

N O R T H E A S T F L O R I D A ' S

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LIFESTYLES





# Norman Kent: Between Earth and Sky

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Photography by: Norman Kent

## Norman Kent

Most people occasionally enjoy gazing dreamily up at the clouds, but Norman Kent has spent the last thirty-three years living out his dreams among the clouds.

A skydiver since age nineteen, with some 19,000 jumps, most of them wearing a helmet-mounted camera, he has earned an international reputation as one of aerial photography's most visionary talents. He is famed for the intuitive, split-second precision that has enabled him to shoot world record attempts, competitions, and other world class skydiving events.

As an aerial cinematographer with dozens of commercial, television, and feature films to his credit, Norman was commissioned by the producer of *Get Smart* to head the photography unit for the movie's skydiving segment. Featured are Steve Carrell as Maxwell Smart, Anne Hathaway as Agent 99, and a massive villain hot on their tails. It's an aerial pas de trois with antics that manage to be both thrilling and comedic. Norman says the project gave him a lot of creative freedom.

Probably one of the most gratifying moments of his career, though, was when Steven Spielberg sought out his cloud shots for the final scene of *Jurassic Park 3*. Norman had originally taken the shots from a Cessna flying over Flagler Beach. Spielberg used those clouds as a backdrop for pterodactyls flying through the sky,

Norman, who has resided in Florida since 1991 and is



based in the Hammock, seeks to “bring Hollywood into our area” as often as possible. As director of photography for the 2000 action film *Cutaway*, with Stephen Baldwin and Tom Berenger, he incorporated aerial views of Flagler Beach's pier and straight coastline. Several of the films he has worked on have been shot in Florida, among them *Drop Zone*, starring Wesley Snipes, *Terminal Velocity*, starring Charlie Sheen, and



1992's *Eraser*, starring Arnold Schwarzenegger. Parts of the latter film were also shot in Flagler Beach.



Whether portrayed by still photography or film, the subject represents more than skydiving formations, Norman says. It is the broader relationship of skydivers to their surroundings that drives him artistically. He



speaks quickly, as if to keep pace with his ideas, and is constantly thinking about com-

position and lighting. "The sky is my playground and a shot includes the full atmosphere," he says.

Norman, who has been on assignments from Japan to Peru, loves Flagler's atmosphere for "the water, clouds, and colors, everywhere green. It's material for beautiful aerals."

Free time means creating independent projects through his company, Norman Kent Productions. He produced the award-winning 1987 *From Wings Came Flight*, which introduced freestyle skydiving and was inspired by two master skydivers: Mike "Michigan" Sandberg and Norman's first wife, Deanna. It was she who became Norman's favorite and most challenging subject to shoot. Then tragedy struck.

During the mid-nineties, Deanna and Norman were in the midst of filming *Willing to Fly* when Deanna contracted a rare illness called CREST Syndrome. They were unable to complete the film before her death in 1997. The shock of Deanna's fatal disease and her loss caused Norman to lose his direction and shelve the project until he met Nicole Angelides, a tax lawyer and an accomplished skydiver. With Nicole assuming the roles of performer and producer, they were able to complete *Willing to Fly* in 1999.

Their relationship sparked a new beginning for Norman, who married Nicole in 2002. They happily continue to share a passion for skydiving and creative pursuits. Norman's grown son and fellow skydiver, Ramsey, assists with photo editing and related work.

Sitting one afternoon in the editing room on the ground floor of his house, where a shelf above a bank of computers is lined with industry award statuettes, the tall, rangy photographer speaks softly and intensely about his twin passions. "Photography goes in front of skydiving, if I had to choose," says Norman. "Not to let go [of aerial photography], just branch out. I don't want to be known only as 'the helmet guy.'"

Sunrise had found him at the beach taking maternity photographs of a friend standing amid the waves. Taken with a fisheye lens to bring out the environment, the photographs symbolically depict the ocean as the mother of all life, Norman explains.

You may ask him to photograph a wedding, but don't expect any formula shots. Norman would rather be second photographer, commissioned to take "the unusual candid shots that hold the most important memories."

