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FREE



CATCHING THE BREEZE

Hang-gliding offers a whole new perspective

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Gliding between 1,000 and 2,000 feet above Lake Rosseau, Brienne Juniper was able to see Lake Joseph and Georgian Bay in the distance.

Soaring high above Muskoka

A tandem hang-gliding flight offers a whole new perspective on life

Story by Brienne Juniper

I awoke for the third day in a row thinking, this is going to be the day I go hang-gliding. When I first made the call to High Perspective, a company that does tandem hang-gliding flights, out of Pickering and Muskoka, I wasn't the least bit nervous.

I'd gone rock climbing, wakeskating and various other daring activities this summer, so hang-gliding didn't seem too intimidating at the time.

Well, that was before I spent two full days in suspense, waiting for what was sure to be the experience of a lifetime.

The first day I had booked to go flying with Michael Robertson, the owner of High Perspective, it rained, pretty much blowing our chances. The second day, the winds were far too strong. By the third day, I was ready, but feeling more anxious and doubtful than ever.

What if the harness broke? What if I got up in the air and a sudden storm arrived? What if something – anything – goes wrong and there we are, gliding thousands of feet above ground, with nothing but the lake to break our fall? What on Earth had I agreed to do?

On the big day, I drove out to Cleveland's House and met Michael and his crew on the end of the dock. There it was, the boat that was going to pull me to great heights tied to the end of the dock, with the hang-glider resting innocently on the back platform.

When I was asked if I'd like to come along in the boat while Michael took another woman hang-gliding, I readily agreed, eager to see what it was all about before I made the final decision to be strapped in.

Perhaps that was a mistake.

As I watched Michael and his passenger glide further and further away from us on their ascent into the sky, never could I have imagined the hang-glider could go *that* high. It was going to take all the nerve I could muster not to back out.

When it came my turn, we returned to the dock where I signed my life away on the release form and slipped into the provided wetsuit. After Michael's partner suited me up with a helmet and the harness that secured me to

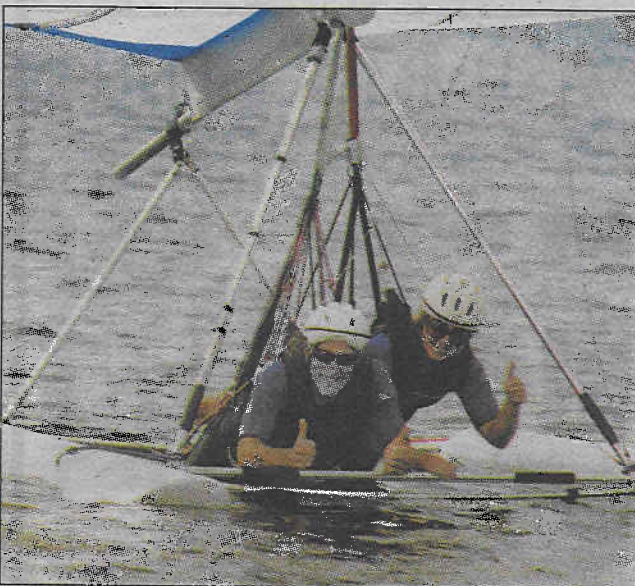
the glider, my excitement mounted.

Every step closer we came to takeoff, I felt the butterflies in my stomach multiply. But before long, my thoughts centred on how exciting this would be, rather than how scary.

I climbed onto the platform and Michael clipped me in to a large carabiner that was attached to the glider. He showed me how, in the chance we got flipped over upon landing in the water, to unattach myself. He assured me this was a very rare occurrence.

Next thing I knew, we were laying down in our harnesses, my right arm wrapping around Michael's back as he gave word for the boat to go. As soon as the boat took off, my fears were gone. This was going to be awesome!

When the boat reached the required speed for takeoff, Michael gave the signal and his crew detached us from



Brienne Juniper touches down with Michael Robertson after an exhilarating experience.

the rig. Within seconds we were gliding through the air, still attached to the vessel by a thin rope, like a kite, climbing higher and higher into the sky.

Before long, we reached the desired height of somewhere around 1,000 feet, and a speed of approximately 35 miles per hour. At this point, Michael dropped the rope free of the kite. We were hang-gliding!

"Look around us," Michael said, as he snapped a few pictures from the camera attached to the wing. "Isn't that something?"

I looked around, and never before had I seen a sight like this. The air rushed by my ears creating a whooshing sound as I looked into the distance and spotted Georgian Bay.

Below us, islands were the size of quarters and the boat we departed from was but a mere speck in the vast, blue water.

As we glided through the air, Michael pointed out Lake Joseph and told me to watch our shadow as it passed over the lake, the trees and snuck right over the deck of an unsuspecting cottage. From our perspective, even Red Leaves looked tiny.

At one point, my tandem partner let me take the wheel, so to speak, and showed me that with the slightest movement of our bodies we could go left, right, and even faster or slower.

As we approached the water, Michael told me to prepare for landing. Though it appeared we were descending at a frightening speed, we touched down on the lake with nothing but a soft splash. The warm water tickled my toes as the boat pulled up to collect us from where we landed.

As I climbed aboard, I was smiling like a fool and felt a rush like never before. I couldn't wait to get back to land so I could tell everyone about what an amazing experience hang-gliding had been.

My only regret was how much time I spent worrying, instead of realizing that when I am flying with a man who has over 15,000 flights under his belt, I'm in pretty good hands.