



Reaching overhead, I grasp two ribbons hanging from the ceiling and wrap my right leg around them. Slowly, I climb the fabric—hands, feet, hands, feet. As I approach the ceiling, I separate the ribbons, coax my torso through the center and hang upside down, suspended ten feet above the ground.

I tried it: Falling Upwards

It was a moment I had played in my mind since I was five-years-old, part of my dream of being in the circus. Clowns! Elephants! Acrobats!—all living in harmony under the big top with one focus: Fun. Thirty years later, I'm living that dream—even if only during private training sessions with a professional aerialist (think Cirque du Soleil).

When I met Rachel Bowman, an aerialist, I was strictly a cardio girl who only let go of life's "shoulds" when I was pounding the pavement at eight miles an hour, or during the occasional yoga class. But Bowman said, "We'll work muscles you don't even know you have, you'll stretch your body's limitations and you won't even feel like you're working out." With my interest peaked, I drove the forty-five miles to her training facility. The room had a tall, apex ceiling with ribbons that descended to the floor.

"You'll use the ribbon to create foot holds," said Bowman. "When you get high enough in the air, you'll twist the fabric around your ankles and the balls of your feet and create a lock. That way, you can rest between movements."

"She has to be kidding," I thought. "How can supporting yourself mid-air with a piece of cloth be considered a rest?"

She demonstrated, arching backward and dancing her way to the ceiling like a stripper working a pole. After her routine, Bowman walked me through a series of conditioning exercises. After a few sessions, I learned to climb the ribbons, split my legs, and fall free using the fabric as support. And I realized dancing on air is more difficult than it looks.

I have always had an unflappable persistence. I never give up—on anything. I've finished books I hated, sat through movies that bored me, and dated hopeless dreamers for years on end. With aerialist training, I learned to let go at the first sign of a red flag because I had to control my way down—and that requires muscle. Push yourself too far and you'll plummet to the floor instead of descending gracefully.

As I climb to the ceiling, I feel a sense of freedom as my childhood fantasy comes to life. I'm not grounded or stifled. My body, however imperfect, is strong, confident, and powerful. I create a foot lock, let go, relax, and realize I'm flying. For more information visit www.rachelbowman.net

—Amy Paturel