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## Sports



Trapeze instructor Jeff Litvack, left, with student Marti Kennedy

## They fly through the air with ease (inside a tent)

By Judith Stiles

While some athletes crave extreme sports such as sky surfing, which involves jumping from an airplane, with a parachute and a board attached to your boots, Marti Kennedy flies through the air with the greatest of ease in a more moderate thrill-seeking adventure, which she experiences right here in the Big Apple, closer to terra firma. When Professor Kennedy is not correcting papers at Montclair State University, you can find her on Saturdays clinging to a bar and swinging through the air at the New York Trapeze School south of Pier 34 on the West Side Highway.

“I love adventures,” she says as she nervously checks the safety belt around her waste in preparation for her turn to swing on the bar. “This is as much fun as when my daughter Amity and I went to 14 different countries in Europe without a map and without a plan, in less than 10 days!” Yes, it is the middle of winter, but don’t think for a minute that Kennedy is crazy to be flying on the trapeze in such frigid weather. On the contrary, it is quite balmy in that white tent you may have spotted out of the corner of your eye, while cruising down the West Side Highway. The gigantic white canvaslike structure is the new home of the New

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York Trapeze School.

Standing in front of the clear-plastic tent windows that overlook the Hudson River, on which snowflakes are falling, veteran instructor Jeff Litvack helps the newcomers get acquainted with the feeling of trapeze. On a ground-level bar that hangs over a soft floor mat, Kennedy takes a turn catching the bar and hanging from it upside down. Next, with the safety lines firmly attached to her waist, she climbs straight up a ladder and reaches a platform, which is 23 feet off the ground and about 12 feet above a large safety net. Kennedy is relieved to meet instructor Ronnie Ram, who greets her on the platform and readies her for her first plunge. A third instructor, Sylvan Harnik, who is on the ground, barks out firm but friendly orders to guide Kennedy through each step.

“It is like flying and every nerve in your body tingles,” says Paula Caputo, a regular, who fell in love with Ram, her first instructor, two years ago. They have been dating and “trapezing” ever since, experimenting with more advanced tricks, such as catching each other from swing to swing.

After Kennedy, Amity and Caputo successfully complete their turns, mom Carol Havdala and her daughters Nicole and Danielle swing trapeze with grace and aplomb as they come from a two-week intensive trapeze class at Club Med in the Dominican Republic. “It’s an incredible rush and really quite addictive,” says Carol Havdala as her daughters nod vigorously in agreement. “The fear was intense the first time, but after that I felt so young and alive,” she adds.

As the class progresses, each instructor rotates safety stations with different approaches to holding the “python rope” that guides the swinging bar.

Litvack points out that there are two ways to give commands. One is reassuring, specific and comforting, while other times he has to act like a drill sergeant, where he forcefully commands the student through the process. Although an occasional student will freeze on the platform, all the highly skilled instructors have been able to deftly urge the panicky student to calm down and take the plunge.

Litvack discovered trapeze arts after visiting Club Med for water sports, where on a lark he decided to try a trapeze class. He was surprised to discover that flying trapeze was an excellent workout that was never tedious or laborious. He has loved it ever since and decidedly describes it as a workout that engages the whole body, while building many muscles such as biceps, triceps, abs, legs and more.

“I recommend this as a supplement to an exercise program such as running, because you get two hours of great core strengthening, without the monotony of using gym equipment,” he adds, as he enthusiastically starts climbing the ladder to demonstrate a new trick. When he jumps off the platform, he belts out a hilarious yelp, mimicking newcomers who have screamed their way through the routine. This immediately has the students laughing along with him as fear melts away like the snowflakes outside as they hit the river.

After the demonstration, he dismounts from the safety net and begins a discussion about the physics of trapeze, and the interaction of velocity, force, and mass. The students listen attentively and then, like magic, they have forgotten their fear and are ready to meet the challenge of a more difficult trick. Nine-year-old Nicole Declen, one of Carol Havdala’s daughters, is eager to

begin and encourages her mother to try the “straddle whip” one more time. “Mom always tells us to try again, so that’s what I tell her,” she says, like a budding sports psychologist.

At the end of March begins the fantastic Circus Program For Children that includes, tumbling, trapeze, hand balancing and even juggling for kids ages 6-12 years old.

And for children of all ages, spring will usher in a new eight-week course called Intensive Flying Workshop, where in the ninth week, the students will give a special performance for the public. This time, instead of Mom and Dad going to see Junior’s big show, families better start practicing their clapping for Mom and Dad when they show off their new trapeze tricks, as they hopefully fly through the air with the greatest of ease.

For more information, visit [www.trapezeschool.com](http://www.trapezeschool.com) or telephone 917-797-1872.

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