

Balloons and Heaven

*On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.*

— THE NICENE CREED,
THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER, P. 327

EVERYONE HEARD HIM COMING before they saw him. The doors swung violently open, and a young man came rushing through, swinging a homemade weapon made from a pair of D batteries wrapped inside a doubled-up pair of tube socks. In the hallway was a water fountain that he'd torn from the wall and a handful of medical staff, hands to their mouths and eyes as big as saucers.

Sometimes you see things like this, working in a state-run psych hospital that is often a last resort for people in desperate need.

This young man was in that kind of need. He ran to the end of another hallway, where he backed into a corner and dared anyone to get close. Anytime someone approached, he would swing the sock and knock holes in the wall to illustrate his potential for violence.

I recognized him. He and I had built some rapport, so I headed down the hallway toward him. After asking him if I could talk to him, I sat on the floor, and after a few minutes, he gave up the weapon and went back to his ward.

Later that evening, I got a knock on my office door.

“Can I talk to you?” the young man asked.

“Sure,” I told him. “What’s up?”

“Well,” he began and tears filled his eyes. “Tomorrow is Mother’s Day and, well, I need you to help me get a card to my mom. She died last year, and, uh, I made her a Mother’s Day card this afternoon.”

“That’s awfully nice,” I began, trying to understand what my role could possibly be and beginning to glimpse a fraction of this young man’s pain.

“Would you get me a helium balloon?” he asked. “I know she’s in heaven, and I want to send my card to her.”

All my theological beliefs came rushing forward, and I wanted to tell him that a helium-filled balloon couldn’t get to heaven any more than a rocket ship or a kite and that his heartfelt, homemade card had already traveled there because of the love he put into it.

Instead, I told him I'd be right back.

I went to the store and got a Mother's Day balloon filled with helium. When he saw me, I realized from the look on his face that he hadn't expected me to return.

"You ready?" I asked.

He nodded his head, and we headed out into the courtyard.

He tied his card to the balloon with shaking hands and released it into the air.

We stood there, watching it get smaller and smaller, when he said, "Hey, Bo, can I ask you a question?"

"What is it?" I said.

"How far up will my balloon go?" he asked.

"It'll go as far as you need it to."



Bo Cox lives in Norman, Oklahoma, with his wife, Debb, two dogs, and five cats. When he's not playing in the woods with them, he spends his time playing games with people who find themselves in the psychiatric hospital where he works as a recreational therapist. Bo has written for Forward Movement for almost twenty years, beginning with the contributions to *Forward Day by Day* that he first penned from prison in 1995. He is also the author of *God is Not in the Thesaurus: Stories from an Oklahoma Prison* (Forward Movement, 1999).