

all that traumatic — I mean, I was just going to ride along with a guy who does that sort of thing for a living, and we had a parachute, and everything.

No problem.

I'd always wanted to do something like this, and here I was, being offered the excuse to overcome my fear of doing it.

Jody Vought, a 36-year-old free spirit with thinning blond hair, big mustache, Bohemian clothes and wild head scarves, was to be my airborne escort. A self-described "hard-core" skydiver, Vought had proposed that a reporter skydive with him in a tandem jump, and then write about it.

Tandem skydiving is a new approach to the sport of skydiving, designed for those who have never before had the nerve to jump alone, or for those who have physical handicaps that prevent them from doing it.

Vought has made about 100

tandem jumps, with not so much as a sprained ankle.

He's made more than 1,900 free-fall jumps. A few sprained ankles, no major injuries.

In tandem skydiving, an instructor is attached by a harness to the student jumper. The instructor carries on his back a 40-pound, extra-large parachute and reserve chute. He is responsible for pulling the rip cord and handling the parachute so that both land where they are supposed to.

So I was off to Tecumseh, in

nearby Lenawee County, home to Parachuting Service, a mom-and-pop operation owned and operated by Harold and Judie Lange. Vought is an accelerated free-fall course instructor and tandem jumpmaster for the Langes.

Into bulky flight suit, boots, "snuggie" cap, goggles and harness, all included in the \$75 fee for the jump. Off to training — consisting of approximately five minutes of stiff assurances from Vought about the fact that, since I am attached to him by a har-

ness that can withstand up to 10,000 pounds of stress (which may not, however, include mental stress), there is "NO WAY" he can lose me on the way down.

I learn how to get into and out of the tiny Cessna 182, how to force my hands, in the 70 mph headwinds, to grasp the plane's strut, and what to expect (HA!) throughout.

I crawl into the plane. It's hard to walk comfortably with the harness on — I feel like a mummy. I'm crouched behind pilot Tim Pipert, the only one in

the plane with packed in front of Larry Eckstrom Heights. "Paraphortly Society," shirt.

Student Bill Licht. He's the first to jump. It's his 20th jump.

Twenty minutes long it takes to get at which we'll jump me something about almost two miles really is.

Bill's getting re-



PHOTO • LARRY

Look, ma, I'm flying! Instructor Jody Vought (white suit) and reporter Susan Oppat during free-fall.



NEWS PHOTO • ROBERT CHASE

Look, ma, I'm walking! Oppat strides happily from the landing site. At left, student jumper Bill Licht.

'Whump! The parachute is up. I'm holding with Jody onto the toggle lines. Pull right, swoop right. Pull left, swoop left. A gust of wind sets us twirling. My fatigue drops away as I float away from the plane.'



Their blue and white Oppat come in for