

The Long

Haul

By Brian Germain

There are many areas of this sport in which we can invest ourselves, so many avenues in which to excel. By focusing heavily on a single discipline, we are able to achieve significant notoriety in a fairly short period of time. By utilising the superior training techniques, personal coaching and wind tunnel rehearsal, modern skydivers are able to reach significant prowess in just a few months of participation in the sport. Although the speedy gratification of our desires is tempting and rewarding in the short term, there is a larger, more important goal. We must survive.

I asked Lew Sandborn (USPA D Licence # 1) what he thought was the biggest problem in the sport today. With very little hesitation he stated that what concerns him the most is "new jumpers trying to make a name for themselves before their skills are ready for them to have that name". We want to get it all in one shot and instantly achieve all of our goals. In a pursuit as complex as skydiving, it is impossible to get all the necessary information in a short period of time. We have to keep learning and hope that our knowledge bucket fills up before our luck bucket runs out.

It is difficult to see the big picture of our lives from where we are at any given moment. We forget that the medals we strive so hard to achieve will not mean much when we are older. They will just represent more stuff to box up when we retire. In the end, the things that matter most pertain to the choices that we wish we could take back. Twisting an ankle today might seem like a small issue, but in fifty years from now, it will be something that effects whether or not we can ever jump again.

Picture yourself forty or fifty years from now. Are you still skydiving? Do you have pain in your joints from a bad landing? The quality of your life in the future is dependant on the choices you make today. If that wise old geezer that you will someday be could somehow communicate to you in the present-day, it might sound something like: "Stop trashing my body!"

We are insecure when we are young. We are so uncertain of who we are that we feel a need to prove ourselves at every opportunity. We think that who we are is based

on our most recent performance. We go to great lengths to show the world what we can do and often pay a hefty price for our impulsiveness.

Short-sighted goals neglect to take into account anything that does not achieve that goal. If looking cool and wearing the right gear is your highest priority, you may find yourself joining the dead skydivers club before too long.

I hate sounding like an old fart. People assume that being safety oriented means that you have to be boring. Not true at all. We can have fun; we just need to keep the throttle below 100% thrust if we are to control where we are going. The long-term survivors in this sport all seem to have this perspective; whether or not they talk about it. We sit around in trailers at boogies, shaking our heads at the ridiculous behavior that repeats itself over and over. We watch people eat it in the same ways that they did last year, and twenty years before that. It's like the message did not get out or something. The message is: "Pace yourself, this is a long journey".

On every jump there is a way for your life to end. No matter how many jumps there are in your logbook, the Reaper is watching for the moment that you stop paying attention. He is looking for the one thing for which you are not prepared. This fact does not require your fear, it requires your attention. If you are to be there at the Skydivers Over Sixty Swoop Competition, you must let go of your grip on trying to prove yourself and stay focused on the stuff that really matters.

The real identity of a skydiver is not in how many medals they win or how stylishly they swoop. It is in how long they jump and how safely. There simply are no Skygods under the age of sixty. If you want to prove yourself, stay alive.



About the Author

Brian Germain is the author of *The Parachute and its Pilot*, a canopy flight educational text as well as *Vertical Journey*, an illustrated freely instructional book. Brian is also the President of Big Air Sportz parachute manufacturing company, and teaches canopy flight courses all over the world. To learn more about Brian, or to order a book, go to: www.BrianGermain.com.

