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Just jump: Reporter crosses skydiving off her bucket list

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Gazette features reporter Meredith Hines-Dochterman jumps from the plane on her first solo static jump at Skydive Iowa in Brooklyn on May 12. (Cliff Jette/The Gazette-KCRG)

BROOKLYN — "Go!"

I launch myself out of the airplane, my body flipping forward as gravity pulls me to the ground.

I can't believe I'm doing this.

I purchased a half-off deal for a solo sky diving lesson and solo jump from Skydive Iowa in September. Skydiving was near the top of my bucket list, so 50 percent off the experience of a lifetime was too good to pass up.

It took seven months for me to work up the nerve to schedule my jump. Once I did, though, I told everyone about it. I posted it on Facebook and tweeted it — everything I could to guarantee I'd actually do it.

I spent nearly six hours in training for the actual jump, but it never seemed real. I made jokes as videographer Randy Roth placed the 30-pound backpack with the parachute and reserve parachute on my shoulders. I was aware of my family watching as I walked to the airplane, but felt removed from the moment.

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Then the plane took off down the runway.

"Are you ready to skydive?" my jump master, Gary Billings, shouts over the plane's engine.

That's my cue.

"Get in position," Billings shouts, helping me scoot forward in the tiny aircraft.

I swing my legs out the plane's door. My left hand grips the bottom of the plane's floor, my right the side of the door, ready to push off at Billings' signal.

"Ready?"

Was I? I was 3,000 feet above the ground. Would I remember to arch my back? What if I smacked my head on the plane's wing? Could I land without breaking, well, anything?

"Go!"

I jump. I forget to arch backward, my body facing down. I forget to count, neglecting to follow the instructions drummed into me since 9 a.m.

"I'm not doing this right," I think.

And then the parachute opens.

"Have fun up there," Skydive Iowa Owner Bruce Kennedy says via the radio zipped in the left arm of my jumpsuit.

I pull my toggles left and right, swaying in the air. I can't hear the plane above me or my daughter cheering below. It's quiet, calm. The adrenaline that launched me out of the plane is gone. All I feel is peace.

I'm falling at 22 feet per second, but it feels like I'm floating.

Soon, too soon, it's time to land. I follow Kennedy's instructions as the ground grows closer.

I pull down hard on the toggles and my toes touch the ground. I land softly on my stomach in the grassy field. My nerves, excitement and adrenaline give way to laughter as I get back to my feet.

"How was it?" Roth asks, coming over to help me gather the parachute.

I want to go again.

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Skydive Iowa videographer Randy Roth explains the route the skydivers will need to take after leaving the plane to first time static jumpers. Gazette features reporter Meredith Hines-Dochterman, Craig Ziegehorn of Iowa City and Theresa Rensimera t Skydive Iowa in Brooklyn on May 12. (Cliff Jette/The Gazette-KCRG) Gazette features reporter Meredith Hines-Dochterman nears the ground on her first solo static jump at Skydive Iowa in Brooklyn on May 12. (Cliff Jette/The Gazette-KCRG)

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