



Balloon Boy Parents Plead Guilty to Lying

Richard and Mayumi Heene Take Plea Deal After Balloon Hoax to Avoid Wife's Deportation

By RUSSELL GOLDMAN

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The [Colorado couple](#) who tricked the nation into believing that their 6-year-old son had floated away aboard a [homemade helium balloon](#) will plead guilty to lying to authorities, the lawyer for the boy's father said today.

Under the deal, Richard Heene, 49, will plead guilty to a felony charge of attempting to influence a public servant. [Mayumi Heene](#), 48 and a Japanese citizen, will plead guilty to false reporting, a misdemeanor, lawyer David Lane said in a statement.

Lane said the Heenes accepted the plea deal rather than risk a trial in which Mayumi, if found guilty, would face deportation to Japan.

"Upon reviewing the evidence, arguably, Mayumi could have possibly ended up being deported and Richard could have proceeded to trial and had a good chance at an acquittal," Lane said. "This, however, would have put the family at grave risk of seeing a loving, caring, compassionate wife and mother ripped from the family and deported. That was not an acceptable risk, thus these pleas."

Although the law provides for a 90-day sentence for the husband and a 60-day sentence for his wife, Lane said, "the prosecutor has stipulated to a sentence of probation."

The couple sparked a nationwide panic when they called 911 Oct. 15 to report that son Falcon had climbed inside a saucer-shaped balloon that became untethered in the backyard of their Fort Collins home. Local, state and federal authorities followed the runaway balloon and sheriffs fielded hundreds of phone calls with suggestions on how to get the boy safely to earth. Thousands watched riveted as the balloon soared across the Colorado sky.

'We Did This for a Show'

Soon after the balloon landed with no one aboard, the Heenes said they found Falcon hiding in the rafters of the family garage.

But, within hours, celebration turned to suspicion when, during a CNN interview, the boy said, "We did this for a show."

The Heenes had twice been on an ABC reality-TV show and a [former business partner](#) said Richard Heene had been in talks to create his own show and had likely launched the balloon as a publicity stunt.

In separate interviews with police Oct. 17, Mayumi Heene admitted the incident was a hoax.

The children were interviewed by [child protective services](#) after the incident but Lane's statement does not say whether the family will continue to be monitored.

Calls to the Larimer County district attorney and Mayumi Heene's personal lawyer were not immediately returned.