



PHOTO BY DUSTIN STURGES

Tribune assistant news editor Sally Buffalo was ready to do it all over again before her feet even hit the ground.

13,000-foot drop is the ride of her life

By SALLY BUFFALO
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"Want to jump out of a perfectly good airplane?" my boyfriend asks.

He sounds as casual as if he were asking about renting a movie. "Sure," I reply, just as nonchalant.

I wonder if I'll be so casual standing at the open door of the plane, looking at the ground 13,000 feet below.

It's hard to feel at ease when you're reading and initialing four pages describing every way you could get hurt or

killed skydiving and asking you (or your next of kin) to give up all legal recourse if anything goes wrong.

We're at SkyDive Santa Barbara, getting ready to jump with a master skydiver strapped on our backs.

Among the form's dire warnings: Your chute might not open. Your backup chute might not open. The plane might crash before you can jump out ... and so on.

Furthermore, I can't sue any-

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Skydiving

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one who caused those things to happen. They could knock me out of the plane with no parachute and not be liable.

I'm somewhat reassured when the jump masters accompanying my friends for their tandem jump start going over some basics on the ground.

My guy, fresh from his last jump, grabs a chute pack and a granola bar and leads me toward the plane.

"Aren't you going to teach me what I need to do up there?" I ask.

"We'll get to that," he says.

"Well, how do you know the chute is packed up right?"

"I don't."

I climb into the Cessna after him.

For the next few minutes, I distract myself looking at spectacular views of the coastline around Point Conception and the mountains on the other side.

"Are we ever going to talk about this?" I finally ask.

"Look," he says. "There are two types of people who come out here. Those who come out to learn how to skydive and those who come out just to do it and enjoy themselves."

"Just have fun, and if you like it, come back and we'll teach you," he adds.

We get to our jump altitude, the door opens and the solo jumpers start bailing out. I'll be the last to go.

"OK," my guy says now we're strapped together.

"When we jump out, I want you to curl your legs up, like you're kicking me in the butt. Cross your arms over your chest. We're going to do a backward flip. I'm going to show you three points on the coastline, then we'll spin around a little bit. When I tap you, spread your arms out."

"That's it?" I ask.

"That's it," he says.

"What about landing?" I ask.

"We'll get to that," he says.

We move toward the open door. He points to my friends dropping speedily to the

earth. And then we're out. I don't even have time to think about being scared.

I feel like Alice falling down the rabbit hole. Then I curl my feet back. We somersault backwards and I'm prone, looking beneath me and out at the horizon.

The wind is deafening. My ears are popping. And my mouth is drying out because I'm grinning from ear to ear. Brandon, as I later learn he's named, taps my arm and points north.

"San Luis!" he yells. We spin to the left. "Point Conception." We spin again. "Santa Barbara."

It's got to be one of the most beautiful drop zones in the world. I imagine how it would be even more spectacular when the miles of flower fields are in bloom.

At 9,000 feet, Brandon points down to my friends floating to the ground with open chutes.

Then, at 5,000 feet, he pulls the cord.

The chute spreads open and we quickly slow from

more than 120 mph to 10.

The wind stops.

"This is incredible," I say, now that someone can actually hear me.

"Welcome to my world," Brandon says back.

I ask him how often he jumps. Every day, he says. He's an instructor five days a week, and on his days off he finds another company to jump with.

We float in silence, taking in a perspective few ever experience.

As the ground comes in closer focus, Brandon yanks his right arm down. We tilt and spin wildly. He pulls his other arm and we twirl the other way.

We've gone from peaceful bird's eye view to amusement park ride.

We spin a few more times and swoop in to the landing zone, my legs lifted up so Brandon can take us safely down.

Before my feet even hit the ground, I'm yelling, "I want to go again!"

If you go ...

SkyDive Santa Barbara

877-652-JUMP

www.skydivesanta
barbara.com

SkyDive Santa Barbara operates out of Lompoc Airport, 1801 N. H St., Suite G, about an hour's drive south of San Luis Obispo.

A tandem jump costs \$199, with discounts for groups of three or more.

An additional \$99 gets you a DVD of your jump (\$75 for VHS).

Call ahead for reservations. Closed Tuesday and Wednesday.

Make sure to wear loose, comfortable clothing and appropriate footwear (i.e., no flip flops).