

Most of my friends thought I was crazy- going skydiving at my age. But it seemed to me like a great way to celebrate reaching my 80th birthday (I really didn't want another party). So, I signed up for tandem parachuting. It's the same as skydiving but you don't need special training because you jump with another person who is a qualified instructor. You are tied to them and they control the jump and decide when to pull the parachute cord.

The day that we chose was a beautifully sunny with just a few clouds. There was a slight wind, but nothing to worry about according to Don, my instructor. All my family came to see me- although my wife was actually very nervous, she tried not to show it. My grandchildren were really excited, however. They kept jumping up and down. There were a few other people as well, doing the same type of jump as me. And what did I feel? Well, I had butterflies in my stomach.

Then it was time to get on the plane. Don told us that we were going to be jumping from about 6,000 feet. That seemed really high to me but Don said that was the normal height for tandem jumping- parachuters can jump from up to 13,000 feet, but I didn't fancy that.

Up we went and I looked out the window and could see the ground disappearing below me. I got more and more nervous and I was feeling a bit sick too, and then Don stood up and told us to check our gear. We checked helmets, parachutes, and most especially the rope that connected us and waited for the green light. When it came on, Don shouted Jump- but he pushed me anyway and then we were out and I could feel the wind on my face and for several seconds I was absolutely terrified- I kept thinking "Why hasn't the parachute opened?" but then suddenly there was a sudden upward pull and we were slowing down and I was able to relax and enjoy the scenery. It was really amazing. I could even see my house from up there.

All too soon, the ground was coming quickly up towards us, and Don told me to prepare myself for the landing. Bump. No bones broken, fortunately. An unbelievable experience. I wish I'd done it before. I thoroughly recommend it.