



Whitney Harder of Eugene Skydivers

Urban Moore, the owner of Eugene Skydivers, checks his altimeter before deploying the parachute as sophomore Chanelle Olivo, who is an education major, enjoys the free-fall portion of the skydive.

Reporter takes leap of faith

■ Jumping out of an airplane 10,000 feet above the ground can change one's outlook

By Lisa Toth
Oregon Daily Emerald

Since elementary school I've known that what comes up must come down — but I had no idea I'd be an example of the law of gravity.

Even though my feet are safely back on the ground, I still can't believe I actually went skydiving for the first time — jumping out of a

Cessna 182, 10,000 feet above the ground. My poor parents would have heart attacks if

they only knew. I haven't told them yet.

I questioned my own sanity as 10 of my crazy college friends and I sped toward the "drop zone" at Creswell Municipal Airport, the tunes of Tom Petty's "Free Falling" and Kenny Loggins' "Danger Zone" filling my head.

The gray skies and 45-degree wind-chill factor at Hobby Field wasn't going to put a damper on our anticipation. When we arrived at the warehouse for Eugene Skydivers, I could tell the level of nervousness went up a notch because there was a line to use the portable toilets.

After we filled out paperwork that acknowledged we would leaping at our own risk, Tandem Instructor Peter Keep orientated our group on airplane safety and how to mentally and physically prepare to jump. The first words that came out of his mouth were: "What's wrong with you people?"

Urban Moore, the owner of Eugene Skydivers, started the business out of his car using rented equipment in 1993. He said the sport attracts "Type A" personalities.

"Basically, we are the kind of people your parents have always warned you about," said Moore, who called skydiving "a finesse sport."

"Once you understand what you

are doing, the air does 95 percent of the work," he said.

After watching a demonstration video, I was already biting my fingernails. But Keep told us most people will only skydive once in a lifetime, so I decided I was going to make the most of it.

"I've had three guys pass out, but I've never had a woman pass out," Keep said.

After we were orientated and I had pushed fatality into the back of my mind, we waved to the first victim of the sky, sophomore education major Chanelle Olivo, as she climbed into the airplane. She would be jumping with Moore.

Katie Breene, a senior political science major, and I were next on the list to take the plunge. Between nervous hugs and shrieks of excitement, I pulled on a purple jumpsuit.

"A ride at an amusement park is going to seem boring after this," Breene said.

Breene and I piled into the plane with our tandem jumpers, trained professionals from Eugene Skydivers, who would be attached to us during the jump. Feeling cramped and claustrophobic, I knew once we got up in the air, the plane wasn't going to land with me in it.

As we took the sky, Darren McMahon, my tandem partner, asked me if I was nervous. I just nodded my head in reply, because my tongue was tied and my stomach was full of butterflies. To my surprise, McMahon told me he was nervous, too.

I thought, "Great! I'm trusting this guy to make sure my parachute opens, and he's getting nervous. He's not suppose to be nervous. He's done this before."

McMahon showed me the altimeter strapped to his wrist that measured our altitude as we climbed higher and higher above the clouds. When we reached 10,000 feet, the next few actions I went through became a blur.

The world seemed so much safer when the door to the airplane was closed. McMahon released the handle, the door flew open and the cabin became extremely loud and windy. I noticed the paint had been peeled off from the edge of the door

by the petrified hands of those who had jumped before me.

That's when the terror set in. I didn't want to look down. McMahon motioned it was time to jump.

I told my feet they were going to have to move. Fighting the intensity of the situation, not to mention the fierce winds, I swung my feet over the edge and onto the wheel of the airplane flying 85 miles an hour. I crossed my hands over my chest.

My palms were sweating, and my senses were on overload.

I heard McMahon yell the three-part exit count: "Ready, set, ARCH!"

We pushed forward into the free-fall portion of the dive. With 90 mph winds screaming past my ears, I felt myself dropping, and I arched my body like we had practiced.

I remember looking out over the clouds and seeing the peaks of the Three Sisters in the distance. The view was simply incredible.

"For some people it's an eternity, for others it's over in a heartbeat," Keep said.

In actuality, the free fall lasted about 35 seconds. Then McMahon pulled the rip-cord that deployed the canopy at 5,000 feet. I had the opportunity to pull the handle, but I was too overwhelmed to actually do it.

The rest of the ride was smooth sailing. We floated down through the clouds, and I helped turn the parachute in midair. Breene and her tandem partner, Jim Renfro, steered alongside us, and Breene and I screamed with excitement as we waved to each other. I looked down and realized how small everything was. McMahon and I practiced our landing before we approached the ground.

"You imagine what you are going to feel when you get out of the plane, and it's nothing like what you think it's going to be," said sophomore art major Nancy Rhodes.

We landed safely and proudly headed back toward the base, where we were greeted by our friends. Everyone who went skydiving on Sunday came away feeling that somehow their lives had changed.

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