

under the sun

Preacher Takes Wing To Marry Skydivers

BY SUSAN USHER

Occasionally preachers go to great lengths—or heights—to deliver their message of Christ's love.

So it was when Rev. Stan Smith, minister of Camp United Methodist Church in Shallotte, performed a recent wedding ceremony at the Franklin County Sport Parachute Club between Franklinton and Louisburg. Using previously agreed-upon symbols to represent the traditional vows, he married skydivers Karen Lloyd and Bobby Pickard while zipping toward earth at roughly 140 mph.

While undergoing one of the most memorable experiences of a lifetime, he said later, "I think I made two friends and I think they appreciated the relationship we had."

This wedding was one of those times where he accepted someone else's lifestyle while modeling his own.

It offered Smith an opportunity "to represent the church to someone who might not ordinarily seek out the church," to show them that Christians don't as a rule fall into the Jonathan Edwards mold of rigid Puritanism.

In talking about marriage before the wedding, he said, "I tried to represent the best of what I think the church ought to be to a couple who I think had basically already written off the church."

"I think they will give it a new look now."

The wedding was also fun.

While fulfilling the couple's fantasy to be married from "two miles up" at the place where they had met and courted, Stan fulfilled a fantasy of his own.

Before assignment to Camp Church in Shallotte, Stan was assigned to a Louisburg parish. Among his congregations were Paul and Nancy Fayard, owners and operators of the parachute center.

"He called and said his real good friend wanted to get married in the air while skydiving," Smith explained during a recent interview.

It wasn't any crazier than some other wedding requests Smith had received in his 17 years of ministry; he agreed.

"Since 1979, I fantasized with Paul and Nancy about

my desire to jump, Smith wrote in a recent Camp newsletter. "Courage always failed me or sanity prevailed. I'm not certain which. This time, Nancy offered an additional enticement. I'd be jumping in a tandem parachute with Paul, an expert 'jumper'."

In a tandem parachute, both partners wear a harness fitted through arms and legs. In this case Paul would wear the parachute and operate the controls. The preacher would be along just for the ride.

Just before dusk, three Cessna 182s and a World War II Army Air Corps Beechcraft D-18 carried the 16-member wedding party to 10,500 feet. Then zooming low over the treetops, the Beechcraft scattered flower petals across the grassy knoll where about 200 friends were watching the sky.

After a wait of some 30 minutes, tiny specks appeared above them. The wedding party had jumped, some leaving colorful smoke trails in their wake. Only the members of the wedding party could actually see the ceremony, those on the ground could see only the divers themselves.

They soon landed, "thick and fast on one small landing site almost to the point of just missing one another," reported Editor Bob Allen in his editorial page column in the next week's issue of The Wake Weekly.

But the airborne preacher "stole the show," he said. Soon all eyes were on the lone, double parachute drifting slowly downward, Stan and Paul traveling piggy-back beneath it.

Jumping was a little easier the third time around, but still frightening at the start, Smith said later.

His first jump, at rehearsal two weeks earlier, had begun in "stark terror" and ended with a heady bird's eye view of the world.

In his church newsletter Smith described the preliminaries as follows:

"When we were ready, eight other 'jumpers,' the bride and groom, Paul (the best man and soon, in Smith's eyes to be "the very best man") and I boarded a twin-engine Cessna. It started with a roar. There were no seats inside the plane, only 12 seat belts attached to the floor. We strapped ourselves in. Huddled together, we looked like Vietnam refugees on an escape boat. The plane vibrated. By the time I checked my seat belt again, we were airborne."

When their predetermined jumping height was reached, the others exited in "10 seconds flat," he said. Soon it was time for the wedding couple, Paul (the best man) and the minister to make their jump together.

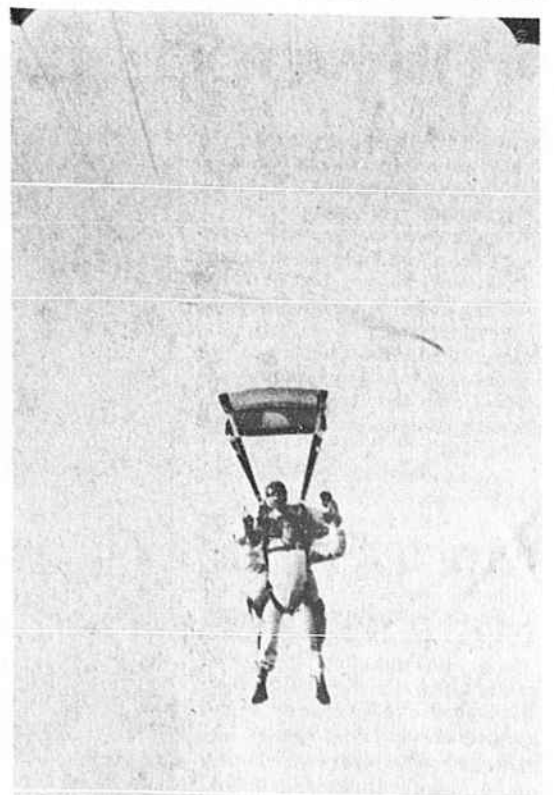
First they stood, looking into the plane, your hands gripping a bar above the space where a door should be, knees bowed "like a banana".

"Suddenly you're falling," he recalled, remembering the "sheer stark terror" he felt at that first jump.

"Free fall" was anything but free, he recollected.



NEWLYWEDS Karen and Bobby Pickard and Rev. Stan Smith landed safely following their high-flying ceremony.



SAFELY LOCKED into a tandem chute with best man Paul Fayard at the controls, Smith (front) was simply along for the ride.

"It emptied my entire serenity 'ready reserve' account. Grace alone brought me enough composure to do hand signs to symbolize the wedding vows."

Then, as during the real wedding two weeks later, the bride and groom moved in front of the minister, kissed and vanished, joining the other jumpers of the wedding party who had formed a large circle and were falling together. Smith next saw them on the ground.

With the opening of his and Paul's shared parachute, Smith recalled, came "more relief than if I'd taken a dozen Ritalids."

He continued, "Peering down, I became conscious of the marvelous view before me. The sky was Carolina blue. Among the white clouds was a 'Goofy' head. Paul pointed out my former parish, Louisburg; home of Louisburg College and site of the National Whistler's Convention then in progress. Near Wake Forest lay the mouth of the Neuse River. From this high up, people looked like microdots on a PacMan video game."

Would he do it again? Asked that question shortly after the wedding, Smith hesitantly replied, in part, "Well, yeah, I'll do it. It was good and one of the most incredible experiences I've ever had."

Ghost Crabs Enjoy The Beach

Recently I watched a ghost crab as he scampered across the sand, moving first in one direction and then another. At any hint of danger, such as a bird overhead or someone approaching, he would run to the nearest hole and dive in! At one such hole, which was already occupied as the resident quickly chased him out, there was a moment's pause as if the crab were reflecting on what had happened. Then in a deliberate move, this crab gathered a clawful of sand, moved over to the hole, threw it in, and fled! He then seemed to resume his routine of exploring and moving about on the beach.

These pale, sand-colored crabs live on the upper beach in deep holes back where the dunes begin to rise. Since they are not air-breathers, they must return often to the ocean to replenish the sea water carried in a chamber surrounding the gills. If it were not for this, and for the necessity for the female to return to the water to liberate her young, these would be true land animals.

Each crab begins its life as a tiny creature of the plankton of the sea. As the young crab drifts in the current it sheds its cuticle several times to accommodate its enlarging body and the slight change of form taking place. The last larval stage is the megalops and its only hope of growing into a crab is to obey whatever instinct it has to move shoreward and to land on the beach. Once on the beach, the larva digs a small hole for protection and to undergo the moult that will change its shape into that of



Bill Faver

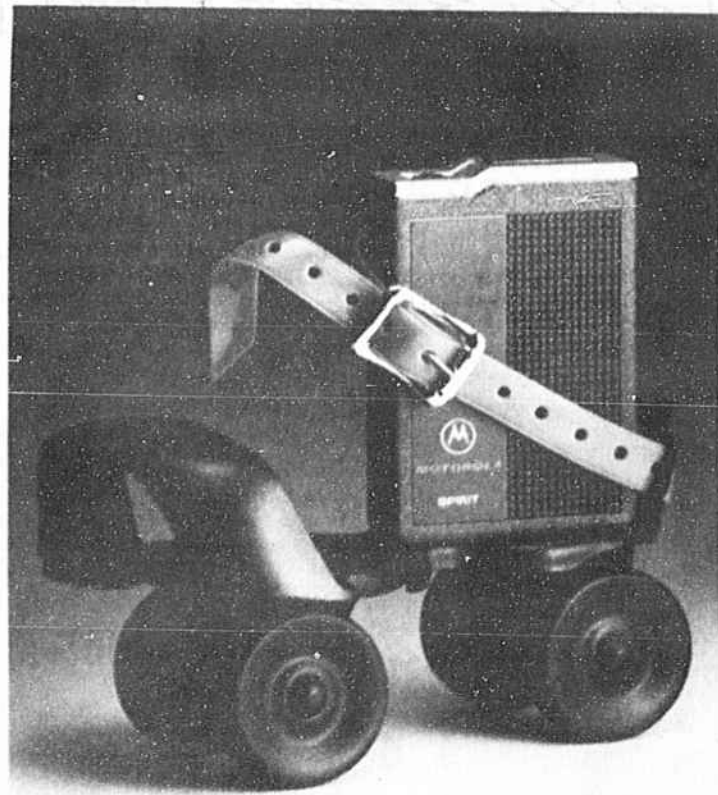
an adult. From this point, the crab gradually moves up the beach.

The burrows of the ghost crab appear and disappear in almost a rhythm. At night the burrows are open while the crabs out on the beach foraging for food. About dawn the crabs return and close off the tunnels. The days are spent in the enlarged den at the end of the burrow but sometimes the crabs spend a portion of the day enlarging or repairing their home. This is when we can see the crab hauling sand as it emerges sideways, carrying sand like a package under its rear legs, and hurling it from the mouth of the burrow. At times, the crab will carry the sand a little way from the tunnel and deposit it in a neat pile. Crabs will stock the burrows with food, close them off, and settle back for a rest!

By autumn most of the crabs move up on the beach beyond the tide and close the doors until late March or April. Then they will open up and if the air is still cold, they'll close up and wait while longer.

The scientific name of the ghost crab or sand crab is Ocypode Quadrata which translates into "swift-footed". Anyone who catches

ghost crabs on our Brunswick County beaches can appreciate that name as they add life and movement at the edge of the sea.



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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Supermarkets Should Advertise In Paper

To the editor:
Please change the address of my Beacon from Hamlet to Supply with the June 6 issue. It is indeed a pleasure to read the Beacon. It makes my week a pleasant one with all manner of happiness being obtained.

I notice that the three supermarkets do not advertise in your paper. This is truly a culture lag, because as other establishments advance, these three lag behind. This will definitely make their output low.

I remember way back when I would read the Beacon before I left Hamlet for our cottage at Holden Beach to see if Hills or any of the rest had any good specials for the weekend. If they did we would wait until we got to Shallotte to buy our food.

I don't care how much radio or television advertising anyone purchases, it very seldom pays off. If they would advertise in the Beacon they would benefit from it.

Bill Williamson
Rt. 1, Supply

CORRECTION

In the recent "Island Living" supplement ad, Ocean Isle Interiors' phone number was incorrectly listed. THE CORRECT PHONE NUMBER FOR OCEAN ISLE INTERIORS, OCEAN ISLE IS 579-6091.

We apologize for any inconvenience this may have caused.

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