

# Opinion

## Skydive What goes up . . .

"How high are we now?" I asked him. The plane's engine drowned out most of his response, but I think he told me we were flying at about 350 feet, which left about 2,650 feet to climb.



Mike Sullivan

Three hundred fifty feet seemed plenty high enough to jump.

The land below was beginning to shape up into neat blocks — products of careful surveying, I supposed. I couldn't have cared less about the individuals who did the surveying, but they had done a good job. As I pondered the blocks of land, however, I realized that I did care about the individual surveyors. They were probably good people with good families and good intentions and someday those good people would be rewarded for their good intentions and . . .

Something about impending death tweaks my mind, making me think good thoughts about people.

I get this bizarre idea that thinking positively about people will make up for all the bad things I've ever thought about others, and that the Power-That-Be will look favorably upon my new frame of mind when deciding my fate.

The concept is similar to the murderer who, on his death bed, says he accepts Jesus Christ as the real thing and, supposedly, a lifetime of wrong is righted, allowing him to slip into heaven at the last minute. (I can afford to be cocky now. I have both feet on the ground.)

My mind continued to ramble good things about strangers until I could stand it no longer. "How high now?"

"About 600 feet," Steve said, holding up six or so fingers. I decided I wasn't going to ask him again.

I looked over at Karl Pallmeyer and Mike Nahas sitting toward the back of the plane in an attempt to draw some emotional strength from their faces.

I saw the back of Karl's helmet. I drew no strength. I looked over at Mike. He was gazing at a cloud. This was to be a strictly solo effort.

We reached the desired altitude of about 3,000 feet, cruised for a bit, and then, with an evil smile, Steve swung open the plane door to hell.

Until that moment, I had been under the impression that things like decapitated bodies, dark alleys in New York City, late-night thriller movies and the Corps barber shop were scary. The term was instantly redefined for me.

Looking down at the tiny model-like buildings, cars, roads and ant-like people from the wing of an airplane flying over 100 mph at 3,000 feet is scary. Contemplating my jump was horrifying.

Steve looked me in the eyes and yelled, "Swing out!" I stuck my feet through the plane's door. He gave the

command to climb out onto the plane's wheel, and, fighting winds that would have put Hurricane Alicia to shame, I grabbed for the bar under the wing.

The next thing I knew, I was dangling from the wing of a plane looking down on creation and humming the lyrics to "God Bless America." Then I let go.

The sound of the plane's engine faded almost instantly as I fell. I felt the parachute opening as it tugged at my back — probably the best feeling I've ever felt — and I began to drift through the sky.

I slowly opened my eyes, looked up at my parachute and then scanned the earth for the airport, which was supposed to be my landing site. Having found the airport, I began to relax.

My mind was free of daily worries. I thought not about homework, class projects, money or filling this page.

I was so carefree and content as I flew through the sky suspended by my nylon friend that I wouldn't have traded a mere bag of seashells for a 4.0 GPR at mid-term.

I greeted reality, however, as I watched my landing target go by beneath my feet. I sailed over a highway about 300 yards off course and looked down at such eyesores as telephone lines, trees, garbage dumps, more trees, bulls in a field, more trees and a number of seemingly sharp objects. I never realized how pointy everything looks when trying to find a good place to land. Had I a bag of seashells at this point, I probably would have traded it for a safe landing.

My landing problem was solved for me, however, when I felt a cluster of tree-tops scratching at my shoes. Abandoning everything I had learned in the six-hour skydiving class about the "banana" landing position — which is supposed to reduce the impact of a hard landing — I immediately assumed my old

standby crash formation, the fetus position, and ate tree bark.

Racing motocross as a teenager had rudely introduced me to many a tree trunk, but this was the first time I had ever found myself entangled in a tree 40 feet off the ground.

But endless summers in my youth spent climbing trees served me well as I was able to climb down the tree unhurt.

So here I am, alive and well after hours of fearful anticipation, minutes of sheer terror at 3,000 feet and seconds of panic at 40 feet — all for three or so blissful minutes in the sky. And I ask myself, what made me do it? I can only respond that I can hardly wait to do it again.

**Mike Sullivan is a senior journalism major and the Opinion Page editor for The Battalion.**



From left, Karl Pallmeyer, Mike Nahas and Mike Sullivan

Photo by Travis

Almost everyone said I was crazy, but I had to do it.

I've always believed a columnist should experience all he can. At least that was a good justification for my skydiving escapade last weekend. The experiences before, during and after my jump really have given me a new outlook on several things.

Most of Friday night was spent learning the ups and downs of skydiving. I learned what to do if everything went right or if some things went wrong. The chances of something going wrong are slim, but there were a couple of bad omens.

The first bad omen came when Sam White, the instructor, told us the chutes were packed by a guy who was in the Corps and on the Traditions Council. Considering the nature of some of our columns, Sullivan and I didn't enjoy hearing that bit of news.

The second bad omen came while practicing the "banana" landing position — the best way to hit the ground to avoid injury if you come in too fast to land on your feet. While trying my hand at the "banana," I banged my head against the mat with enough force to spend the next few minutes counting stars. My first skydiving injury and I hadn't even left the ground.

After class Friday night, I dropped by a party thrown by some fellow journalists. I didn't stay too long because I had to get up the next morning for the jump and I was getting tired of all my friends arguing about who would get my records, videotapes, books, computer and cat after I had to be scraped off the ground.



Karl Pallmeyer

I went back to the airfield Saturday ready to complete my training. We practiced jumping and emergency procedures. We finished all the ground work and waited around until the clouds lifted enough for us to jump. After a couple of hours and a dozen calls to the weatherman, we were given the go-ahead. We decided the first three to jump would be Sullivan, Mike Nahas, who had jumped before, and me. I would be the second guy out of the plane, right after Sullivan.

The plane climbed to about 3,000 feet and Sullivan bailed out. When I saw his chute open, I felt better about the whole thing. I crawled into position and the jumpmaster hooked my static line to the pilot's seat. I waited for the door to be opened.

The door was opened and I was told "feet out." Panic began to set in. The wind was blowing so hard I could almost feel my high-top Kaepas being blown all the way to Kansas. I didn't understand how I was going to "swing out" into the wind until the pilot cut the engines and the wind died down to mere hurricane force. Once I grabbed the strut, I realized I could hang like this for the next 100 years if necessary.

I was given the command to "arch," and I let go. I didn't think about much until my chute opened a few seconds (years) later.

The risers attaching me to my chute were twisted, but no problem. I remembered my training, grabbed the risers, pulled and twisted my body until everything was untwisted. Everything was cool, and I was ready to enjoy a nice ride back down to the ground.

As I was floating in the air, thousands of feet above the world, I felt great. I gave out a yell that could be heard all the way to Somerville. The feeling you get while skydiving is better than sex — I guess.

After a little while, I noticed the air-

port where I was supposed to land directly under me and moving fast. Instead of simply yelling for help, I should have watched where I was landing. Before long, I was looking at power lines, telephone lines, roads, trees and other things I didn't want to be coming closer and closer to me. I was going to land soon. I hoped I would clear the patch below me and land in the field beyond. No such luck. I landed in the trees — three feet in from a particularly nasty mesquite tree.

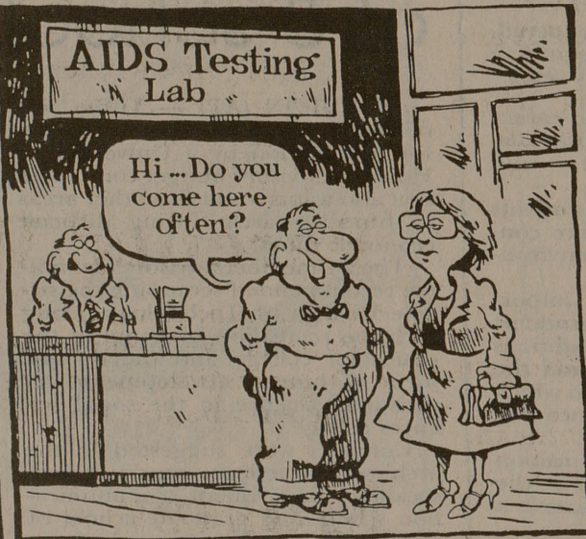
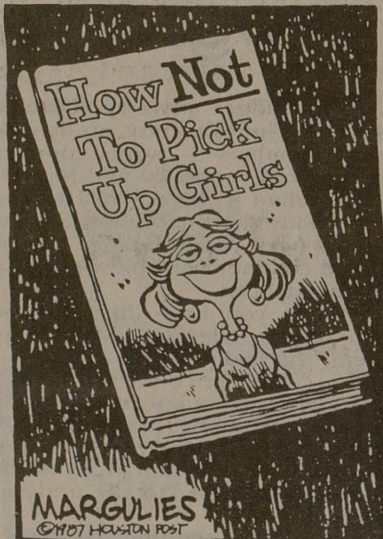
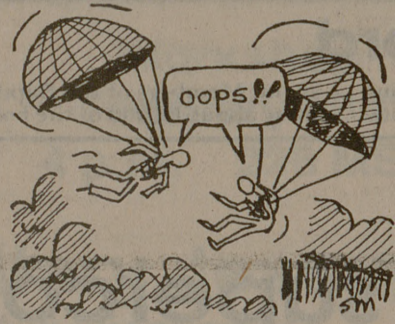
As I was coming in for a landing, I had one thing in my head — I should have been thinking BANANA. I landed, sort of, on my feet and my knee hurt quite a bit, but I didn't immediately so the skydiving wouldn't worry about me. I thought they might be mad that I hung from their expensive chutes in a tree when they arrived at my landing only a couple of minutes after I had landed. I saw that their main concern was making sure I was alright. I was kind of embarrassed to land so far from the airport until I learned that I had landed in a tree about 100 feet further away.

I hobbled back to the airport and told my story to all who would listen. The combination of ego and the thrill of the experience kept me from admitting I was hurt.

By the time I got back home, however, I realized I was hurt and I had pulled some muscles. The doctor wrapped my knee and gave me some boring drugs and crutches.

For the next two weeks I was missing another experience — the essence of being handicapped. But soon as my leg heals, I'm going to do another jump. And this time I'll be perfect.

**Karl Pallmeyer is a journalism major and a columnist for The Battalion.**



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## Mail Call

### Facts support themselves

EDITOR:

In response to *The Battalion's* Feb. 12 edition of "At Ease" with the theme "Looking for Love:" After reading the article "Smart Sex," I was quite amazed at the number of sexually active students here at Texas A&M. It is also disturbing to find that *The Battalion* gives indirect support of sexual activity by allowing the article to advertise the use of contraceptives. Putting that aside, let me address the issue of the high percentage of sexually active students.

It is entirely natural to want to have sex before marriage, but acting upon that urge could destroy the future relationship you will have with your wife/husband because you must carry the guilt of already having had sex (Hebrews 13:4). I believe that God created sex so that a man and his wife can enjoy it and be as close together as two can possibly be (Genesis 2:24). And, if you find yourself in a close situation with a woman or a man, accordingly, just remember that God "... will not allow you to be tempted beyond that which you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it." But you must believe in God first (1 Corinthians 10:13, John 3:16).

Rob Huff '90

### Friendly campus

EDITOR:

Monday evening, Feb. 9, two friends and I were studying in our normal spot in the library and gradually the whole place became extremely noisy. We attempted to study for about half an hour at the same noise level. I commented to my friend saying, "This is ridiculous. The guy at the table in front of me had the nerve to turn around and say quite rudely, 'Hey, if you want to study, home!' And he and all of his friends continued to talk even louder.

I thought the library was a place to study — not socialize. And for those of you who don't know, there are group study sections on the 3rd and 4th floors.

As for the guy who made the comment, I hope you accomplished something by it. Maybe you actually impressed your friends.

**Stephanie Everest '89**  
accompanied by two signatures

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