

## Look Up: a Hot-Air Balloon Adventure

### The Gottabees, Reading Rainbow, and Real-Life Hot Air Balloon Adventures



Bonnie with her family around a hot air balloon basket  
(Bonnie is in the middle wearing a white shirt!)

*If you've ever seen a Gottabees show or any work that puppeteer Bonnie Duncan has made solo, there is often a balloon involved --- whether the balloon helps a character escape, transports them to magical lands, or is a merely a form of transportation.*

*For Bonnie, balloons are magical, beautiful, and mysterious. They were also an important part of her childhood. Read on to learn more about her real-life hot air balloon adventures.*

#### **Q: Bonnie, what's your connection to hot air ballooning?**

When I was four years old, my family started hot air ballooning. This became our family's hobby for 15+ years --- my grandparents, my parents, and my aunt and uncle all had balloons. Most weekends, we would pack up the van and head to a balloon rally in a neighboring state or fly with other ballooning friends at dawn and then again at dusk."

**Q: What do you remember from the experience of flying with your family?**

You cannot control exactly where a balloon goes or lands. Radio communication was limited at the time (there was no GPS readily available), and the chase crew depended on maps, a good sense of direction, and continual attempts at keeping sight of the 7-story high balloon flying overhead in order to meet the balloon when it landed.

The landowners of wherever we landed were always amazed and overwhelmingly wonderful. For them, a colorful gentle giant that sounded like a dragon had just floated down from the sky and landed in their yard or field at 8:00 am on a Saturday.



*Bonnie with her grandparents and cousins in the 1980s, awaiting a hot air balloon flight.*

Each flight was a new adventure, filled with characters and experiences that we still recount to this day as a family.

**Q: Do you have any other fun stories to share?**



*Reading Rainbow's LeVar Burton visits a Balloon Rally hosted by puppeteer Bonnie Duncan's family in 1984.*

One story that I so love sharing with my own children is that Reading Rainbow was filmed during a balloon rally that my father organized. LeVar Burton flew in our balloon and was part of our weekend. I was eight at the time and this was really special because I was a BIG FAN of the show. But don't just take my word for it...

The closing credits to Season 2, Episode 1 feature a beautiful sequence that gives you a sense of what it's like to be in a balloon. You can see all of my family's and friends' balloons!!

Try watching this video on [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com).



### *Look Up: a Hot Air Balloon Adventure*

Join Bonnie on an almost-true story from her childhood about hot air ballooning. You'll float among the clouds, learn how to pilot a balloon, and attempt to harness the wind. You might even have breakfast with a baby dragon, if you're lucky.

Will we meet a baby dragon? Find out during ScreenPLAY!



For more factual information about hot air balloons —

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hot\\_air\\_balloon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hot_air_balloon)

<https://www.explainthatstuff.com/how-hot-air-balloons-work.html>