

# *Up*

## *The Man in the Flying Chair*



Photo: Charles Gorrill

by Bridget Carpenter

Theatre Pro Rata  
May 26-June 11, 2017  
Performing at Park Square Theatre  
Andy Boss Thrust Stage

## **The play**

Nearly two decades ago Walter Griffin attached over 40 helium-filled weather balloons to a lawn chair and found himself 16,000 feet above the world. Today he's furiously holding onto his dreams and the faded memory of that glorious day, doing everything he can to keep his feet from touching the ground. But his dreams also affect his breadwinning wife and teen-age son: what price do we pay for the dreams we hold dear?

## **The playwright**

Bridget Carpenter is an award-winning playwright and television writer/producer. She received her MFA from Brown University and has taught playwriting across the United States. Her plays have been produced nationwide. In 2002, she was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship. Her recent work for television includes *Friday Night Lights* and *11.22.63*. *Up* was first produced in 2002 (and is unrelated to the Disney film, released in 2009).

More info: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bridget\\_Carpenter](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bridget_Carpenter)

<http://www.newcitystage.com/2009/06/15/making-up-playwright-bridget-carpenters-dream-comes-to-life-at-steppenwolf/>

## **The original man in the flying chair**

In July 1982, truck driver Larry Walters attached 45 helium-filled weather balloons to a lawn chair, and went aloft from a backyard in San Pedro, California. He rose to a height of 16,000 feet, was seen by commercial airliners, and drifted into controlled air space near Long Beach airport. As he descended he became tangled in a power line and caused a 20-minute blackout in the Long Beach area. He was arrested upon landing, charged, and fined. He spoke to the press after landing and said, "It was something I had to do. I had this dream for twenty years, and if I hadn't done it, I think I would have ended up in the funny farm."

More info: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Larry\\_Walters](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Larry_Walters)

Pilot Mark Barry created a website dedicated to the story:

<http://www.markbarry.com/lawnchairman.html>

Writer George Plimpton chronicled the story in *The New Yorker* on June 1, 1998, and it later appeared as the title essay in a collection of his work. A review of the collection appeared in the *New York Times* in January 2005:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/01/02/books/review/the-man-in-the-flying-lawn-chair-the-raconteur.html>

The Australian film *Danny Deckchair* was also inspired by Walters's flight:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Danny\\_Deckchair](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Danny_Deckchair)

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0337960/>

Others have imitated Walters since his original flight (some of these are documented in the Wikipedia article noted above). In 2015, Daniel Boria launched himself over the Calgary Stampede in Canada.

Original story (2015)

<http://www.ctvnews.ca/mobile/canada/man-floats-above-stampede-city-on-chair-tethered-to-balloons-1.2455502>

Follow-up (2017)

<http://www.ctvnews.ca/mobile/canada/calgary-stampede-balloonatic-sorry-for-stunt-1.3328891>

More on cluster ballooning

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cluster\\_ballooning](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cluster_ballooning)

## **Philippe Petit**

French high-wire artist Philippe Petit is best known for his walk between the two World Trade Center towers in 1974. The walk was the subject of the documentary *Man on Wire* (2008) and the film *The Walk* (2015). *Man on Wire* won a number of awards including the Academy Award for Best Documentary. Petit's walk was also the focus of Colum McCann's novel *Let the Great World Spin*.

More info:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philippe\\_Petit](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philippe_Petit)

And now for something completely different:

Citizen science (with balloons): scroll down to item 3

<http://www.yesmagazine.org/issues/science/6-ways-citizens-across-the-us-are-using-science-to-build-a-better-world-20170228>