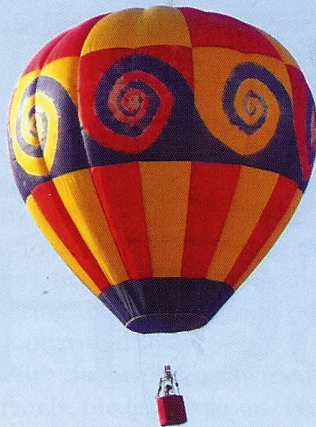


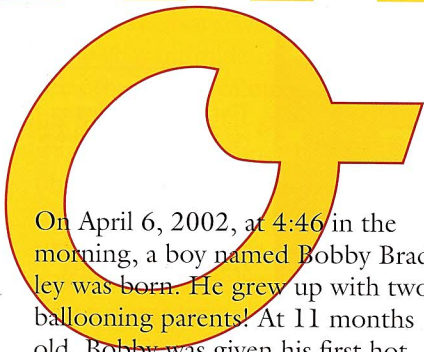


You're never too little to have

*Big
Dreams!*



*The Bobby Bradley Story:
in his own words!*



On April 6, 2002, at 4:46 in the morning, a boy named Bobby Bradley was born. He grew up with two ballooning parents! At 11 months old, Bobby was given his first hot air balloon ride by his father, Troy Bradley. His first word was balloon. When he was 4, Bobby finally got over his fear of the burners when his Dad let him actually burn for the first time. From then on, Bobby began training to be a hot air balloon pilot. That boy is me.

When I was 7, we went to Turkey for three week to visit my Dad who was living and flying there. In Turkey, my Dad and I had an idea. What if I could solo in a hot air balloon before I was 14? Two years later my Dad, Mom, Jonathan Wolfe, my sister, and I all sat together as we worked on the design of the balloon I would soon solo. About 6 months after designing the balloon, naming the balloon, building the balloon, getting the gondola, building the equipment, making checklists, testing the balloon, and so much more, I was ready! Ready to solo.

It was early in the morning on June 4, 2011, and it was time. When I woke up, I had the best feeling ever. I knew that if the weather was good I would soon be soloing. "I just want you to be safe, Bobby," my Mom said. So I said to her, "You can trust me, Mom." We drove to the launch site. As time passed, more and more friends and family arrived. Seeing all of them made me feel so great. There were tons of media but I didn't care about them. I cared about saying good bye to friends and family and making sure all my equipment worked. My equipment included 1 cell phone, 2 radios, 1 harness, 1 helmet, 2 GPS units, 1 flight instrument, 3 lighters, 1 striker, 1 10 gallon tank, 1 fire extinguisher, and 1 burner. I also brought along a

good luck charm from our Japanese friends, my father's special coin, and my lucky bears. My grandmother gave me a special gift; it was my grandfather's flight jacket. Since he died before I was born, it was a special way I could have him with me and watching over me on the flight.

It was finally time to take off. I went through my checklists and hugged my family good bye. My last priority was saying good bye to my sister. After that, I hit the burner and I was off! When I was in the air it was the best feeling on earth, or really the best feeling OFF earth! I wasn't afraid to be alone because the winds were calm and I already knew how to fly the balloon. By the time I launched I knew I had done it! I had practiced a lot and everything was going great. 26 minutes in, my Dad tells me on the radio, "Hey Bobby, why don't you look at this road over here." I said, "Wait! What, you mean landing? I don't

want to land, I love it up here." He made me come down but I had to drop my toy skydiver first. That was something I had promised my sister I would do.

As I was coming in for landing, I was so excited. From the point I launched until I came back down would be my first solo! I was about to touch the ground. It was a perfect stand up landing on a road and my crew was already there. What a great feeling! I did it!

As my crew packed up my equipment, the media all came to talk to me. That felt weird and kind of annoying. I just wanted to hang out with my friends now. This was only my first solo, the beginning. Since then I have soloed two more times and look forward to a fourth, a fifth, a sixth, and so much more ballooning in my future!



It was a perfect stand up landing on a road and my crew was already there. What a great feeling!

I did it!

Above photo by Jill Stevenson, Opposite page by Douglas Riddle, inset photo by Stacie Gebeke