

Hey Danny,

You remember this scene?

It's you and me, late afternoon, early summer 2008, taking our new-used, four-wheel drive, champagne-colored Forerunner for its first cruise.

We pull off of Leona. You're buckled into the rear passenger seat. Kenny Chesney is already rooted in the CD player. *And it's two bare feet on the dashboard, Young love and an old Ford, Cheap shades and a tattoo, And a Yoo-Hoo! (Yoo-Hoo!) bottle rollin' on the floorboard.*

Man, you loved that "You-Hoo!" line.

We've got no destination. We head west on Devon. In the rearview mirror, in the lane between your sandy-brown hair and your Spiderman shades, I see the crinkle of your forehead as you absorb the music. *Perfect song on the radio. Sing along 'cause it's one we know....*

As late afternoon turns to early evening, we turn north onto Caldwell. The sun casts echos of the low-slung buildings. Shadows swipe our faces. Pictures shuffle in my head. Their perspectives are silhouettes of dancing bears, collared in color and shaded with comprehensive contentment. Life is good.

I wonder what you are thinking. We travel northbound on Caldwell.

On our right run the houses — a variety of 1930s and 1940s jobbers— each catching less of the sun as they stretch north. On our left sits the forest preserve, nature's place, with its bike trails and footpaths and boundaries for the deer.

That was our frontier once. Remember hopping out of the jogging stroller and seeping into the woods to take a leak?

We make our way to Touhy, then east to 94 West. We hit that on-ramp, I set the cruise control, and we sail, northbound, into the pink and purple sky. We are coasting.

It's a smile, it's a kiss. It's a sip of wine, it's summertime. Sweet summertime.

The song is over.

I look back at you, Danny, and you're touring the land of Nod. But once your nose hits the Golden Arches' drive-through somewhere north of Lake Cook road....

Back home, it's late and you're tired. You've got sleep in your eyes, a smudge of dried chocolate shake on your chin and ketchup on your shirt. Mom takes over from there.

I think I know what you were thinking. It was a great first ride in our great new ride. You were three years old at that time.

Now, here comes your 19th birthday.

* * *

“To live well, we need to stop deceiving ourselves that all is clear or that ultimately all can be clear,” writes modern philosopher Peter Cave. “But although what will be will be, that does not mean that what will be must be. It does not mean that what we do will make no difference.”

* * *

If you were here now Danny, for your 19th birthday, you'd hear something like that around the house, just as Mary Grace, Johnny and Tommy do. I think there's a 75% chance that your response would be 100% the same as your siblings.

And I don't know if it's courageous or if it's cowardly, Danny, but through the sting of resignation I've taken possession of those meditative sentiments.

And since you died, and since your Foundation was born, so much heartbreak, so much fear, and so much anguish has not come into

existence for so many people. Because you, somehow, have altered something about the way things are, and about the way things will be.

Your energy ripples.

You are an influencer.

That's some real fancy icing on your cake, buddy. That's a perpetual *Yoo-Hoo bottle rollin' on the floorboard*.

And to keep your enduring mojo in the Danny Did dojo, we are reaching out to your supporters during your birthday month so that the Danny Did Foundation's impact continues to thread through the stories of all the families you have touched, and of all those to come.

Our goal is to raise \$19,000 this month. You think we'll hit the mark? I do, and the 'why' of it is easy: because your Foundation and the people who support it are solid gold, buddy, just like you.

Happy 19th birthday, Daniel George. Keep on keepin' on, and I'll do the same.

All of my love, all of the time,

Dad