

## Sheila Anthony

*My name is Jennifer d'Alton. I'm a director of the British Balloon Museum. I'm incredibly lucky to talk to the only living flying vicar in the world. Sheila Anthony, and we're so pleased that she's got time today in between chatting with God to talk to us. I love it. First time I think we met, you you've been working in Riyadh*

No, I've been working in Dubai between 1980 and 86. I met you before that.

*I have photographs of you in a field with Terry and Mike Adams. Taking a balloon off outside my parent's house.*

Oh, yeah, it's um,

*Peppard Common,*

Peppard Common Yeah, I remember that? Yeah. Yeah. A long time ago, isn't it? Yes,

*Yes. We both look thin and ...*

Yes. no change whatsoever. Just the same as we did then.

*Yes, absolutely. ,When did you see your first balloon?*

In 1969 and I saw a balloon flying it was in Nottingham and I followed it. I just passed my driving licence actually. So I was able to in my new little car, my VW Beetle, I potted off to see this balloon and I met Gerry Turnbull, Wing Commander Gerry Turnbull.

*Wow.*

So that's how it all began because I then started crewing for him and travelling all over the place, but of course by then I'd also met Mike and we started a relationship.

*Mike Adams?*

So that's why I was doing so much travelling at weekends, but we would try and get to help Gerry every time we could, and that was gas balloons as well as hot-air.

Lots of hard work. I can remember Mike climbing up the side of the the gas balloon and the hydrogen- it was his voice was getting higher and higher, and Gerry said, I think you need to get down now. I'm not quite sure how that happened. But there was a leak or something. But it was funny. I think maybe it was the what-its-name I forgotten. It's not it's not the crown.

*The safety valve?*

Well, yeah, the valve at the top. That's it, I think there was a leak in that I think that's what it was. So that's why he climbed up the side of this gas balloon on the nets which they had then.

*Yes. I remember doing the sandbags up the net.*

Quite hard work, but I enjoyed that. You know, it's gas ballooning has changed a bit now, but I just enjoyed the whole thing. It was just really magical. We were very lucky. I think people who fly balloons now might not have flown if they seen the balloons that we were flying in, but we didn't know any better did we.

*Do you remember Dutch lacing for the rip?*

Which was really the gas ballooning. Come from the gas balloon wasn't it. And you know, that's why they had it and then they went from that to two inch Velcro and then think they had a one inch Velcro at one point with a whole parachute kept in by that and then, of course, when Mike had his accident, there was a rethink about the parachutes.

*Can you explain that for the recording?*

Yeah, it was not it was the eighth of October 1974, imprinted on my memory. And Mike Adams and Mike Sparks. Mike was the P1 and Mike.

He was training Mike Sparks. They had a job to do in Birmingham. And I can't remember who they were. Can't remember, I know the balloon was Park Equipment and I'm not sure if it was.

I know that the TV cameras were there. I remember the TV cameras were there. And they were flying mid afternoon which really in October was not very clever. They shouldn't have flown.

And basically they took off in Birmingham and they went high to about I think, I think from memory it was about 2000 feet, and they got a crosswind and it opened the parachute because it just hit it. So the balloon, I mean it actually was filmed by the BBC. And the balloon was a candle just coming down, straight down.

And they went, they landed on the towpath of a canal in Birmingham, but you know sometimes you wonder if he'd landed in the water .... I don't know if .. but these things go through your mind.

*But yes, that was in 74.*

Both of them killed obviously. Really tragically. And, yes, there was some rethinks about how they had the parachute held in and we've now got this amazing system. So it can't ,it can't do that anymore.

*It was also a big thing because of that. About balloonists taking off under the pressure from papers and advertisers, they are now saying use your initiative.*

I think Mike was one of the first commercial pilots and not in - we now have a grading of private and commercial but he was one of the first ones certainly to be flying with a commercial balloon. So yeah. So there was a there was quite big who-hah about that. You know, what can we do to prevent this?

*He did actually did a lot of good that way, unfortunately.*

Yeah. And I don't know if you remember, but Terry Adams had an accident before that. And he came out of the air at about 1000 feet with two people in the basket and I can't remember what their names were but one of them was Stuart Ashby you might remember the name. Stu, Oh, I know who it is. And I just can't remember the name of the girl but she, she actually cowered down in the basket and was quite badly injured.

But because of that, she should have, you know, as we all know, now that you when you land, you should just let your knees you know, bend a bit and you just take that I mean, you know, coming down the speed they were coming wouldn't have been good. But she was literally I think sitting on the bottom of the basket cowering down and she I think she broke her hip. I mean she had really a nasty accident. And I think that might have been the first one in the UK. I'm not sure. And I don't know the reason for it.

I can't remember the reason for it, but it was Terry Adams was flying. He was P1. Stuart, Stuart Ashby but I can't remember the girl. I can't remember the girl who was injured. Yeah, but it was it was awful then.

So you know and then Mike's was later on of course. I'm not sure which balloon I mean, I don't think I was there. So I just I knew of it.

*So after Mike, did you stop ballooning or did you carry on?*

I did. I mean, I don't if you want me to go back to my first flight because I crewed for two years before I got a flight. Okay. Yeah. So it was hard. You know, it was quite hard work.

And it's not like today when people just get flights almost immediately, but I literally had to crew for two years and the first flight was on the third of October 1971, I flew with Don Cameron and Mark Yarry in Golden Eagle, from Newcastle to south of Greenside, wherever that is. So that was my first flight.

And then just a couple of weeks later, I flew with Terry Adams P1 in Omega, and in Jester with Douglas Stoneham.

That was from Nymphsfield in Gloucestershire. twice on the same day that was pretty good, going from two years of not flying, and suddenly I'm flying twice in a day.

And then I flew again in Jester With Terry as P1, but Mike flew it. He was training. Yeah, so there were three of us in the basket in the flight.

And then I did one in 1971. September The 15th. Suddenly from nothing, I did loads That was in Hermes with David Harris. Remember David Harris? Well, yes. Yeah, that was I've got a feeling that wasn't a Western balloon and really it was ....no, I can't remember.

And then I flew in October that same year with Giles Bulmer and Mike Adams again in Jester.

Then I did some tethered flying with Gerry but the one of the things that was interesting is, I flew in November 72, again, it's just passengers, you know, but I was sort of PI was trying to learn, you know, myself but the in Diaphanous that was a Western balloon. It was one of Gerry's, I'm not sure how many balloons Gerry manufactured. But that was one Gerry and Mark's. Yeah, but was with Kevin Meehan, who was P1. And Robin Henton, whose balloon it was. He paid for you too.

*Ben Henson?.*

David Hinton, Robin sorry Robin Hanson. He, owned Diaphanous, he was in Nottingham. In fact, I introduced him to Gerry so that he ended up buying a balloon from Gerry. And somebody I was asking if anybody had a photograph of that recently, and I did manage to get one actually. But Robin bless him - he offered me to have a share in the balloon for 50 pounds, but I didn't have very much money then I was just about to go to London, so I never took it up.

*I bet you kick yourself now.*

It's so ridiculous, isn't it? Yeah. And then I moved to London and I had a bit of a break. And actually Mike and I had a break. We got back together again and I flew with Mike in August 74 in Tiger Jack. And then again in Jester with Mike and then as P1, I wanted to mention that I was in Jester with Dick Wirth and I remember flying in the rain with him that was just great and then in Jumping Jack. Yeah, Jumping Jack Flash with Phil Hutchins.

Those are the ones that I've made a note of in my log book, but I mean, I had lots of times when I was passenger, and I didn't mark it down.

*So when you were living in London, what were you doing that you could have weekends off to fly?*

Oh, I was some I was working in a coin company just for a few months actually. And then I joined the court service. I was in the Crown Court.

And then of course, in 1980 I moved off over to Dubai and lived there. I flew a little bit I think we might have been the first balloon to fly in. In Dubai might be the second balloon, what was his name? A chap came out with La Vache Qui Rit on the side of the balloon. Again La Vache Qui Rit, the cow who smiled. Peter someone

I will remember his name but he was out there. We did actually have a little time when we were flying with Peter. Yeah. And then I came back in 86 and that's really when I started to learn to fly again.

*You where were you living then?*

Um I was living in I started in Bristol and then I moved to Gloucestershire

*You did you have your own rides business?*

No, we had not at that time. I started going out with John Christopher of course and we bought our first balloon together in well, I'm going when we bought it was in 87 We had our first flight in it in September 87 And that was a 65 an O65 and it was Golf, Bravo, India, Sierra, Whiskey, and that was I don't even remember the chap who sold it, he had the rabbit farm. He had two yellow balloons. And he gave up and we bought one of them, but it smelt absolutely horrid it was incredibly porous and very smelly. Because I think it got wet. Almost wanted to make you throw up when you were inflating it was so awful.

*What was the rest of the registration? Bravo, India, India right?*

Hylyne Rabbits Ltd a bunny but didn't work.

It was Easy Doe and Fast Buck. I think we had Easy Doe from memory. Yeah, we did. We had Easy Doe

*Did you fly it everywhere?*

Yeah, we flew quite a bit. But we flew at Chatsworth, that was a good, good one. That was one that landed with a 250 yard drag that was fine.

Yeah, and then in 87 Yeah. 87, we flew quite a few times. It's sort of just because we did it, sell that and buy another balloon. So I did all my training. And then where are we on?

My it was quite funny because I did have an interesting landing with Andy Walker once I can tell you about that one. And that was quite close to me checking out actually.

But as I said to you, the balloon was porous and when it started going down, you couldn't stop there.

So we started off at five knots and I think it got to about I don't know fourteen fifteen knots or something. It's not very nice. And we came we were coming down to this field and we were gonna hit it really hard because it just would not stop. And then and Andy Walker just said, you know, don't pull the RIP, don't pull the RIP.

We literally bounced over some poplars trees and landed in somebody's garden actually was a big garden.

Having said that he was a photographer for the queen or the royal family. I've never had such a big bounce in my life. So we had that and it was not an easy balloon to fly as you can imagine, but it was good to do that.

But when I did my checkout, we actually bought another balloon, which you know, which was the Viva 65 which you will remember the Bravo Mike Yankee Juliet (Skylark) and I did my checkout in that with Gerry and I never forget it.

We were at Cam in Dursley in Gloucestershire and, and we were coming in, that he wanted me to land and honestly, I it was like I couldn't land it because, you know, because of the previous time I had to really burn and burn so cut this really gentle landing, but I had this really light balloon that hardly got any hours at all. So it was quite funny. He couldn't believe it. I did land it eventually, of course, but But it was funny.

You know, I just couldn't get it down that last bit because I just been in a different balloon. But that worked. But then we did quite a lot with with Skylark. The Skylark and we went to Chile with you didn't we?

Yes.

So I've flown with David Liddiard. Joy Smallwood remember, wow, yeah, yeah. I've got people here in the logbooks, I can't remember who they are, I cant remember them at all!

So I flew with Muir Moffat Unipart. But mainly in my balloon or our balloon. Oh, we did actually have an interesting time. We, years and years ago, we were connected with Mark what's his name?

*Westwood?*

Yes. So we were with Mark Westwood. We flew with him Giles Bulmer and Mark Westwood. Terry, Mike, you know we were all together. And Mark was married to this lovely lady and I've forgotten her name.

*Her name was Jenny. She was very pretty.*

Hey, Jenny. Jenny. You're right. And they lived in Iron Acton in this house. And anyway, obviously they split up. So tra la la la la. Anyway, years later, I was flying our little Skylark, Viva 65 with a friend. And we landed in this field. And this chap came up on a in a wheelchair and he was he was a paraplegic microlight pilot.

He had just flown the whole way around the UK. He was amazing. And he said all you must come back to the house and have a cup of tea. And he lived at Rose cottage Iron Acton where Mark and Jenny had lived. I mean, isn't that weird?

*What are the chances!*

Yeah. And the other thing that is quite interesting, just going back on I don't know this is fact. But in 1786 there was somebody called, his surname was NewMarch and I can't remember his first name. I've got the paperwork somewhere. And he flew in a balloon in the UK up near Manchester way.

NewMarch is a really unusual name. And it's my mother's maiden name. Really, I did wonder if actually one of my ascendants could have been a balloonist? I don't know. But it is is you know, it is an unusual name. It's not it's NewMarch, not mark NewMarch.

*John Baker will be on the case*

He's he managed to get something for me actually, was I he found it from a newspaper cutting. He only flew once that we can tell, but it was in a newspaper cutting. And I did actually Yeah, really? It is interesting, isn't it? You just don't know. In the blood? Yeah, maybe.

I started commercially flying. I've never took my commercial licence because I never wanted to, but we flew, John was commercial obviously. We flew passengers for him.

He flew Allen and Harris balloon for ages. And then which you know, and then we took on Bristol Street Motors, which was 120 and flew passengers in that but it was really, you know, that was really good. And then we, we were asked to help with, well join in with Virgin when it first began Virgin balloon flights. So we were involved in that .

*Yes?*

Yeah, we ran the franchise in the Cotswolds. Yes for quite some years actually. And in fact, the area grew bigger and bigger because by the time I gave up with Virgin we were flying all the way down in Dorset. Really, Dorset was my furthest south, Oxford furthest east. Monmouth of this western Henstridge in the south, with further south was quite a lot of I think we had 13 sites to run with one balloon at a time. One balloon. Yeah. So we wouldn't be you know, it's quite quite hard

work actually. It's quite hard. Yeah. But yeah, I think too, because too big an area really.

*So did you sell that franchise or how did*

I know because we didn't actually pay for the France franchise, but the way it worked was that Virgin took all the money and then paid us so much. So each time we flew, we didn't get the money til we flew and we also rented the balloon from them. It is a hefty cost, isn't it with these 210 and a 240. we had a 210 first and then a 240. But yeah, I obviously when John and I split up so I carried on getting a pilot in but of course, that was quite immense.

When we flew I didn't get very much money. Really, it was, you know, because I had to pay the pilot £250 So it's a lot of money out of it. So it was it was quite hard to keep it going. And yeah, so I think I gave it up.

In 2001 It was actually no, it must be 2002 because it would have been 2003 but somewhere around there because we'd have the foot and mouth and that really affected. Yeah, and we were in the Forest of Dean. So you know, you really saw it. So we didn't fly for a long time. And then the first year after that. It was pretty poor. So yeah, it was not an easy time. Really. Yeah.

So then I sort of, I stopped I stopped with the commercial, sold Bristol street motors that we still had, and then I didn't have a balloon for a while. And then I was down in Devon working and Colin Butter bless him, He just tried to persuade me to get back involved. And I did and I ended up buying a new balloon. Well, not brand new, from David Litchfield. You would have known him.

Yes.

I bought it from him. So yeah, It only had I think only about six, seven hours on it when I bought it. I think not very many anyway. And I still got it and it still flies beautifully. Yeah.

*Yeah. Is that the one you take out with you?*

Yeah, this one? Yeah. Yeah. Flying around Italy. Again we are going again this year. We I've been I don't know how many times I've been. I started looking but it's certainly 11 or 12 times or something quite a lot. But it's a bit hot. I'm thinking I might maybe not do that next year. I might try and go a bit further north where it's cooler and in a different time.

*So you have a balloon but what drew you to the church I know you used to ring bells because you were the first person I can actually say, I know a campanologist right?*

Yeah. Oh, it was a God thing, Jenny. I mean, I think this is probably something that isn't going on there thinking is it? Okay, I think I but it was through the breakup with John.

So I just remember the sorts of bits where, you know, Cremation Charlie and all that having burned hair. We didn't have exactly no eyebrows and we didn't have fat. We did have fun. So we were flapping.

We didn't have mobile phones. So we had somebody central that we had to phone into. Yeah, so there was this those things that they weren't easy. Were they, I mean, it was great fun. I mean, we didn't know as I said, we didn't know any different but now it's just so much more sophisticated,

*So much slicker.*

Yeah, definitely slicker. Yeah. I mean for me in flying now. I'm glad it is slicker. But you know, then it was and we had doghouse landings, remember?

Yes.

Or no poles. So you'd have to push the burner over when you landed to make sure that the balloon was going away from you rather than then and if you've if you landed quickly, you would land on the on your side and it would tip.

*What was your most appalling landing?*

Ah oh well I have I've got a funny one. I was flying. We went to France a whole group of us and Ray Bailey came. Did the Simpsons come I'm not sure Alex but Barbara and Noel, and I was flying with Barbara one day and it was really light winds and Ray was flying I'm not sure who else, but two passengers.

And as we came over this plateau the wind suddenly went from like three or four miles an hour and I just gone down to just radio down to might saying actually I'm gonna keep flying for a while because it's so lovely. And suddenly it was like a hand grabbed me from the sky and just threw me and, and Ray landed almost immediately.

And they sailed across this huge field, and then he stopped and he just went on the radio and said to John, I've just seen the girls tanking across the sky. And I thought, I wish I hadn't said that because if you hadn't, I'd been fine. And so anyway, we came, we came down we actually landed in this, this ploughed field.

The only reason that we stopped was there was so much soil compacted in the basket that literally stopped I could not get to the hands on the top of the tank because, I couldn't it was solid compacted soil Yeah, and it was very funny because Barbara landed she was on her back, and I always I can remember I just said it was like an upturned toy tortoise holding on.

So that was quite a funny one. And I was quite glad I had landed. Yeah, just a few fast ones and there's been a few one I've been a bit worried because the balloon you know, wind drops and you are over wires and things like that which is not very nice, but I'm not too good. I can remember probably the hardest landing I had was when we went down and bounced over the poplars leaving quite a few things behind in the field as we went.

*We've all flown and landed and had various landowners. Who has been the nicest landowner you've come across?*

Oh, um, well, when we've been invited into Breakfast has been lovely. Yeah, I mean to be honest, Jenni on the whole, even when we were with Virgin, we only had I think, I've only had two problems in the whole of my flying, so yep, yep. When we went when we've we landed once in Cirencester and Lord Bathurst came out and he'd had an issue with someone else.

And I don't know why, because I know them and I know how lovely they are. So something that not just not gone, right. Anyway, I thought he was going to be really cross and he came out and he went to the field where John had landed and I drove up behind and I thought I'm not going to go into the field, I'll wait, I won't do that. Anyway, at the end of it, he wrote to us and gave us a letter saying we can land on his land anytime we like.

I think I've still got the letter so let me I'm really positive stuff really. I had I had one issue when it wasn't so good when I was in Cambridgeshire and it really upset me because I'm not used to it. And it wasn't an awful one. But he just didn't want me to land there anymore because he'd had virgin on there before and he got cross but um, it really upset me so I don't really like flying in the UK.

I don't know if you know that the Midlands air festival there was some balloons landed on a field and in one of them the farmer came and drove over his balloon. That was ruined. I mean, it's balloons trashed. Yeah. There's farmers. You know they're on the edge actually aren't they? Oh, yeah, yeah. Anyway, that's the bad stuff.

But no, I've had good stuff we used to we had a lovely, lovely lovely guy who in in Painswick or just in Ewly just outside Painswick were not usually. Anyway, it was just outside Edge, but it was actually just outside Painswick. And John managed to adjust he had so little fuel left in doing a passenger flight was with Bristol street motors. And he landed in this field and this fabulous farmer came out.

He was just adorable, and we ended up flying out of his farm all the time. He was exquisite. And he flew. I can remember John flew him. And my mother, my mother was disabled so it was a bit special. And so it was myself, John, this other chap, John and my mom, and we flew and we landed where they were doing the A419

from Gloucester to Swindon digging it up for years, you know, at that time it's getting bigger now but then, but that was a bit special. So there's been some lovely flights and lovely, lovely, lovely farmers generally.

*Did your mother enjoy it?*

Fabulous. She loved it. Yeah. Yeah. I mean, she was quite a, she was a real entrepreneur and my mom actually really, in business. She had a business with 40 people working for her and she was very, you know, she wouldn't let her disability stop her from doing anything.

She used to take us, you know, over to Austria in the summer when we would go up mountains and things and they'd have to stop the the chairlift so she could get off easily and stuff. She was amazing. Amazing. I mean, our mothers are wonderful. Your mother was wonderful.

*I hope that my children said that about me.*

Yeah, no, no, no.

Yeah, I can't thank you enough. Sheila. After spending so much time with me this afternoon. It's been absolutely incredible. I will be sending you a piece of paper to sign saying I'd be nice to you.