

Waikato Whispers



Waikato Hot Air Balloon Club: www.waikatoballoonclub.co.nz Tel:07 856 0060

CLUB NIGHT Wednesday 3rd May details below

CLUB DAY Sunday 7th May Auckland

NEWS IN BRIEF

Club Night: Meeting 7:30pm Woodworkers Guild Hall Storey Ave Hamilton. Dave giving a talk on Aeronautical Decision Making which impacts on both Pilots and Crew.

Club Day: Auckland – further details on Club Night and on facebook.

For our Younger Members: (Ref: Kids Learning Resources by Cameron Balloons)

It must have been a bumpy landing as they had no way of controlling the balloon.



14) Why can't a hot-air balloon fly in the rain?

The heat inside of the balloon can bring any rain on the surface of the fabric to boiling or steaming temperatures which damages the very thin specially-coated hot-air balloon material, as it can destroy layers in the fabric's coating.

Junior Balloonists

Our first meeting was on Sunday. We will be contacting the schools to put a note out in their newsletters in the hope that we might attract some additional JB's. We have a draft programme which we will be working with until such time as we have final numbers. Next meeting Sunday 21st May.

Jeanette Piccard

(Thanks to Dianne McKee for send through the family video) <https://vimeo.com/211391132>

Jeannette Piccard, SM'19 (1895–1981)

A "pioneer of the skies"

By Jason Kelly
Photography courtesy Getty Images





Jeannette Piccard, left, and her husband, Jean, center, took ballooning to new heights.



Before dawn on October 23, 1934, about 45,000 people gathered at Ford Airport in Dearborn, Michigan, to see Jeannette Piccard, SM'19, attempt to become the first woman in the stratosphere. In an enclosed magnesium-alloy gondola under an undulating 600,000-cubic-foot hydrogen balloon, she and her husband, Swiss chemist and engineer Jean Piccard, floated away from the waving crowd. "What a wonderful moment that was," Jeannette Piccard wrote in the next day's *New York Times*. That moment almost never happened.

First, though, Jeannette Piccard had to complete both night and day solo balloon flights—"an adventurous feminine pioneer of the skies," the Associated Press dubbed her—becoming the first female balloonist to earn a National Aeronautic Association license. The license permitted her to pilot the stratosphere expedition, while her husband would focus on scientific observations, but the idea of a woman at the controls concerned potential sponsors.

In flight there were a few brief frightening moments. Winds jostled the gondola at low altitude, but the Piccards dropped ballast and climbed to calmer air and sunshine above the clouds. Suddenly, through the top window, Jeannette Piccard saw the balloon "sway violently." For several minutes she held and released the valve rope while hearing the thwack of material tossed about in what she described as a "gale" above them, but the threat soon passed. "From then on," she wrote, "everything was smooth sailing."

A focus on getting her own way might have served Piccard in overcoming social constraints. Before she earned her master's in organic chemistry and became a balloonist, she had an aspiration even more outrageous for a young woman of her time: she wanted to be an Episcopal priest.

Although she wouldn't achieve that goal for decades, spiritual thoughts permeated Piccard's scientific pursuits. The view from beneath the partially inflated stratosphere balloon, soaring 175 feet over her head, reminded her of "a magnificent cathedral." And flying miles high at the whim of the wind was a transcendent experience: "You feel like part of the air. You almost feel like part of eternity."

Looking down onto a wall-to-wall carpet of clouds, Piccard felt disconnected from the earth for a more basic reason. She had no idea what direction they were traveling, or how fast. She had almost no sensation that they were moving at all. "Were we traveling two miles an hour or 200? Were we going east or north or south? Were we over Ontario, or Lake Erie, or already over the ocean?" she recounted in the *Times*.

After four hours in the air, that uncertainty prompted a slow descent from their peak at 57,579 feet, almost 11 miles high. For almost three hours, Piccard held a valve open for 90 seconds at regular intervals to bring the balloon gradually back to earth. Below the clouds it became difficult to maintain a steady pace. Even when they unloaded the last of their ballast, the drop remained too rapid to avoid a cluster of trees, and the gondola came to rest in an elm. In a history of scientific ballooning, National Air and Space Museum curator David DeVorkin wrote that Piccard made "unplanned and impulsive maneuvers" at the controls and that the flight records were incomplete.

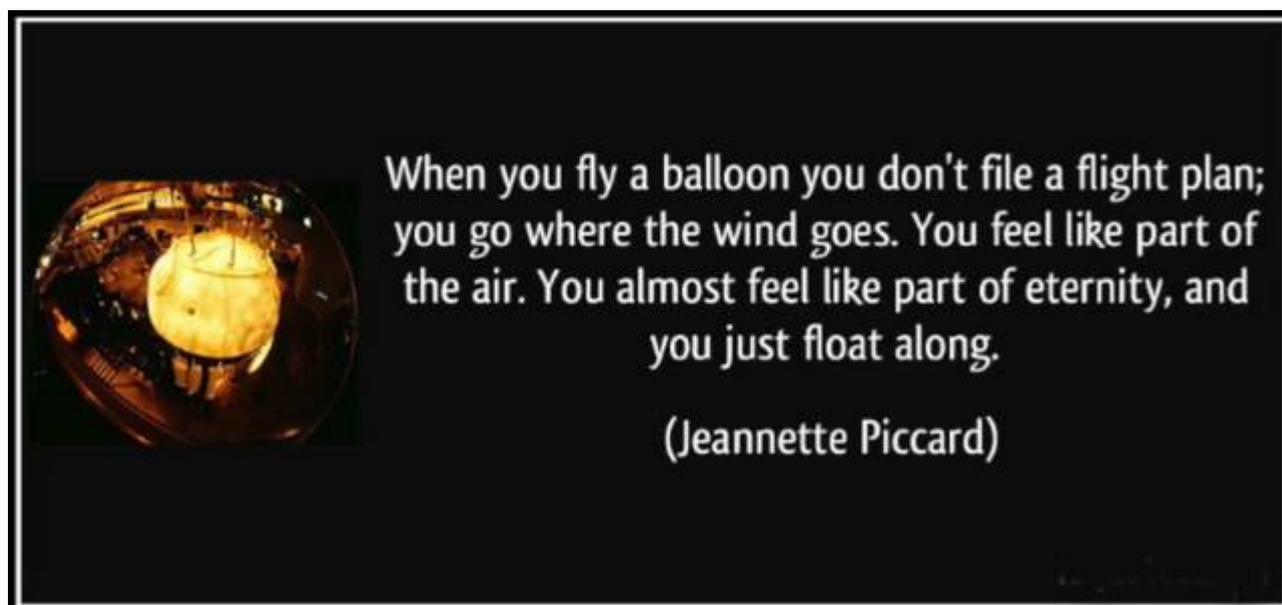
They landed near Cadiz, Ohio, eight hours after takeoff, 300 miles from their Dearborn departure, having flown across Lake Erie. Three decades later Piccard reflected, "We are the only people in the 1930s to

make a stratosphere flight through the clouds, landed through clouds, and lived to tell the tale." At the time, though, she overlooked the significance of the accomplishment, expressing her disappointment in the *Times*: "My most vivid sensation with regard to this flight is one of shame."

Her regret came from the fact that the balloon had become tangled in the elm's branches, ripping and sending the gondola free-falling 15 to 20 feet. Looking at "the torn fragments of our once beautiful balloon" spoiled Piccard's experience.

Not long afterward, Jean Piccard's twin brother, Auguste, became an international celebrity for his ballooning accomplishments; in 1931 and 1932 he made stratosphere flights in Belgium, then began planning a similar attempt in the United States. When he received funding for another flight in Belgium, Auguste returned to Europe, and Jean stepped into his long shadow.

In 1936 Jean joined the University of Minnesota's aeronautical-engineering department, where he remained until his retirement. Jeannette earned an education doctorate there in 1942, and after her husband's 1963 death, she promoted the space program for seven years as a NASA consultant.



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