

A Summary of Joseph Bayly's *The Gospel Blimp*

by B. Nathaniel Sullivan

The group met one warm, Summer evening in George Griscom's backyard. It was just a social gathering, but before long the discussion focused on ways to reach the people of the city with the gospel. George and Ethel were especially concerned about their next-door neighbors, whom they knew were not Christians.

The idea of the Gospel Blimp was brought up soon after a plane flew overhead. They use blimps in advertising, so why couldn't a blimp be used to spread the good news about Jesus Christ? It sounded like a great idea! Signs with Scripture verses on them would trail the blimp (everyone would see them), gospel tracts would be dropped all over the city (who wouldn't read these if they fell down from the sky?), and, as it turned out later, a public address system would be added (no one would be able to avoid hearing the good news about Jesus). All of this would require a great deal of planning and effort, but it would be worth it. After all, what better way was there to show the Griscom's next-door neighbors how to become Christians?

In the months ahead, the group invested significant time and energy into the project. The dream became a reality with the delivery of the blimp in April of the following year. The blimp was christened with a bottle of Seven-Up (Seven-Up was used, of course, because seven is the perfect number), and then began her gospel voyages. Tracts were wrapped in colored cellophane and dropped from the blimp. At first everyone picked them up to see what they were, but it wasn't long before everyone's curiosity was satisfied and little interest was shown. At least they got the gospel after the first few times the tracts were dropped.

The signs seemed to work really well. They could be seen for blocks, and the group knew they were spreading the gospel.

The public address system wasn't as effective as the other methods, at least at first. During the first gospel program the volume was turned up too high, and it upset a few people. The gospel was much more well received when the blimp operators turned down the volume a bit. Funny though — when the board meetings were held (the board was composed of the members of the group who had first come up with the idea), George Griscom never indicated that his next-door neighbors were showing any signs of becoming Christians.

As time passed, the project grew in many ways. It became very well known in Christian circles (that's where the money came from). The General Director of International Gospel Blimps, Incorporated — Herm — was being invited to speak at a growing number of missionary and church groups.

Things went along pretty well, with only a few exceptions. George quit coming to the board meetings after a slight technical problem with the PA system. Well, it really wasn't so much a technical problem as it was how Herm dealt with it. Anyway, the rest of the group gave Herm the benefit of the doubt. Maybe that helped them to do the same thing again when Marge, Herm's wife, filed for a divorce. It seems that she felt Herm was spending too much time on the blimp. This, of course, was hard for everybody to take, but the general feeling was that things should continue as they had been, "for the sake of the blimp."

Weeks and then months passed by, and before everyone knew it, it had been three full years since the meeting had been held at which the idea for the blimp was born. For old time's sake, the Griscoms invited everyone over for a picnic supper, like the one three years before.

This one was a little different, however; because the Griscom's next-door neighbors were there, too. And they had some good news to share. They had become Christians! How did that happen? It must have been the gospel sign on the blimp. No? How about the program that came over the PA system — it had to be that, right? Wrong again. And it wasn't the tracts wrapped in colored cellophane, either. Then what *did* compel the

Griscom's next-door neighbors to become Christians?

Well, after George stopped attending the board meetings, he and Ethel took a personal interest in their neighbors. George went on fishing trips with his neighbor, and when his wife was sick and in the hospital, Ethel came and visited her often and did everything she could to help. Because the Griscom's next-door neighbors saw Christ in Ethel and George, they wanted what they saw. And so they came to Christ.

The group invited the neighbor to help with the blimp, but he couldn't. The next day he and George were going bowling with the fellow who lived across the street.

Read the book! Watch the film!

Joseph Bayly's searing yet humorous and instructive book, The Gospel Blimp,¹ was first published in 1960. In 1967 it was made into a film, and Warhorn Media now has made it available for viewing in HD² for the first time ever. Read the backstory as told by Bayly's grandson and namesake here.³ Read these reflections about the book from Joseph Bayly's son, Tim, here.⁴

This summary is available online at <https://t.ly/9tZSW>.

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Notes:

¹ <https://t.ly/ogHtN>

² <https://t.ly/igV-d>

³ <https://t.ly/gFcWs>

⁴ <https://t.ly/5ykvb>