

4-1-2008

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Recommended Citation

Sferas, Samantha (2008) "Dancing in the Sky," *ESSAI*: Vol. 6, Article 45.
Available at: <http://dc.cod.edu/essai/vol6/iss1/45>

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Dancing in the Sky

by Samantha Sferas

(English 1101)

I can hear the small gravel stones shift under the weight of my tires as I pull into the closest space next to the hanger. As I turn the car off I notice the time, 7:30 on a Saturday morning with clear blue skies. Walking around to the back of my car, I admire the uniformity and emerald green richness of the grass runway. I can smell the freshness from the plowed fields beyond the runway and as far as the eyes can see. The sense of tranquility rushes over me as I flip my gear over my shoulder strolling towards the hanger.

As I round the corner of the hanger, my morning is greeted with the laughter and good spirits of my comrades. Morning Rookie! Ready for the first dive of the day? You bet! I replied smiling. "Well then get your butt movin', dirt dive in five minutes," Jimmy responded after handing me a fresh cup of java.

As I started to suit up I witnessed a uniqueness, an unspoken chemistry between all of us. We came from such diverse backgrounds, as distinctive as the individual colors of the rainbow. It is the synergy of freefall, the euphoric sensation of body flying, the fluidity under canopy that our souls convey and seamlessly bridging the gap amid cultures.

The shout of "Dirt Dive!" in the foreground brings me out of my thoughts. Our team of four begins to assemble on the side of the runway. I sneak up behind Buddy and give him a great big bear hug and he leans over forward instinctively holding my hands in front of him. I'm now on the top of his back; I lift my arms and head towards the heavens as I emulate a skydiver's arch. Everyone grins with familiarity as excitement runs through the air.

As we synchronize the design of our formations it becomes a dance, a skydance. A language all of its own, expressed in orchestrated movements and rhythms of the body. It is pure geometry in motion with the wind as your dance partner. Docking one formation and moving onto the other, the melody is formed from its energetic flow.

The roar of the twin engines in the background is a signal its time for us to take our places on the jump plane in the order of the dive team exits. I look up at that sky; this is a picturesque day, the winds are soft and smooth, and it is a day for soaring...

The climb to altitude is largely taken up by lively conversation and those mentally shadowing through their dive...Skydivers instinctively know this:

*Always look where you want to go,
Your body will follow your head,
Your arms control your altitude,
Your legs control your speed,
Your body goes where you fly it*

I can feel the excitement pumping through my heart as the Beech Craft is turning onto jump run. We are two miles high and have reached our altitude. The spotter takes his place at the doorway. Giving signals to the pilot, he ensures we exit over a spot which would determine where we would land on the drop zone.

A low roar comes from the engines as the pilot throttles back and the spotter gives the signal for us to take our place. I swing through the door and hang on, waiting as the rest of the team moves

quickly to their positions in the doorway. I hear the call commands, ready...lean back, set...lean in, go...let go...We ignite from the tight huddle of the doorway into the great blue arch of the heavens. I catch a first class exit arching in the airstream as I dive. I am delighted and exhilarated as I enjoy the ride. Even with over three hundred and fifty jumps to my credit the sensation of each dive is always different.

As I release my arch and relax into a vertical position leveling out with the horizon. I immediately look for Lana. She's right in position, up close, with a beautiful clean and stable fingertip dock. Into the dive we punch through a feathery mass of wet, thin, cold air rushing up around us. Awed by the experience and the adrenalin rush, it had the feeling of falling into cotton candy that was satisfying to the senses.

At the altitude of three thousand feet, I give the gesture it is time for the team to depart. Each team member turns away from each other into a track position creating maximum separation. After generating plenty of distance, I flare my body as a bird would spread their wings to decrease the speed. I look up, over my shoulder for other skydivers who might be above me before giving the wave off, a signal that I will be opening my chute. I then sit up, reach over with my right hand to the right of my hip and pull.

Watching as my canopy presents her pristine shades of ebony with a hot pink racer stripe to the left. My world instantly changes from the rapid speed of freefall into the quite and serene crown of my canopy as she glides to earth.

Having made my last jump in 1992, the experience of Skydiving has forever expanded my intellectual awareness.