

Skydiver *Nathan Wernig*

Photo by Stacey Carl, Skydive Houston

A look at this Katy skydiving instructor's high-flying career



Photo by Suzi Issa

Nathan Wernig made his first tandem jump to celebrate the start of his honeymoon and has been hooked ever since

Written by Mary Hogan

Skydiving instructor Nathan Wernig enjoys sharing the thrill of freefall with his students

Smiles and cheers, fear and nerves, laughter and even tears. Skydiving instructor Nathan Wernig has seen a range of emotions throughout his career at

Skydive Houston. On a typical day, he helps anywhere from two to 15 people experience the thrill of freefall and make memories that will last a lifetime. "Regardless of the current emotion I am witnessing, I walk away knowing that I've seen true human spirit: The ability to overcome even our own fears," he shares.

Taking the Plunge

Growing up, Wernig had always wanted to skydive. He didn't experience the freedom of freefall until the day after he got married, though. To celebrate the start of their honeymoon, the Wernigs decided to skydive at a small drop zone. "The plane was too small for both of us to go at the same time, so I went first," Nathan recalls. "I loved the freefall and when the parachute opened, I felt all of the emotions of the past few days flow through me." He knew then that he was hooked.

A few years after that first jump, Wernig found himself teaching high school and unhappy in his career. "One night, my wife and I were talking about what it meant to be a parent," he says. "We began discussing how it was much more than being a financial provider; it was about being an example of how to live life."

He knew then and there he had to make a change for the better and be a positive role model for his children. "I resigned, finished that school year, took two days off, and have worked at Skydive Houston full-time since," he shares.

Sharing His Love of Skydiving

To become a tandem instructor, skydivers must complete a minimum of 500 jumps to earn the U.S. Parachute Association's D license. They are then eligible to take a course and train for the tandem rating.

Time and again, he feels a sense of pride when he watches his students become skydivers, too. "I wish I could make my first jump all over again and start from the beginning, but I can't," he

says. "So instead, I take people for their first jump and get to share it with them. Smiles are worth taking chances for!"

Up in the wild blue yonder, each day is different. Birthdays, graduations, anniversaries, getting married, getting divorced, and beating cancer have all made the list of milestones marked by a thrilling freefall. "While I really enjoy the intensity of freefall contrasted against the calmness of flying under a parachute, it's the people that keep me loving it," he says.

Finding Joy in Freefall

Throughout his thrilling career, Wernig's wife and children have always supported him and his skydiving endeavors. "They know what this sport not only means to me, but also what it does for me as a person," says Wernig. "My wife says it makes me a better person."

One of Wernig's most memorable jumps came when he took his older brother skydiving for his 40th birthday. "It was nice to look after him, since he spent so much time looking after me when we were young," he shares.

Challenges sometimes arise, like the weather, but for Wernig, that is what keeps his passion for the sport fresh and alive. A short while ago, he took a young lady skydiving who happened to be deaf. "Figuring out a way to communicate was interesting, since we can't see each other once harnessed up. When I opened the parachute, she began to laugh and giggle," he recalls. "That sound of sheer enjoyment really was a beautiful, pure sound. It made my day, week, and month."

Making a Tandem Jump

Making a tandem jump for the first time is easy, and Wernig says you will never regret it, even if it's not your "thing." He adds, "But if you don't [ever jump], you might end up regretting it. Don't

be afraid to live life." He advises first-time skydivers to have fun, relax, and listen to their instructor.

Just like the people he takes to jump are different, so are the jumps themselves. Beforehand, Wernig spends about a half hour training and gearing each student up. Then, they get on the plane and ride to altitude, which is around 13,000 feet. "This is where the nerves really kick in!" he says. He adds, "A little bit of nerves has kept me alive for my first 1,100 skydives, so I don't mind it. Students who don't listen or are busy impressing their friends more than working with me make me nervous."

Once the harnesses are connected and Wernig and a student have walked to the door, they get into a proper body position and jump. He jokes, "People seem to calm down then; probably since we can't get back into the plane, they might as well." After a minute of freefall at 120 miles per hour, Wernig opens the parachute and they spend about five minutes gliding. "Most people really enjoy it," he reflects. "But even those who don't are glad they did it and feel a sense of accomplishment."

A Way of Life

Along with serving as a skydiving instructor, Wernig also spends time shooting video for a freeflying team. Group members are currently gearing up to compete at nationals in Eloy, AZ in early November.

For Wernig, skydiving has truly become a way of life and a way to live life. "I often also say to my students, 'Who says only angels should get to see the earth this way,'" he says. "Seeing the world from that perspective is pretty amazing and humbling." **KM**

MARY HOGAN enjoys being associate editor for Katy Magazine and admires those who share their love of life with others.

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Wernig encourages those considering skydiving to take the plunge, saying anyone who does will never regret it



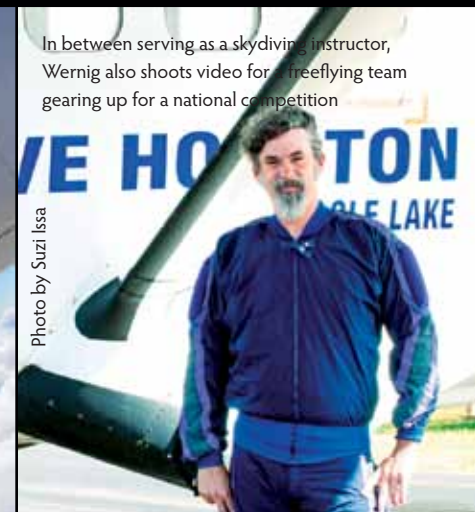
Photo by Stacey Carl, Skydive Houston

Wernig has helped people celebrate everything from birthdays to beating cancer with skydiving



In between serving as a skydiving instructor, Wernig also shoots video for a freeflying team gearing up for a national competition

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SKYDIVING | FUN FACTS

- A tandem jump ranges from \$200 to \$275 in price (photos and videos extra).
- A skydiver falls at about 115 miles per hour for approximately one minute.
- Skydivers jump from 12,500 feet to 14,500 feet (over two miles up).
- Most facilities require you to be 18 years old to skydive.



Photo by Stacey Carl, Skydive Houston

Before each tandem jump, Wernig spends about 30 minutes training each student and advises first-time skydivers to have fun, relax, and listen to their instructor

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