

## **World Championships – Scheilletein, Austria 1987**

To swoop in a balloon from almost 7000 feet down to 5 feet in a distance of less than 2 kilometers is one of my most memorable flights. One afternoon, a pilot declared goal was called by the Director. Each pilot had to assess the winds and to declare their own target. My decision was to shoot high to find that fast wind in front of the clouds. With the burner on continually, the balloon climbed through 3000, 4000, 5000, 6000 feet. At 6950 feet JUS and I hit the wind shear and began our forward movement. I could see my target which was only 2 kilometers away. All I had to do now was to use my intuition and trust my feelings to know the exact moment to pull the ripcord to allow the balloon to descend at an accurate speed and angle to hit my target.

### ***Did Ruth hit her target?***

"I'm going" I stated and my team were right there for me. Everyone was apprehensive. The balloon and I lifted off at a great speed and the climb finally levelled out at 1400 feet. I stared at my instruments. 1400 feet! 45 knots! And I was in the blackest cloud in the sky. I could not see anything. I hesitated about what to do next. Burn to climb further or descend. I was not game to spill any air from the top in case the whole balloon deflated mid-air. I stood in the centre of the basket holding onto the sides firmly. My legs were physically shaking with fright. "Please God. Let me get down safely. I will never fly in these conditions again."

The cold air around the balloon caused it to begin to drop until we were clear of the cloud. I was situated right over the bend in the river obviously on target to the goal. My spirits soared. I was being rewarded for being so brave. I had flirted with limits and it appeared my courage would be acknowledged with a good result. Isn't the mind a marvellous thing? Only a small number of pilots flew and most of them were way to my left flying much lower at tree top level.

As I persevered alone in the sky along my flight level, I flew over a church convinced I would find the target. At no time did I think I should descend and join the pack, to be safe with a comfortable score at the Worlds in France 1983.

### ***What did Ruth learn about herself during this flight?***

Richard Bach, author of Jonathan Livingston Seagull, Illusions and other books wrote in his 1985 book, *The Bridge Across Forever*, "**did you ever feel that you were missing someone you had never met?**" Indeed, like thousands of other people, I identified with his words.

Like Richard Bach in his bi-plane searching for his soul mate, I travelled the world to fly for adventure, challenge and competition. With every flight and landing, I met new people but never the person I was missing. While Richard Bach was writing and publishing *The Bridge Across Forever* in 1985, I flew in

different areas of Australia until June when I left to balloon in Switzerland, then the United States and Canada.

The Swiss countryside from a balloon is magnificent to see, to feel. I joined Marta Trindler and in her balloon, SPROSS, flew from Pfaffikon to Himivil, from Brand to Monchaltorf with my final flight from Geiss to Wegscheid. Floating over Swiss chalets perched on undulating hillsides with cows wearing cowbells on a background of rich green grass below remains one of my pleasant flying memories. Six months later, I would fly in the Swiss Alps but for now, Zurich became my second home.