

# BEYOND CLOUDLAND



## CHIP HILL

# CLOUDLAND books by Chip Hill

Volume 1

CLOUDLAND

Volume 2

RETURN TO CLOUDLAND

Volume 3

BEYOND CLOUDLAND

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Illustrations by Michael Kelley

BEYOND  
CLOUDLAND

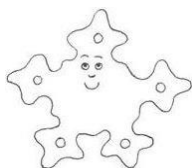
CHIP HILL

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY  
MICHAEL KELLEY

*For my grandchildren Shiloh, Karis, Nathan,  
Lorelei and Forrest*



# 1. A Vision



The adventure started innocently enough.

Robbie had come with his best buddy Neely, short for Cornelius, to the winter carnival. Nothing special, just tents and thrill rides and game booths with different ways to take your money. A chain link fence kept kids from sneaking in, but didn't stop the many carnival noises from carrying all over town. Robbie stepped carefully around mud from recent snow melt and smelled fresh hay, hot dogs grilling, and a faint odor of horse poop. A girl walking by hugging a teddy bear reminded him of his sister Jane, due home from school in a few days.

At that moment, a weird feeling began to take hold of Robbie. He shivered inside his coat. Did

the temperature just drop? he asked himself. The carnival noise stopped. His vision became blurry to either side, but straight ahead he could see super clear, like through a telescope. As he stared, he could make out an object in the distance. It started moving toward him, seeming to float above the ground. How creepy! He blinked and could now make out a person, someone who began to appear vaguely familiar.

Then his body tensed and the hair on his arms stood up. The vision in front of him was his Uncle Josh! It was a vision so lifelike, Robbie took a half step forward and reached out to touch it. But his hand only touched air where his uncle's face should have been. The face assumed a sad expression when Robbie pulled his hand back. As he watched, his uncle opened his mouth to say something. But instead, the vision began to break apart, the details of his uncle's face slowly dissolving.

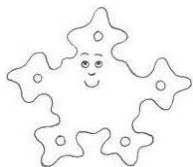
“Wait, Uncle Josh, don't go,” begged Robbie, reaching out with both arms. “Please,” he added.



But he couldn't stop it. Before long, all traces of the vision had disappeared, and his perception of his surroundings gradually returned. Robbie felt empty, abandoned, and sick to his stomach. A longing for his uncle flooded over Robbie. Uncle Josh meant everything to him.

A picture of his uncle's house appeared in Robbie's mind. A house in the woods where he and his sister Jane spent vacations hiking, building campfires under the stars, and listening to their uncle's stories. Then, almost a year ago, his uncle had disappeared. It was one of the worst days of Robbie's life. I did just see his face, didn't I? Robbie asked himself.

## 2. A Balloon Ride



Robbie continued to stare straight ahead and tried to shake off the chill he still felt. It was then he became aware that Neely had moved away a step and was watching him intently. Uh oh. I bet he's wondering what just happened. But I sure don't want to talk about it.

Robbie made a show of slapping his arms across his chest a couple of times and said, "Is it getting colder or is it just me?" Neely's expression didn't change much. Before he could say anything, however, Robbie asked, "So what do you want to do now?"

Neely's puzzled expression slowly became a smile. They had already stuffed themselves on hot dogs and tried their hand at some of the arcade games. "More food?" chuckled Neely, peering over his glasses at the next food stand.

Robbie didn't take him seriously and faked a punch at Neely's shoulder. Robbie's friend was a little chubby it was true, but he was fun to be around. He was the best joke teller in school.

Neely shrugged his shoulders, and they wandered on down the midway, the shadows from the tents thickening and spreading with the rays of the setting sun. Colorful lights began coming on throughout the fairgrounds. Glancing up, Robbie saw some bright green fabric billowing in the wind. "It's a balloon! Come on!" he said, grabbing Neely's arm and starting to run.

Rounding one of the tents and dodging a cluster of little kids, they skidded to a halt in front of a stand selling hot air balloon rides. "Let's go for a Ride! Very Safe Balloon!" said a

sign, with a drawing of people on the ground holding a balloon with ropes.

“Let’s do it!” Robbie said.

“I’m not too crazy about that idea,” answered Neely, folding his arms and shaking his head.

“C’mon,” urged Robbie. “It’ll be cool. We’ll have a great view up there of the carnival and the whole countryside.”

“He’s right,” chimed in the balloon pilot. “Everyone’s amazed how quiet and smooth the balloon is and how far you can see. It’s completely safe, but trust me, it’ll be a ride you’ll never forget!”

Despite his reservations, Neely finally gave in. “You did say you were paying for this, right Robbie?” he added with a skeptical tone of voice. He glanced all around nervously. “I think I want to remember what the place looks like,” he muttered. “In case things don’t go as advertised.”

After receiving instructions from their pilot, they climbed into a large wicker basket. Lines from the basket went up to a golden cylinder

that connected to an inflated balloon the color of a green lollipop. Held in a metal frame over their heads was a gas burner and a set of controls. “All set?” asked the man. “Here we go!” The pilot used a knob to open a gas valve and increase the flame size, like on a gas stove. This heated more air to keep the balloon at full inflation. The boys heard a chuffing sound and felt the heat on the back of their necks. As the lines tightened, the basket slid around on the ground and wobbled softly. Neely pressed his lips together and tightly gripped the edge of the basket.

“Here we go!” echoed Robbie excitedly, despite his nerves being a bit on edge.

Robbie felt a jerk and the balloon began to rise.