

Bertrand Piccard

By KATE MURPHY

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Bertrand Piccard is a Swiss psychiatrist and aviator who in 1999 was the first to circumnavigate the globe nonstop in a balloon. Earlier this month he and a colleague alternated piloting the first coast-to-coast flight across the United States in a single-seat solar-powered airplane^[1] (which prompted numerous 911 calls about U.F.O.'s) in preparation for a round-the-world flight in 2015.



Joshua Bright for The New York Times

READING After three months reading weather reports every hour, it's such a pleasure to get back to the pile of books waiting on my night table. I'm on the second of five "Reality Transurfing"^[2] books by Vadim Zeland, a Russian quantum physicist. It's interesting because he tries to prove through the laws of physics the parameters of self-development. The idea is to put more consciousness into every action and reaction.

It fits quite well with what I've believed in my life. Very often human beings are living like on autopilot, reacting automatically with what happens. What interests me about the life of an explorer is you are in the unknown; you are out of your habits. You are obliged to produce new answers to what life is bringing to you. These are the moments that wake you up from the automatic. You are more focused and efficient because you have access to all of your consciousness and awareness.

LISTENING During our recent flight, I listened to the very soft whistling of the propellers. It's a very pleasant, quiet and regular sound because we have solar-powered electric motors. There is no combustion engine. It's extremely peaceful. The only thing that breaks the silence is the radio with the air traffic controllers and the satellite phone each time mission control is calling us from Switzerland.

WATCHING I saw some beautiful footage of the history of aviation when I was at the Air and Space Museum^[3] in Washington, D.C. What the history of aviation has brought in the 20th century should inspire us to be inventors and explorers ourselves in the new century.

A movie I must have seen 10 times is "Jonathan Livingston Seagull"^[4]. It's an old movie, but still such a beautiful message. If I had only one film I could take on my computer on a desert island, I would take "Jonathan Livingston Seagull." It has beautiful pictures of sea gulls flying as a metaphor for the spiritual quest of human beings.

WEARING A pair of Google Glass^[5] I received from Larry Page to use in the plane. In the last leg of our flight from Washington, D.C., to New York, my colleague, André Borschberg, was wearing the Google Glass in the cockpit and I was wearing the Google Glass on the ground and I could see what he was seeing. It's really a fabulous tool to communicate between two people who want to see the same thing.

LEARNING I'm learning kite surfing^[6]. It's a little surfboard you have on your feet with straps, and you have a big kite like a power glider in the air that pulls you. You don't need waves to move and it makes a big spray of water as you go. You can jump in waves. I didn't dare to jump, but my daughters did. My kids are teaching me.

Kate Murphy is a journalist in Houston who writes frequently for The New York Times.

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