

Flying High

Had skydiving been popular in the 19th century, Utilitarian philosopher, John Stuart Mill probably wouldn't have taken the plunge. Mill believed you should choose how to behave based on how much each action would help the world. "Actions are right to the degree that they tend to promote the greatest good for the greatest number," he claimed.

In contrast, if you sign the third section of Skydive Lake Tahoe's liability waiver, you agree, "...Parachuting is of little value to society and I am not under any compulsion to ride in or jump from an airplane. My participation is only for personal satisfaction and is entirely voluntary."

Combine this lack of societal significance with the sheer, heart palpitating terror of jumping out of a plane from 10,500 feet, and you may wonder why anyone in her right mind would choose to skydive. On a Saturday morning in June, I decided to find out.

With instructions to wear pants and sneakers, my husband and I left Truckee at 7 a.m. Forty minutes of alpine scenery later, we rolled in to the Nervino Airport in Beckworth, the headquarters of Skydive Lake Tahoe.

I tried to subdue my anxiety as we approached the hangar. Co-owner Amy Vail was unloading her 15-month old son, Cali, from the car, while Mike Vail, her husband, co-owner, pilot and professional skydiver, chatted with the tandem instructors.

After traveling all over the world to jump and compete Mike grew tired of "the big business bs" of most drop zones. He thought they were over-booked, impersonal and too far from home. So in 1997 Mike started Skydive Lake Tahoe in his own backyard.

Mike is the pilot and handles the equipment while Amy manages the business end. Though Amy has jumped a few times, she spends most of her time on the ground. "I have a doctorate in clinical psychology," she explains, "I've spent years getting grounded and helping other get grounded. It would be kind of oxymoronic."

For no rational reason at all, I am afraid of flying. Yes, I know, commercial airline travel is 65 times less dangerous than driving, but I allow myself to indulge in this illogical fear. So why did I opt to not only fly in a small plane, but also to jump out of one on this morning?



Susan and Greg

Photo: Dave Donnelly

Perhaps I figured it would be a good way to conquer my phobia by confronting the most extreme flying experience I could imagine. But like an evening glass of wine, the family atmosphere of Skydive Lake Tahoe, together with the tranquility of the morning and the sweeping valley views, soon soothed my nerves.

Tandem instructor, Greg Foster walked us out to the six-person Turbo 206 Cessna and gave us the details, quickly peeling away layers of denial about what we were about to do. I wondered if I might actually contribute to the good of society by accelerating the process of natural selection.

Greg explained that we needed to arch our backs, thrust our hips forward and drop our heads back as we plummeted. This initial body positioning, he explained, was the most important part of the entire jump. If we got it right, we would become aerodynamic, like the curve of the airplane's wing, and stabilize quickly. If we freaked out and curled up in the fetal position, he would be stuck struggling to control our shapeless mass.

After heightening my stress level with these incomprehensible instructions, Greg reminded us this would be a completely unique experience, and we should breathe, look around, relax, and take it all in. Since we weren't there to solve the world's problems, we might as well have fun. So I resolved to arch, breath and relax. I repeated these directives in my mind like a mantra while Greg helped me into my harness.

The plane's sliding plexiglass door closed, we accelerated down the runway, and lifted off into the sky. I couldn't turn back; I could barely move since we were wedged in so tightly. So I relaxed, willed my heart rate to slow, and enjoyed the views. We spotted Mount Lassen and Mount Shasta, still snow-covered at the end of June, as well as Lake Tahoe,

Frenchman's Reservoir, Lake Davis, The Sierra Valley, Reno, the Sierra Buttes, and the Feather River.

At 7,500 feet, Greg connected my harness to his, verbalizing each point of attachment as he did. At 10,500 feet we shimmied toward the door on our butts, and I hung off the edge, suspended in space, as Greg straddled me and held on to the inside of the door. I gripped my chest straps, clenched my jaw and arched my back like never before as we dropped head first toward the earth. For the first 10 seconds or so, as we accelerated to

about 120 miles per hour, the air felt like a brick wall laid across my chest and over my mouth. I couldn't inhale or exhale as the pressure contorted my face. Unable to complete the most basic of life's functions, I surrendered to my circumstances and arched away.

Soon we were stabilized, which meant that our bodies were falling parallel to the earth. Greg tapped my shoulder, indicating that I could spread my arms out and soar. Air moved freely in and out of my lungs and an ear-to-ear grin swept across my face. We flew over to Dave, the photographer outfitted in a bright red and yellow jumpsuit and helmet, equipped with both a video and still camera. We came so close that we touched hands for a few surreal seconds. It's a good thing they make you go tandem the first time, as I was so wrapped up in the ecstasy and freedom of freefall, the parachute never crossed my mind.

Fortunately, after a minute of falling, Greg pulled the ripcord.

Silence replaced hollering wind and our momentum slowed dramatically. Greg pointed out the mountains and rivers below, the distant purple speck of another tandem approaching the landing zone, even the simple beauty of the teal parachute above.

I guided the chute and experimented with steering and turning. We executed

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By Susan Schnier

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El consuelo El Yarrow

El tiempo de las flores silvestres está llegando a su fin. Cada año me gusta observar como progresan las flores silvestres. Desde las flores que crecen al principio de la primavera, como las llamadas *Downingias*, las Violetas, y las Camas, hasta las que florecen temprano en el verano, como las Blue-Eyed Marys y las Manzanitas. Después llegan las flores a la mitad del verano como las Elderberrys (Saucos), Columbinas, y los Penstemons. Las flores del fin de verano como las Pearly Everlasting (*Anaphalis*), Yarrow, y Mullien, que comienzan a florecer a la mitad del verano y continúan hasta el otoño. Una de mis favoritas y la que más se utiliza de las flores de verano es el Yarrow.

El Yarrow (*Achillea sp.*) crece en un área geográfica muy amplia. Es una planta herbácea muy bonita, que forma grandes marañas conectadas en las raíces. El Yarrow se expande rápidamente en cualquier área si así se le permite. El Yarrow salvaje puede crecer hasta una

Hill's Valley

Por Hillary Humphreys

altura de 18 pulgadas de altura y tiene hojas en forma de pluma y flores pequeñas agrupadas muy juntas de color blanco muy aromáticas. El

Yarrow prefiere áreas abiertas, soleadas, secas, alteradas, pero también es posible encontrarlo en áreas de sombra parcial y húmedas como a la orilla de un río, o de un lago. El Yarrow es feliz, tanto delante de un edificio en el centro de Truckee como Glenshire, en el lago, o en la cima de Donner. El Yarrow ha sido cultivado en invernaderos y ahora se puede comprar con flores blancas, amarillas, rosas o rojas. Pero he notado que estas variedades no son tan resistentes como las blancas, que crecen localmente.

El nombre del género en Latín llamado *Achillea*, se deriva del héroe Griego y Medio Dios Aquiles. Aquiles fue el hijo mortal de Tetis y Peleo. Tetis intentó obtener la inmortalidad de su hijo y logró hacer el cuerpo de Aquiles invulnerable excepto por sus talones. Después de estudiar medicina con el gran Centauro Chiron, Aquiles fue a pelear en contra de los Troyanos. Con la gran sabiduría que tenía a cerca de las plantas, Aquiles salvó a muchos guerreros de sus heridas utilizando la flor Yarrow. Durante el sitio de Troya, cuando estaba a punto de traicionar a sus aliados por el amor de Polyxena, la hija de Priamo, una flecha le pegó en la única parte de su cuerpo que era vulnerable, el talón. Entonces Aquiles murió pero su nombre vive con la planta que lleva su

nombre. Las especies llamadas *millefolium* o *milhojas* se refieren a los varios segmentos en que se dividen las hojas, lo cual también le da al Yarrow algunos de sus nombres comunes, como Milhojas y Mil Mala Hierba. Los nombres latinos inician otros nombres comunes como Heridas de Soldado y Milhojas de los Caballeros. El nombre de Yarrow, es una corrupción del nombre Anglo-sajón "gearme" de la planta y del Holandés "yerw".

El Yarrow tiene muchos usos medicinales. Algunos herboristas lo usan en forma de polvo, llenando cápsulas y utilizándolas para fiebres graves. Yo uso una infusión de la flor seca para fiebre tanto en niños, como en adultos. Esta flor es muy buena para fiebres que comienzan con un simple catarro. Baja la temperatura porque es un diaforético ligero, lo que quiere decir que ayuda a perspirar. Esta es una de las pocas plantas que mis hijos toman en forma de té -si la combino con Manzanilla y Menta, y un poco de miel por supuesto. Por sí sola sabe un poquito amarga para el gusto de la mayoría de los niños.

Yarrow también ayuda a detener el sangrado. Me encanta la habilidad de esta planta para los primeros auxilios. Lo que la hace tan poderosa es que crece en todas partes. No podría contar cuantas veces mis hijos se han tropezado, o se han raspado las rodillas o los codos caminando en la montaña o jugando. Por lo general lo que hago es tomar algunas hojas de Yarrow, las mastico solamente lo suficiente para machucarlas un poco y las pongo directamente en la herida. Es muy rápido y efectivo. Si el hecho de tener que masticar las hojas es molesto, se pueden romper las hojas con los dedos en pedacitos pequeños, o pegarles con una roca. Pero sí se tienen que machucar para que puedan ayudar a sanar. Por lo general pongo flores y hojas de Yarrow en mis pomadas para utilizarlas como anti-inflamatorios y para parar hemorragias o sangrado. Sí, el Yarrow también tiene propiedades anti-inflamatorias. Una cataplasma de hojas machucadas puede ayudar a reducir la inflamación de coyunturas y dolor de músculos. Pero es mucho más efectivo si se utiliza en combinación con otras hierbas anti-inflamatorias, como el Arnica y el St. John's Wort. Se hace un té bastante fuerte, utilizando unas dos onzas de Yarrow, el cual se añade al baño para descansar de la varicela, de los piquetes de insectos, de artritis reumatoide, de reacciones alérgicas y de algunas otras condiciones inflamatorias. Yo he oído, pero nunca lo he hecho, que se puede utilizar la raíz del Yarrow para prob-



Illustration by Hillary Humphreys

lemas de dientes y encías. Aparentemente, se deja remojar en whisky o en ron y luego se mastica. Debido a las propiedades curativas del Yarrow, ha sido utilizado internamente para cistitis y la irritación de la próstata, generalmente, tomado en forma de té, dos tazas al día por un par de semanas.

Si te da un poco de temor utilizar el Yarrow medicinalmente, no te desespere. El Yarrow tiene otros usos. Se puede secar y ser utilizado en arreglos florales. Los tallos del Yarrow se han utilizado por siglos en China, para el *I-Ching* que es el arte de predecir el futuro. Un viejo mito Inglés dice que hay que coser un pedazo de Yarrow en un retazo de franela, ponerlo abajo de la almohada y recitar el verso que sigue a continuación:

*"Tú linda hierba del árbol de Venus
Tu verdadero nombre es Yarrow;
Ahora quien será el amor del alma
Ruego que me lo digas mañana,*

Entonces en tu sueño tendrás una visión de tu futuro esposo o esposa.

¡Buena suerte!

Hillary Humphreys es la madre de dos niños entusiásticos. Ella es una herbalista, una artista y presentemente está trabajando para conseguir su "Doctorado de Naturopathy." Moonshine Ink y Hillary Humphreys declaman la prescripción de este tipo de medicación sin el consejo de un profesional.

Traducido por Sylvia Doignon

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some weightless 180s before coasting into patch of grass near the landing zone. At the last minute I put my feet on the ground, and took a few jerky steps before coming to a smooth stop back on earth.

Dave rushed over with the video camera. What was my initial reaction, he asked? Speechless, I sputtered something about feeling like I had landed on another planet. I had a giddy smile and no words – a potentially serious problem for a writer.

Eventually words returned, and life's normal rhythm resumed. I hugged Greg and thanked him again for the incredible time. I guess hurtling through the atmosphere strapped together, suspended by some nylon, can forge a quick bond. I

understood the sense of family and community I had felt upon entering Skydive Lake Tahoe headquarters less than two hours ago.

We returned to Truckee, elated and awestruck. My husband was high on adrenalin and I felt as though I had just had a religious experience of the kind that mystics report.

According to Amy, my reaction was common. After their first jump, people tend to feel very proud. "Sometimes it's on their list of things to do before they turn 50, or they're going through a major transition in life, and trying to do something huge and symbolic to sever old ties and see themselves from a different perspective," Amy says. "We also get a lot of

people who can't believe how peaceful they feel afterwards and they wonder how they can get back to that feeling."

Later that day, I helped cater a lakeside wedding in Incline Village. After working for ten hours under the hot sun, a drunk relative of the bride became enraged that we had broken down a few unused tables. Inexplicably, I became target of her rage. Whereas such an incident might have infuriated me in the past, I felt only calm. Nothing could bring me down – I had jumped out of a plane that morning!

So, no, skydiving was not going to change the world. It was not going to feed the starving, house the homeless, or locate missing persons. It was not a

Utilitarian pursuit. But I think that, in some small way, it contributes to the greater good of society. If nothing else, it provides a new and unique perspective that can help you absorb negativity and deflect it as peace.

Call 832-1474 for reservations.

\$185 per person for a tandem skydive.

Peak season: June through September.

Susan Schnier lives in Truckee with her husband, Greg, and their cat, Fraidy. She's the managing editor at Couloir, the magazine of backcountry skiing and snowboarding, and a freelance writer. When she's not skiing or working, Susan is out trying new things for this column.