

No regrets

As the door of the small Cessna 182 Skyhawk airplane crashed open, the onrush of wind was literally breath taking. There was no going back now for Alan. He and his now best buddy inched closer to the opening, Alan laid back, closed his eyes and within seconds they were plummeting at 120 mph earthwards. The wind rushing passed his body wrapping around him like a hug from the sky.

Alan had always been fearful of heights yet here he was in freefall at 10,000 feet and he had never felt more alive.

The noise of the plane and the sound of the wind disappeared replaced by a sudden calmness as the canopy opened. The sense of falling replaced by that of floating many thoughts rushing through his head. The primary one of 'why am I doing this' soon replaced by a feeling of utter joy.

Alan's life was happy but in no way adventurous. He had always found life a challenge and at times he felt one of life's bystanders. It was something that just happened to him rather than him giving it any direction or shape. Nothing in his life was planned.

When he left school in the late 60s it was really easy to walk into work. If you had a few CSEs or GCE O levels you could practically pick which job to take. In Alan's case that meant a life time in insurance. This was when staying for a company for life was seen as a positive. Attitudes changed and his career ended in redundancy when 40 years of service was not an advantage.

There wasn't much planning in his home life either. Carol and he had been childhood sweethearts and there was an assumption that they would marry, and theirs was in deed a happy union.

They had stayed in the same house for 40 years where routine was pivotal. Saturday was a day of shopping in the morning and gardening in the afternoon. How many times did he weed the same patch of earth and how many miles had he walked mowing the same stretch of lawn, making sure he had immaculate stripes?

He would clean the car on a Sunday morning and it was always followed by a roast lunch. Somebody once said to him that you only regret what you don't do. If this were true he perhaps would have many regrets as saying 'no' to opportunities was his normal response.

He once had a chance to work in the Bahamas, Nassau. At the time he and Carol's children were about to embark on secondary school. His mother never enjoyed the best of health so may need his help. There were so many reasons to say 'No'.

If your life can be seen as a zig saw each tile representing a moment or event then Alan's contained many plain blue pieces of sky with not many edge pieces. But today was not one of those days. Not only did it have an edge it most definitely was a corner piece.

Alan was 91 and skydiving was probably not the top of his bucket list. When volunteers were requested at his social club for a charity skydive he heard this little voice say 'yes'. He was more surprised than anyone else that the voice was his! He was now floating over the mosaic of Kent's glorious countryside. He had lived in Kent all his life but probably for the first time he appreciated the county's splendor. Every shade of green imaginable spread for miles. He was in awe.

As he gently floated down he resolved that from now on whatever the question was the answer always will be 'yes.'