taking off and the smell of aviation fuel. It smelled like a petrol and paraffin mixture and the noise of the propeller was deafening.

At 11 000 feet the red light above the rear door came on and the jump master opened it; after what felt like ages the pilot throttled back and the green light came on. One by one the skydivers jumped out of the plane. Unlike the movies where



it looks like the skydivers are falling out of the plane in slow motion, in real life it all happens very quickly which does not help a first-time skydiver's self confidence. Well, we made it to the door and then Glen (the guy with whom I did the tandem) began the countdown.

Ready. Set. Go! And down we fell... I expected that it would feel like I was falling for 40-odd seconds but in reality it felt more like I was floating gently on the clouds.

The other thing that I did not expect was the deafening noise of the wind rushing in my ears. We fell at approximately 200 km/h for 40 seconds and at about 5000 feet Glen waved and pulled the ripcord.

The force of the parachute opening jerked me a bit but there was instant silence, peace and serenity. Under the canopy, Glen and I could talk clearly to each other and the view was indescribable.

Needless to say, I was hooked on skydiving. I immediately contacted an Accelerated Free Fall (AFF) instructor to book a course.

The main difference between AFF and static line is that with AFF the student immediately does a free-fall jump from 11 000 feet and pulls his/her own ripcord, whereas with static line the first jump is from 3500 feet and a static line opens the canopy for the student.

With the first AFF jump, two AFF instructors hold on to the student throughout the jump, one on either side of the student.

When we reached 11 000 feet on my first AFF jump a (by now) familiar fear gripped me. I just kept on telling myself that my instructors were two girls and if they could do it, so could I. I did the jump. I pulled my ripcord, I landed my canopy and I hurt my ankle rupturing two ligaments. Needless, to say I did not do any more jumping that day. Nonetheless, it was still a lot of fun and I made up my mind to continue jumping. After my prescribed rest period and physiotherapy, I contacted the instructor to continue my training. In the aircraft I was scared again, but this time it



was a fear of the landing and that I would hurt my ankle again.

However, this time round everything went just fine and I had a perfect landing.

The AFF progression was a lot of fun. I learnt how to move forward, do turns, front and back-loops and how to put myself into a spin in free fall. The instructor lady wasn't bad looking either. I think I will remember this until the day I die.

The people at the Johannesburg Skydiving Club are very safety-conscious and this also helps your confidence a lot, especially if you are a beginner. The first jump course is also very comprehensive and by the time you walk out to the plane you feel as though you are ready for almost any situation.

For me, skydiving is a game where you must overcome the fears generated by your mind. It is scary as hell on the first jump and overcoming the mental block to jump was pretty huge. But having said that, after I completed my first jumps I felt as if I could take on the world and that anything was possible if I set my mind to it. I realise now that everything in life is mind over matter.

I have, at the time of writing, completed 40 skydives, obtained my A-licence and every time the sky is nice and blue I long to be up there.

Check out the Johannesburg Skydiving Club's website for contact details for either a tandem or the first jump course (www.jsc.co.za).

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