

Tether  
by  
Mickey Bolmer

Monday, June 15, 196\_, 6:04 AM EST

"This is Walter Cronkite with a special bulletin from the Manned Spacecraft Center in Houston. Ground Control has lost contact with Freedom Flier. It is expected that communications will be reestablished momentarily. Astronaut Bob Green reported just before communications break down that all systems were go and that Astronaut Jim Anderson was half way through his space walk. Our continuous live coverage begins at 7:00 AM EST."

Why, Jim? Why'd you do it? Why  
I just had to.... it's so beautiful.

Ground Control confirms: we do not have power to reach you.

That's right, Bob. Earth and stars now sing together, all the universe holding me. It was the only way. It had to go; it held me to earth.

It was your life line. Jim, the back-up holds only twenty minutes of oxygen. At our present drift your communications will be cut in 2.34 minutes.

Bob, let's talk. Have you ever wondered where to find God? Have you ever prayed?

Of course. I'm praying right now--for you.

Where do you find God, Bob?

I don't know. In heaven, I guess.

Have you ever wanted to swing so high that you never come down? Or sail west right off the edge of the earth? Our families have climbed mountains together. There you are on top of the world Do you want to go down? Or do you want to climb forever? That's where I find God When I stepped out of the capsule, there I was in heaven, except for one thin tether that was so easy to cut.... and now God is all around.

Dammit, you're insane.

I hope, not God damned

What if it gets out? You're just like my son, never thinking of consequences. If I've said it once, I've said it a thousand times, "Junior, think before you act. You can't...."

Bob, Bob, calm down. Everything will be OK. I am sorry for the trouble this will be but you know the program will handle this. Your capsule is so small shining against the Pacific I will miss you, but how the universe grows

Stop it. Dammit, I won't listen. It's just suicide and a lot of fancy words won't make it anything else. You don't have the right to choose your end. That's God's choice, not yours. You've no right. Are you God that you go knocking on his door to say, "Here I am Let's chat."? You may not leave us.

Bob, all our lives we are leaving Our bodies age, leaving us behind The world is always spinning us on to new time, new places, new people, and just when it gets us there, it spins right on, leaving us or them behind Life is leaving Now I am Here No Jim. Our love, sometimes our hate and fear, ties us together, holds us to

earth as tightly as mothers' wombs. I'm held to earth right now as tightly as if I were in Mary's arms, by Mary, by my children, by my parents, by their parents, by my children's children. You can not cut yourself off from earth. Why earth's gravity is still pulling you, earth still holds you. You can not cut yourself off. You have not the power.

Bob, the cord is cut Let me go Do not hold me

Jim, we've only got seconds left. What about Celeste? What about the program? What do I do? What do I say?

Say, Bob? Say what the earth tells No worries God is beautiful

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Monday, June 15, 196\_, 7:00 AM EST

"Good morning. This is Walter Cronkite from the Houston Manned Spacecraft Center. Communications with Freedom Flier was reestablished at 6:51 AM EST. Ground Control tells us that there was a switch malfunction. The problem is corrected and should not reoccur. Both astronauts are well. Jim Anderson is back in the capsule after a very successful space walk. He reports that the beauty is breath-taking. Both astronauts are now in a rest period with all communications shut down. At 9:00 EST they are scheduled for a meal and then a very busy day. They have one more scientific experiment and then in their 60th orbit when they are over southern China, they will fire their retro rockets for a splashdown southeast of Okinawa. Our cameras are on the nuclear carrier, the Nimitz, and our live coverage will continue through splashdown, expected at 4:40 PM EST, right up to the arrival of Astronauts Anderson and Green on the Nimitz back from space."

Monday, June 15, 196\_, 6:30 PM EST

"Good evening. This is Walter Cronkite with the news. Today, as many of you already know, astronaut Jim Anderson lost his life when Freedom Flier sank 250 miles southeast of Okinawa. Astronaut Bob Green escaped. Communications problems plagued the reentry. The capsule was about 100 miles off target. When the reentry team reached the point of splash down, they found only Bob Green. He is now being debriefed by NASA. Ground Control officials indicate that the capsule's flotation devices failed, and that Bob Green blew the hatch on the sinking capsule, and he was blown free but Jim Anderson was trapped inside. Unfortunately the capsule was over the Ryuku Trench where the waters are as much as 4 miles deep. A special Navy deep dive crew is being sent to the area, but officials do not believe the body or capsule can be recovered. President Johnson has spoken with Astronaut Green, Mrs. Anderson, and officials at NASA. Meanwhile in Saigon..."

Friday, June 19, 196\_, 6:56 PM EST

"Tonight we close our show with the end of a sad chapter in the United States space program. Today, in the courtyard of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, President Johnson dedicated a plaque to the memory of Astronaut Jim Anderson. Cardinal Spellman conducted the ceremony. Here are Jim Anderson's wife Celeste and fellow astronaut Bob Green putting a wreath below the plaque honoring an American space hero. That's the way it is. This is Walter Cronkite for CBS News. Good night."

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"Celeste, it's Bob. Can I come in for a few minutes?"

"Sure. Can I get you a cup of coffee?"

"Thanks."

"Here, sit down. I'll be right back."

Bob did not sit. He wandered the room, as if seeing it for the first time. He noticed how, in the large photograph over the mantel, the moon seemed to hang just within reach. Now the antique astrolabe, the moving model of the solar system, even the family Bible held new meaning. He picked up a photograph of their two families smiling on the top of Mount Hood. In his jacket pocket, a copy of the tape of their last conversation weighed. He had come, feeling that it should go to Celeste, that she would understand, perhaps help him to understand.

"Here Bob, why don't you sit down?"

"Thanks, Celeste. Celeste, if I'd known, maybe I could've saved him."

"I know you did everything you could. Without flotation devices, we all know just how fast a capsule goes down. It's a miracle that you got out."

"Celeste, it didn't happen that way. I can't explain. Sometimes I think I imagined it all. But here, listen to this tape. Maybe you'll understand. I've got to go. I'm sorry."

He fled the house. Celeste went to Jim's desk, took out his tape player, fed the tape through the machine into the reel, and hit play. There was nothing but a high pitched tone. She tried fast forwarding, but got the same tone. She absent-mindedly let it run as she considered what Bob had meant by "It didn't happen that way." And why give her this tape? Perhaps Bob had wanted to say something but knew he couldn't and so had put it on tape. Well he must have brought the wrong tape or maybe his recorder wasn't even working. He seemed so upset. She rewound and tried again. Nothing but the tone. Strange though. It was almost musical.

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