

Above & Beyond

In our understanding of things, our idea of a Browning™ Automatic Rifle, with telescopic lens, a Chriscraft Silver Bullet™ 20 Limited Edition, or the Nike Air Pegasus™ Plus convey a sense of clear definite meanings. They have color, texture, shape, and weight.

But how about a thing called “Above & Beyond?” How do we measure it? Can we grasp it and hold it in our hands?

Have you ever wondered where “above & beyond” is?

Perhaps you feel as Cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin felt on April 12, 1961. Yuri was the first person into outer space and was rumored to have said as his spaceship circled the globe, “ I don't see any God up here,” after leaving the earth's orbit. This quote was later attributed to a speech that Nikita Khrushchev delivered at a Communist Party Rally.

Or perhaps the words uttered by Astronaut Buzz Aldrin, 'When I consider the heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the Moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained; What is man that Thou art mindful of him?' (A verse from Psalms), comes to mind.” Or maybe you find good meaning in Lieutenant Neil Armstrong's declaration, at **09: 24** in the morning as the sun streaked magnificently over the horizon. Armstrong said: 'That's one small step for (a) man; one giant leap for mankind,' This statement was made when the Apollo 11's lunar module touched down on the moon on July 20, 1969.

At the outset of World War Two, on September 3, 1941 to be precise, the Germans experimented with the deadly poison Cyclon B on Polish opponents and Jews at the Auschwitz Concentration Camp, in Poland. All of their prisoners were killed, and the Nazi scientists proclaimed the test a success.

At the same time, on September 3, 1941, as he was training for war, Capt. John G. Magee Jr., of the Royal Canadian Air Force, penned these words,

“High in the sunlit silence. Hov'ring there,
I've chased the shouting wind along, and flung
My eager craft through footless halls of air.
Up, up the long, delirious, burning blue
I've topped the wind-swept heights with easy grace,
Where never lark, or even eagle flew --
And, while with silent, lifting mind I've trod
The high untrespassed sanctity of space,
Put out my hand and touched the face of God¹”.

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¹ “High Flight,” ©Copyright 1943, The Yale Press.

Back down here on earth, where today's teen-agers are seduced into drug use, contemplate suicide, or otherwise live life in the fast lane and where the annual number of new AIDS diagnoses is an estimated 37,041.

In total, an estimated 1,051,875 people have been diagnosed with AIDS in America. According to the Center for Disease Control for June 2009, there were an estimated 14,561 deaths from HIV/AIDS in 2008 and climbing. Since the beginning of the epidemic, an estimated 583,298 people with AIDS have died in the USA. Among men who have sex with men, there has been a rapid rise in new infections since the early 1990s.

This is cause for pause, and wonderment.

Is there a real meaning; is there any substance to Above & Beyond that we can grasp in our hands?

And so, when you and your party are setting up camp for that first night out in the wilderness, and pitching that new Kelty Gunnison™ 2.1 Tent, unfurling your new Marmot Lithium® Sleeping Bag, and heating up your MSR WindPro™ Backpacking Stove perhaps you will have time to stop and look at the horizon. As the evening sun slowly melts into the emerald shaded landscape, you might want to stay up until the stars break out, shiny as white dots in the black sky, and look above and beyond what you know into that vastness to think about the meaning of things.

And sometimes, we are called to do that which is Above & Beyond.