



► Peter Pastiva, a machine operator technician at Cook Vandergrift, on his skydiving adventure in August 2021.

# All because I stood up and began

Peter Pastiva takes  
on skydiving

**I**t's shortly after 1:00 pm on August 27 in Grove City, Pennsylvania. The clouds have cleared enough, and the light just turned from red to green. "What am I doing here?" I thought while we scooted forward on the bench of the Beachview King airplane.

I always wanted to skydive at least once. It was on the ol' bucket list. Like most things in life, you get curveballs thrown at you whether you like it or not. In 2017, before becoming employed at Cook Vandergrift, I messed up my shoulder and needed surgery. No big deal right? Well, shortly after surgery my job folded. "Great," I thought. "Here I am with my arm in a sling and I am unable to work."

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Up until this point in my life, I had been strong mentally. A few weeks after my job closed, I began having panic attacks. Things were very tough during this time and I couldn't do anything because of my surgery. I felt like a failure because I didn't have a job. However, I worked through it all on my own and somehow found a way.

I started at Cook Vandergrift on December 21, 2017. At this point, I had gained weight during my time off for surgery. My crutch was eating and drinking. It helped with the depression. But for skydiving, you need to be about 230 pounds or less. I was 294.5 pounds in January 2020. I had hit rock bottom again and it was hard.

I failed miserably in hunting season that year, and to be honest I should have had a major health issue or died. I was so out of shape that on the last day of hunting season, I was livid with myself.

The turning point for me was when I went to my friend's house and couldn't lift their almost one-year-old son above my head. That is when I decided I needed to go to the gym.

I started going one week later. I started making gains, but then the Covid-19 pandemic hit and slowed my progress. However, by hunting season 2021, I was down to 263 pounds. I finally said, "Next year I will skydive."

After hunting season, I resumed with my Elites, which is a small, coed group session at my gym. The goal of these groups is to do the workout correctly and push each other, which we all did. Around June 2021, I began to lead the workouts. Previously, I could keep pace with others in the group, before eventually falling behind.

In July 2021, my goal shifted to being able to skydive for my birthday in August. I ramped up



▲ Peter boards the plane to begin his skydiving journey.

my workouts. I made gains and started to really turn heads. Then, one Tuesday I walked into the gym for class and I got the whole gym's attention. The lyrics from one of my favorite songs *Panic Station* by the band Muse came to mind: "Get up and commit. Show the power trapped within. Do just what you want to. And now stand up and begin."

These lyrics mean a lot to me and I walk into work 80% of the time with this song playing. At this point I really ramped it up and kept going.

The end of August rolled around and I was going to go skydiving. I was about 12 pounds over the 230 pound limit, but I could still jump if I paid a dollar per extra pound and I didn't care at that point.

I left work at 8:00 am that Friday morning. It was a pleasant drive up to Grove City. I had already called and confirmed that we were planning to jump that day. At 10:30 am I got the official email saying

that we were a go and I drove to the airstrip. Western Pennsylvania clouds can mess with you and they did for two hours. You need at least one mile of open sky due to Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) rules. We waited, checked other landing sites, and waited some more. Shortly after 1:00 pm we got the call that they had back-to-back planes ready.

There was one other person doing a tandem jump, which is where you are attached to an instructor during the jump, in my group. We boarded the Beachview King and took off. I knew I could not back down. I had five sport jumpers in front of me that were all certified to jump on their own. Then it was our turn.

▶ To see a video of Peter's jump, visit the [Life@Cook](#) blog!



▲ Peter during his jump after the parachute had been deployed.



▲ Peter and his skydiving instructor after their jump.

We scooted forward. Your left leg goes out of the plane and your right leg stays at a 90 degree angle on the door jamb. Then, when it was the right time, the instructor pushed us out and we jumped. For the first 1.5 seconds, which seemed like forever, it was chaos. After that, you put both of your arms in the air at a 90 degree angle and your legs at a 90 degree angle between the instructor's legs. You are in a free fall from 13,500 feet for 40 to 50 seconds. Then the parachute deploys. It was very gentle. I expected a huge jolt. I was given control of the parachute for a bit. That was fun, but turning right, I pulled hard and we began dropping fast. The instructor took over again, and we came in for a gentle landing. After the jump was finished, I was on one of the best adrenaline highs I've ever had. I left the airstrip and went to Primanti's, a restaurant a few miles down the road, to celebrate my achievement. I was beyond the Andromeda Galaxy in terms of energy. It was one of the best feelings ever. All the failures of years

past were gone and the excitement I felt over what I had accomplished was an epic feeling.

And as the Muse lyrics mentioned above, I can say, "Do just what you want to. And now stand up and begin." You just have to start and later is better the never. I reflect on where I was in January 2020 to the present day: 294.5 pounds to skydiving weight at 242 pounds. It is a huge accomplishment. I became the healthiest I have ever been to this point in my life, and reached great total body strength.

By the way, I plan on skydiving again in May 2022 with some other friends and coworkers from Cook. Yes, I said coworkers from Cook. Other friends and family have helped me live through them and now it's my turn to help others make their goals happen. All because I stood up and began, and I am not done yet: I will be back.

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## What's on your mind?

Do you have a life philosophy or personal strategies for well-being or happiness that you want to share? We want to hear about it! Send it to [Angiogram@CookMedical.com](mailto:Angiogram@CookMedical.com).