

The Broccoli Incident

A true story from [The Rocklore Files](#)

Of [Jamie Thompson](#)

Published by Jamie & Judy Thompson

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In the spring 1986 I was living at "The Mission House" in Pittsburgh with three other guys: David Young, Joseph "Bud" Kelly, and Scott Dietz. Being bachelors, fellow musicians, and good friends we often decided at the end of a long workday to go to a restaurant rather than deal with our messy kitchen. There were many decent family restaurants near our home. One of them was a real meat and potatoes kind of place called "Mr. Steak." We ate there at least four times per year because they had a birthday special - bring your birthday group to Mr. Steak and the birthday person gets to eat for free. Such a deal!

One fine day in May it was David's birthday and he wanted to go to Mr. Steak so we did. After we were all situated in our roomy booth against the wall we informed our waitress of the presence of our birthday boy. She promptly brought us a happy birthday helium balloon and taped it to our table. After submitting our orders we sat there chatting and admiring our balloon. Soon thereafter she returned with our appetizer - a plate of raw vegetables encircling a cup of dip.

Before long Bud and Scott's creativity kicked in and they endeavored to experiment with the balloon. They untaped it from the table and tied it to a piece of broccoli. When they let go of it, though, instead of rising or drifting in space it descended slowly and came to rest on the tabletop. David and I watched as Bud and Scott carefully pulled small pieces of stem from the broccoli until its weight precisely counteracted the balloon's lift and it finally hovered. With that accomplishment under wraps we continued chatting while the broccoli drifted aimlessly around our booth.

Before long our dinners arrived. As our waitress was distributing plates she eyed the free-floating broccoli with a mixture of wonder and bewilderment. We kept straight faces the whole time, though, and she didn't say anything about it. After she left we broke into hysterics and gave thanks for our food.

As the meal progressed our broccoli friend hovered faithfully around our table. After a while, though, the novelty of the situation wore off and we started to get a little antsy for something different to happen. So we decided, against all acceptable standards of decorum, to launch the broccoli/balloon out of our booth and into the restaurant. Being the birthday boy, David did the honors. He gave the balloon a little tap and away it went.

We watched anxiously as it drifted slowly toward the middle of the room. Other customers were sitting at their booths and tables eating and chatting but no one seemed to notice the broccoli as it drifted by. The whole scene was totally absurd and we were enjoying ourselves thoroughly.

But then the balloon got caught in an air current that pulled it up to the ceiling. Bud and Scott launched into an intense discussion about whether or not they had taken too much mass off of the broccoli's stem. Sadly, it looked as though our balloon's maiden voyage was going to come to a soporific end against one of those fake styrofoam crossbeams.

It hit the beam, stalled for a few seconds, and then gently skidded and bounced along its length. Bud and Scott observed that there was a ceiling fan on the other side of the room. They deduced that the air it was drawing had lifted the balloon to the ceiling and was now pulling it in like a tractor beam! The closer the balloon got to the fan, the more it sped up. The question was... what would happen when it hit the fan? Would it explode, causing everyone in the restaurant to hit the deck?

We didn't have to wait long for the answer. The balloon entered the sweep of the fan blades, making a dull thud. Then it flew away from the fan at high speed. A well dressed, middle-aged woman sitting at a table nearby heard the thud and turned to see what was going on. The moment she turned, though, she was stunned. The broccoli was making a line drive for her nose! She crossed her eyes to keep it in sight as she lunged backwards to avoid being hit but she wasn't fast enough. The broccoli tweaked her right on the

end of her nose! She looked absolutely bewildered as we all broke into uncontrollable, hysterics!

Meanwhile, a cook who was leaning against a wall by the kitchen taking a break saw the whole preposterous event unfold. The moment the broccoli made contact with the woman's nose, he rushed out of the shadows, snatched it out of the air, and disappeared into the kitchen with the balloon flailing behind him!

Our laughter abruptly ended because we all assumed we were in big trouble and that it was just a matter of time before someone asked us to leave. We sat at our table with our arms at our sides looking straight ahead with long guilty faces.

Suddenly, from somewhere behind the kitchen door we heard a loud **“POP!!”**

We all looked at each other in horror.

“They executed our balloon!” Scott said, aghast.

This brought a fresh round of hysterics. We were trying to play it cool but we couldn't help ourselves. By now everyone in the restaurant was looking at us. We figured we were caught so why not enjoy getting thrown out of the place?

But no one came out to talk to us. We finished our meals, paid our checks and left. No one said a word to us.

Several months later we had a party at our house. As we greeted people and became acquainted with folks that we didn't know very well I met a young woman who told me that she worked as a waitress at Mr. Steak. Of course, I got all excited and told her about our little madcap adventure there. As my story unfolded a look of recognition developed on her face and she said, “The Broccoli Incident!”

I stopped and said, “The Broccoli Incident?”

She smiled and said, “You guys were responsible the Broccoli Incident! I can’t believe it!”

It turned out that our little escapade had achieved legendary status at Mr. Steak and had become part of the folklore of the restaurant! She said that everyone who works at Mr. Steak knows about “The Broccoli Incident!”

We were VERY pleased with ourselves. The next thing we knew everyone at the party demanded to hear our wacky little story and we had a hilarious time reliving a very silly event that couldn’t have occurred if we had planned it.

The End



Jamie Thompson is a writer, musician, songwriter, photographer, videographer, husband, and a stay-at-home-dad with two small children.

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