

Birthday Balloons for Grandpa



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KatieMae

Illustrated by Andrew Denn



The Awakened Press

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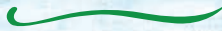
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*To my family and friends,
who remind me on a daily basis,
you are never too old to follow your dreams.*



Chapter 1



I first met Grandpa when I was two years old. I don't remember it very well, but I have seen pictures of us together. Grandma and Grandpa used to come visit us every summer and stay at our house for two whole weeks. It was always the best part of summer for me because I would wake up and spend those days with Grandpa.

Before Grandma and Grandpa went home, we always made sure to take family pictures. Mom, Dad, Grandma,

my brother Ben, and my sister Holly squished together with me on the couch as Grandpa set the timer on the camera. Once the camera was set, Grandpa would crawl across the living room floor as fast as he could, turn around to face the camera, and plop on the floor so he could be included in the picture. Last year, Grandpa crawled back so fast, he ripped his jeans and got a rug burn on his knee. The camera snapped the picture, and instead of everyone sitting there smiling like we usually do in the other pictures, this one was of everyone laughing and looking at Grandpa. That picture was my favorite family picture, especially today.

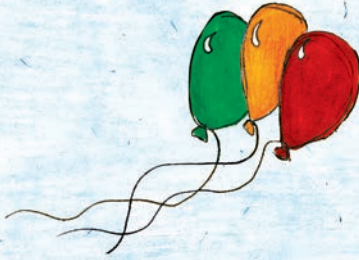
This summer Grandpa won't be able to take pictures with us.

My Grandpa died last Christmas. Mom said he was too young to die. 60 seemed pretty old to me, but Mom said it was too soon. My family and I knew he went to a better place. A place where he wasn't sick anymore, and that one day we would get to see him again.

Having Grandpa die was hard for the whole family. Especially for Mom. She cried a lot at first, but after a while, there were only certain days she felt really, really sad like on Father's Day and Grandpa's birthday. I didn't like it when my mom got sad, and I always found ways to make her smile or laugh.

I have always loved Grandpa, and even though I only

saw him a few times in my life, he was my favorite person in the whole world to play with, and he was my best friend. I know I am only eight years old, and will meet a lot of people in my life, but I don't think anyone could ever be as cool as my Grandpa.



As I sat on my bed watching the fluffy white clouds play hide-and-seek with the sun, I wondered if Grandpa could see me from Heaven. Sometimes, when the clouds changed shape, I could see his face looking at me. Like the times we used to lay down on the front lawn at his house, and point out the different cloud shapes.

“What are you looking at?” came a voice from the hallway.

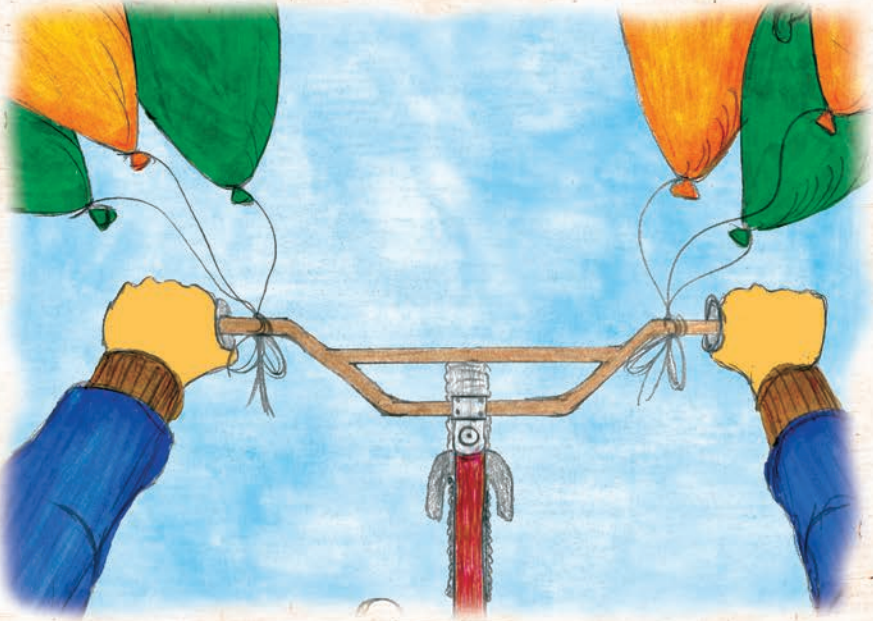
It was my sister, Holly. As I turned toward the door, I saw her standing just outside my room wearing her yellow ballerina outfit, holding a brush in one hand and one of her dolls in the other. Holly was in love with the color yellow. She always said that yellow is a happy color. No one in her ballet class had a yellow outfit, and during her recitals she liked to stand out for everyone to see

Thinking about all of the fun Grandpa and I used to have, I suddenly remembered what Holly told me in my room.

I wonder if a person could really float up to Heaven using balloons? Yeah, in cartoons you can do anything, but a real person — could that really work?

I had to find out. If my brother, Ben, was home, then maybe he would let me use his computer to research this. If it was possible to fly with balloons, then I could figure out a way to use them to go visit Grandpa in Heaven.

Chapter 3



When I woke up the next morning, I had to do some chores after breakfast. When I went outside to take the garbage to the curb, I found my older brother, Ben, mowing the lawn. I stood there trying to get his attention so I could ask for his help with my plan. He finally saw me standing there and turned off the lawn mower.

Ben walked over to me. He was twice my height and sometimes I felt small next to him, but I was never afraid

of him. Looking up at him, I said, "Ben, I need your help with something. Can you go to the store with me so I can buy some stuff with my money?"

"Can't you see that I'm busy, Squirt? Why do you want to go to the store, anyway? Do you need to buy junk for your girlfriend?" Ben asked, laughing at me.

"No, I don't have a girlfriend. I need to get something for Grandpa's birthday, and Mom won't let me go to the store by myself."

"So, you need my help, huh? Well, if you finish mowing the lawn for me I will consider helping you out, but it will cost you," he said.

As I looked at Ben, I really wanted to yell how mean he was, but I knew that would only make him tell me he didn't want to help me. "I could mow the lawn for you, but I am not as good as you, and it will take longer. A lot longer." I stood there looking at him. "Please, Ben, this is important," I said.

"Okay, kid. Let me finish my chores and I will go to the store with you. But like I said, it will cost you. I will take a soda for payment. Ask Mom if it's okay for us to ride our bikes to the store."

"Deal," I said. I ran into the house, grabbed my backpack, and yelled for Mom. "Hey, Mom!! Ben and I are going to the store to get a soda. We'll be back later."

“Alright, but stay with your brother and behave,” Mom replied.

As I waited for Ben to finish mowing the lawn, my friend Matthew came down the street to visit. We’ve been friends since we were little kids. “Hi, Andrew,” he said. “Do you want to come to my house and play?”

“Hi, Matthew,” I said. “Maybe later. Right now I am waiting for Ben to finish the lawn so we can ride our bikes up to the store.”

“What are you going to get at the store?” Matthew asked.

Walking over to the fence, I looked behind me to make sure no one else was around. “I am going to buy some helium balloons to take a trip,” I answered.

“A trip? Where are you going, and why do you need balloons for your trip?” Matthew questioned. “Can I come?”

I looked Matthew in the eyes and said, “If I tell you a secret, do you promise not to tell anyone? Not even your mom?”

Matthew nodded. I looked behind me one last time, stepped a little closer so Matthew could hear me, and told him about my plan to visit Grandpa in Heaven.

“WHAT?” Matthew shouted.

“Shhhhhh!!! This is top secret. You can’t tell anyone, ever! I’m going to leave tonight when everyone’s asleep.”

bag of M&M's and remembered how Grandpa liked them. I asked her how much it would be with the candy, too.

"Altogether with the soda, that will be five dollars and twenty-one cents in total."

I was so excited. I would still have a little money left over to put back in my piggy bank.

I went outside and tied the newly inflated balloons to the handlebars on my bike, and put the candy in my backpack. Ben and I went home together in silence. I was thinking about the next step in my plan, and Ben was probably thinking about some dumb girl.

When we got home I thanked Ben for taking me to the store. I also told him I would miss him. He just laughed and said that he would miss me, too, but he would see me at dinner.

If he only knew this would probably be the last dinner we would have together for a long time. I didn't know how long I would be visiting Grandpa in Heaven.

Chapter 4



After dinner, I ran up to my room to check on the balloons I hid in my closet when I got home from the store. Tonight was the night I was going to visit Grandpa, and I needed to make sure I had everything ready. I picked out my jeans, my tennis shoes, and my T-shirt that read, “My Grandpa is the Coolest.” I decided to bring my backpack so I could carry the candy. I packed my LEGO® blocks so Grandpa and I could build something when we were done working on our trains.

At 9:00 p.m., I went to Mom and Dad and told them I was tired and going to bed.

Both of my parents looked at me, and Dad said, "Are you feeling alright, Andrew? You never go to bed this early during the summer."

"Yeah, I'm okay. I guess I am just tired."

"Well, have a good sleep, sweetie," Mom said. "We have a very special day tomorrow. It's Grandpa's birthday, and Grandma is going to come to the beach with us to be part of the celebration."

"I didn't know Grandma was coming, too. That will be nice. Tell her I love her, okay?" I said.

"Andrew, you can tell her tomorrow when you see her. You aren't planning on going anywhere during the night, now, are you?" Dad remarked with a teasing look in his eyes.

"Ummm. Where would I go? I'm only a kid, and I can't go anywhere without an adult with me," I responded.

Mom and Dad both smiled, and I hugged and kissed them goodnight. "I love you both very much. Always remember that, okay?" I said.

They both smiled again, and said they would see me in the morning.

I walked upstairs thinking about how surprised my family would be when they found out I was not there in

the morning. *I better leave a note, so they don't worry too much*, I thought to myself.

So before I climbed into bed, I sat down at my desk and wrote:

Dear Mom and Dad,

Don't worry about me, I am fine. I decided to take a trip to visit Grandpa for his birthday, and I am not sure how long I will be there. I love all of you, even Ben.

Sincerely,

Andrew

Then, all I had to do was wait until everyone was asleep. I heard Mom and Dad stopping by Ben's room to tell him, "Lights out in 30 minutes!" I heard my door quietly open, and quickly closed my eyes. Mom walked into the room and came over to tuck the covers around me, and kissed me on the forehead. After she left, I watched the clock minutes slowly tick by as I waited. The clock by my bedside said 10:30 p.m.

I felt my eyes growing heavier as I lay awake in bed waiting for everyone to go to sleep. My closet doors were open, and I saw the shadow of the six balloons I bought at the store today. They were swaying back and forth as if they were excited about the upcoming trip, too.

KatieMae



Kathi Denn is retired Navy wife, a mom of 4 children, and a grandma to 7 grandchildren who has been married to the love of her life for 38 years. KatieMae is the endearing nickname her Dad gave her when she was a kid, and has stuck with her ever since.

Her hunger and desire were born inside of her to write after one of her short stories was published in the school newspaper in the fourth grade. Over the years she has written poems, short stories, letters to her

children, and continues to write and share her words with the world.

Whether it be a smile as she walks by a stranger or an encouraging note mailed to someone who is going through a rough patch, KatieMae strives at least once a day to make a positive impact in someone's life. She is an encourager and a believer that people can do anything they set their minds to regardless what this world may throw at them. Sometimes there will be roadblocks and detours, but it's important to press on and continue towards our dreams.

It is my hope that you find something to encourage you in your day, so you can be an encourager to others you come across. We never know when one kind act or one word of encouragement could change someone's life forever.

