

meet Clair Marie, BASEgirl

"It's my goal in life to inspire and empower other women to aim high, follow their hearts, and stop at nothing to accomplish their dreams."

Let's time travel a bit. Tell us your story—from the beginning.

I was introduced to the industry differently than anyone else. When I was 8 years old, I saw a BASE jumping clip at a ski resort and tugged on my mom's sleeve "Mom, I'm going to do that one day!" She said, "Uh, no you're not!"

Eventually, I got ahold of a BASE jumping video, which I watched repeatedly. One day, I noticed the producer/instructor's e-mail address on the case. I timidly wrote to him, "Hi. I'm 16 and have never skydived, but I really want to BASE jump. Will you teach me?" His first e-mail blew me away. He said, "No way." So I wrote back, apologizing for wasting his time, and told him, "I've been passionate about BASE jumping for a really long time." He replied, "Oh, I thought this was a joke. You're serious!" Then, he called me and offered to teach me to BASE jump before I learned to skydive—on one condition: I had to appear in his next BASE video. I thought, "You're going to teach me for free and film me and give me publicity? That sounds like a good deal."

Most people get into BASE jumping through doing about 250 skydives and then learning how to BASE jump. So me being really young, a girl, and not a skydiver first was a huge deal in the community. My first jump was off a 480 foot power tower at 10 o'clock at night with no moon. Before I even landed my first jump, I yelled up to the tower, "You have to take me again! You have to take me again!"

The next week I started packing parachutes for the skydiving center. That's where I had my intro to working in skydiving. I was 16 and packing parachutes.

Age: 24

Stomping grounds: Boulder, CO

Job titles: BASE jumping and skydiving instructor, professional BASE jumper and skydiver

Years jumping: 7

Jumps to date: 240 BASE jumps and 3,500 skydives

Most memorable BASE jumping trip: Norway—for all the legal options there.

Search "BASE girl" on Facebook or find her online at basegirl.com.

Eventually, I started skydiving and filming tandem jumps. It got me a lot of experience but I actually wanted to teach people, introduce them to skydiving, so they could experience and understand it. Becoming an instructor was a way to open up my world to others and let them see why I love it.

I owned my own dropzone—our name for a skydiving center—for a couple years (from ages 19-21), but that kept me too busy to do what I wanted to do—BASE jump. So, I sold it and moved to Arizona, taking on more BASE students and focusing on my brand, BASEgirl.

I got tired of Arizona's heat and moved to Colorado last year to work at a dropzone in Longmont that teaches AFF (accelerated free fall), a seven-jump course to go from being a tandem skydiver to solo. I also teach people to BASE jump and do about six trips a year with students.

How do you choose your students?

I meet someone, they express an interest, and I say, "That's awesome," then judge whether they'll do well. Skydiving is similar to BASE, but it's a totally different sport in other aspects. An athlete might be better equipped to learn how to BASE jump than someone who has a thousand skydives.

I look first at their athletic experience. You're not going to pull someone off the couch and teach her to climb El Cap. Body awareness is huge. Then, I evaluate whether they're grounded mentally. We like to find people who understand the risk, because there is a risk involved. Usually, you can see if they just want to do it because it's the hardcore thing to do. Those aren't good people to teach. I won't teach someone who wants to do it because it's cool. I teach people who are passionate about it, have researched it, and are self-motivated. I won't put myself on the line for any other person.

Describe some of your signature teaching techniques.

I teach differently than how some of the guys teach, because I bring a different energy to it, just as they bring a different energy to a ballet class, for example. First, I ask my students not to be intimidated. It worried me in the beginning. The girls were intimidated by me, and the guys didn't want to listen to me because I was a girl. The guys wanted to be more hardcore and the girls weren't sure they could talk to me. So, I take a posture with the guys to maintain my authority and take a sweeter, more nurturing approach with the girls. I tell the women not to let others' opinions get in their way and limit them. I say, "If this is something that you're passionate about and want to do for yourself and that motivation comes from a pure place, then just fly through it." Obviously, I encourage all my students to stick with it.

When they're jumping, I coach them from the other side of the rail. I just talk to them, communicate that I know what I'm doing, then hand that trust back to them and encourage them.

BASE jump (beys) *noun*

a parachute jump from the tops of tall manmade or natural objects, usually from 1,000 feet (305 meters) or less.