

Gliding down



Katie Priest

I was diagnosed with MS in 1995. I didn't know what MS was. I'd been suffering from optic neuritis and couldn't see properly; I thought maybe I had a brain tumour. Then I had a brain scan. It was very scary. The consultant neurologist said, "You have multiple sclerosis. I'll see you at my next clinic. Go and make another appointment."

After I had to give up work, I felt I couldn't sit around just doing nothing and feeling sorry for myself. I wanted to feel useful again and do something constructive. That's why, when I read about fundraising by doing a parachute jump for the MS Trust in Open Door, I thought, that's for me.

I chose to jump at Hinton Skydiving near Oxford. We rang to find out if it was possible for me to do it and were assured it was no problem. Yee-ha! They sent me some forms to be completed including one by my GP to say there was no medical reason why I shouldn't jump! Just because I have MS didn't mean I wasn't able to jump, despite what some people said. I wanted to prove them wrong.



Katie with Geoff

I did the jump in July 2009 and it was amazing. One of the best things I've done for a long time.

With my husband and young son, I drove up to Oxfordshire from London, with Mum and Dad following. Lots of very good friends and relatives had come to cheer me on and encourage me. And then disaster struck - Dad had forgotten to bring the medical form. Luckily we were able to contact my younger cousin James, who faxed the form through to the airfield. Yippee. I wasn't scared or worried about the jump, just annoyed I had to wait so long.

When I was being wheeled to the plane by my father in law I felt so excited. There were about nine other people on the plane who all got on first before I was lifted out of my wheelchair into the plane. I was the only tandem jumper on that flight, strapped to my instructor, Geoff. The plane started to taxi and it was ages before they shut the door.

The plane went up to around 13,000 feet. One person jumped out before me and then it was my turn. Geoff and I jumped...

It was good to get away from the noise of the plane. My ears had popped so I couldn't hear anything. The parachute opened and we started to glide down. The view was fantastic and the sensation of floating was wonderful. We went round and round and down and down and I felt a little bit dizzy. But the feeling was brilliant. If anyone is nervous about doing a parachute jump, just do it. It is fantastic.

The landing was so soft. Geoff touched down and rolled on his back and I was unclipped, the harness and jump suit were taken off and I was back in my wheelchair before I knew it.

We then had a late lunch and laughed and joked. We drove back to London and I was on a high for a very long time.

I would like to thank the MS Trust for being such a brilliant organisation and for being there for me and my family and giving us practical and psychological help whenever we need it.

To find out how you could do a parachute jump for the MS Trust, ring 01462 476707 or visit www.mstrust.org.uk/jump