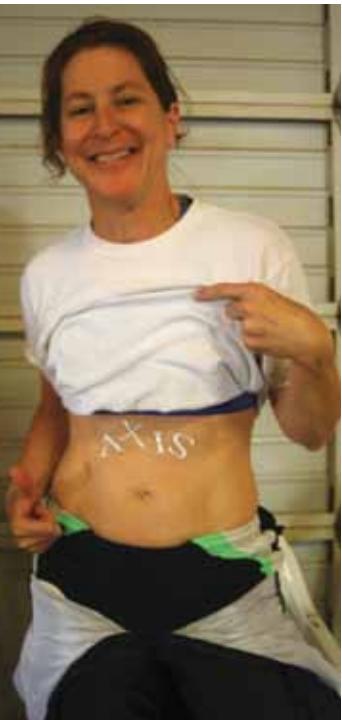


Why Do People Skydive?

BY LORI ZITO

I think some people dream of flying their whole lives. Not me. Never thought about it. Not even once.

All photos by John McElroy



The AXIS Expansion Project (www.axisflightschool.com) isn't the only great option to get what Lori got. In addition to the ones listed below, ask your DZ if they offer or know of a newbie camp, program, or local coach.

- **Sisters in Skydiving:** USPA's female mentorship program, events and resources around the country. Big sisters act as mentors to little sisters to make them feel welcome, coach, and put on events just for newbie girls. www.uspa.org/USPAMembers/SistersinSkydiving.aspx
- **EXCEL Camps:** Skydive Elsinore's belly, freefly, and canopy camps for beginners. skydiveelsinore.com/excel/index.html
- **Satori Academy:** A comprehensive 4-way FS program to take belly flyers of any experience level, run them through the 4-way training system that has created world champions, and form teams to compete at the U.K. Nationals. www.teamsatori.co.uk
- **Rookie Fest:** 3-way + coach FS scrambles for new jumpers at Skydive Chicago. skydivechicago.com



Summer 2010

It started with an eighteenth birthday, a complete and total lack of ideas with regard to selecting that perfect birthday gift, and the realization that an "empty nest" was upon me. Anyhow, it was apparent that a Barbie® cake or a horsie-themed party wasn't going to do it. She was headed to Ohio in late August, and would turn 18 in September. This gift had to be different. After conferring with my husband, I concluded that he was completely devoid of ideas. Then, in a flash of brilliance, it occurred to me—I can't throw my baby from the nest until she knows how to fly! I had seen the indoor wind tunnel featured on Good Morning Arizona—what, almost 15 years ago? I had always intended to give it a try, but never quite made it. This was perfect. Indoor tunnel here we come! The birthday gift turned into three more tunnel sessions within a 14-day period at the end of August 2010. I then shipped the kid to Ohio for the next phase of her life¹.

When my daughter came home for holiday breaks, we went to the tunnel because it was fun^{1,2}.

Why do people skydive?

Summer 2011:

- Tunnel Sessions—check.
- Tandems (yes, plural)—check.
- Skydiving licenses (yes, plural)—check. See how things escalate?
- Excitement, accomplishment—check. Could this be why people skydive?

Fall 2011

- Jumps 25-50—mostly solos; getting bored; feeling stagnant; this is starting to sort of suck; definitely tired of doing solos.
- Questioning choices.
- Lacking confidence in skills; sense of accomplishment absent.
- Excitement waning; always paying for something.
- Is now the time to bail? Could this be why people leave skydiving?

News Flash:

New skydivers have just invested heavily in initial training, licensing, and equipment rentals and/or purchases. We are very, very aware that we need additional training and our official skill level is "suck" at best. This is not a secret to us. However, it is often a choice between jumping (staying current) and not jumping at all. Training dollars are limited. This is a reality. We don't suck because we WANT to suck; we suck because we can't afford to access the resources we really need.

Winter 2011

By now my daughter was home for break, so at least I would have a playmate at the DZ. We decided we would do a little tunnel time, and then maybe go for a day or two to the Holiday Boogie. Maybe I could answer my questions there. Why do people skydive?

December 28-29, 2011

Announcement: "Attention all Ladies! We need Ladies! We are looking for ladies to participate in the Arizona state record...come see Amy or Sara if interested." Okay, I am interested, but it certainly does beg the question: Are you looking for talent or are you looking for bodies? We got bodies: two of them. Talent? Not so much. Lucky for us, they were willing to accept bodies. My daughter (38 jumps) and I (67 jumps) had the two best days ever!! It was so much fun to be part of a group, to learn, to meet new people, to improve skills, and to be greeted with enthusiasm⁴!

But, as we know, all good things must come to an end. The women's record attempt ended. The boogie ended. My daughter went back to school. Now what? There are load organizers, but it just always seemed like it was forever a group of 10-12 "more experienced jumpers." It wasn't that I was made to feel unwelcome, it was more that I knew I didn't quite belong there yet. As much fun as I had doing the record attempts, it was clear that my RW skills needed

¹ Fuck yeah. ³ Not entirely certain of the dates.

² Fuck yeah. ⁴ Read "Brienne Thompson voted Ms. Enthusiasm 2010-2012."

Why Do People Skydive?

work. If I learned one thing, it was that a shit-load of solo jumps doesn't do you a shit load of good. What next?

SIS Event January 2012

Wow. Just when you think it can't get a whole lot better, the ladies from SDAZ outdo themselves with the SIS event! Social, welcoming, organized, fun, and some much needed very basic training courtesy of the Big Sisters. Level. Slot. Dock. Yeah, the basic basics... but you have to start somewhere. What next?

Why do people skydive?

AXIS Expansion March 2012

The AXIS Expansion Project gave me a place where I could take my limited skill and learn more in a fun environment, in an organized manner, under the direction of a highly skilled professional. Once again, it was so much fun to be part of a group, to learn, meet new people, improve skills, and be greeted with enthusiasm. What the AXIS Expansion Project did was allow me to train with a group of people with a common objective and skill level, rather than train as an individual. I was improving and did not feel like I was a burden to the group. That, combined with the real-time physical feedback that can only come from flying with somebody who knows where they are supposed to be (and is consistently there), maintains the fall rate, knows the next block or random (all four slots), does not back-slide, etc. makes for a very successful group learning dynamic. When you are learning, a solid "sky reference" is invaluable and the AXIS format provided that element.

In short, the AXIS Expansion Project provided me with:

- A group training format that allowed me to meet new people and develop skills while leveraging the cost of the training across three people rather than absorbing solo costs;
- Enthusiasm and expertise;
- Personal improvement;
- A venue through which a personal commitment to learning could be made (it took a bit to rationalize the expense of the program; ways to make it more cost-effective must be investigated);
- Opportunity to participate in USPA Nationals (a true benchmark of progress, and something I never would have undertaken on my own or with a random group of friends);
- Relative success—some people view winning as an absolute concept; but I believe it can be relative as well. Sometimes you win because you're the best. Sometimes you win just because you produced way more fight than anyone ever expected. Sometimes you win just by showing up. I doubt I'll ever be the best, but the Expansion Project has given me opportunity to achieve relative success.

Why do people skydive?

I think people skydive for a number of reasons, including the challenge and thrill of it. But to me, it has been so much more. Skydiving is a chance for me to really push myself as an individual—setting new goals, overcoming failures and setbacks, and testing the limits of my physical and mental capabilities. Frankly, it was the first thing that I had done FOR myself in a long time; accordingly, I have prioritized the associated cost of it all, but do wish there were ways to make these opportunities more affordable. But more than anything else, I have found skydiving to be an extremely social sport; I feel that I have access to a very unique community of people each with their own interesting story to tell. The skills I have gained from my AXIS experience not only helped to retain me as a member of the skydiving community, it has given me the skills and confidence needed to pursue more challenging goals and objectives with a wider range of people. I know I am not the most talented, but I feel I can jump with (and keep up with) most recreational jumpers from 4-way to at least 20-way. I feel like a little kid going to the park—I don't know who is going to be there on any given day or what games we are going to play, but because of my broadened skill level, I always find someone to play with and I always have fun. That's why I skydive. ☺

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Lori received her A license in August 2011 and her B license in April 2012. She currently has 217 logged jumps having exited on purpose 215 times and being shoved out twice. The second time, she made sure she took someone with her (see, *training helps*). In addition to skydiving, she enjoys hiking, camping, music, food and drinking beer. She runs most mornings with her dog, but she doesn't really enjoy that. She resides in Arizona with her husband Dave, dog Andre, cat Andy, and all the junk her kids collected during the past 23 years.