

Wander

Dear Emery and William,

Indulge your father for a few moments while I tell you the story of a trip your mother and I once took, as there are several lessons at the end for you to consider.

A few years ago we flew to Marrakesh, intending to spend a few days there and then fly across Morocco to Fez. But something happened in that gorgeous city, which seems eternally soaked in late-afternoon light.

Essentially, your mother had a brainstorm, which happens fairly often when we travel and which you will one day learn to anticipate, and possibly even enjoy, though this may take many years.

Her idea? Ditch our flight to Fez travel instead to the Sahara Desert in the southern part of Morocco, and get there in time to ride a camel out into the desert and watch the sun rise.

We argued. Rather, I argued.

A crazy idea, I said. How will we get there? Where will we stay? Why change our perfectly good plans now? As you surely know by now, your mother can be quite persuasive.

In short, we decided to change our plans. Rather than board a plane, we hired a driver to take us across the Atlas Mountains and into the desert. We saw Berber villages cut into the sides of mountain peaks; we saw ancient sand-and-mud towns rising out of the barren desert; we saw verdant gorges cut from the mountains over the centuries by roaring rivers.

After a fourteen-hour drive we arrived at an oasis and a tiny inn run by an expat Frenchman, who served us wine and cheese he'd bought earlier that week in Algiers. Sometime after midnight, after writing about the day in our journal, I left your sleeping mother and walked out to the spring for a swim.

I was alone in an ice-cold oasis under a full moon in the desert. The night was completely black and completely silent, the moon so enormous I thought I could reach up and touch it. It was one of the most memorable moments of my life — the kind of moment when you are conscious, even while you are still having the experience, of the fact that you will remember it forever.

The knock on our door (no phones, naturally) came long before dawn. We were driven by SUV further out into the desert, until we came upon a Berber camp. We each chose a camel and mounted (your mother still likes to imitate the groan my camel made when he tried to stand with me aboard), and were led over increasingly higher dunes toward the east.

Finally, on the highest mound, we sat and watched the most beautiful sky you can imagine, watched the first light hit the dunes in front of us, watched the colours deepen and shift in the sky and over the sands. And it was the second time in the space of a few hours that I had one of the most memorable moments of my life.

So why do I tell you this story now?

Here's why: because it sums up some of the most important lessons that your mother has taught me and that I, in turn, hope to teach you.

First: make plans, but don't be afraid to alter them or reject them altogether. When new information appears or if changed circumstances warrant, be willing to adapt and to try something unexpected.

Second: once you decide to strike out in a new or unexpected direction, don't regret the path not taken — throw yourself into the course you've chosen and enjoy and appreciate it as best you can.

Third (and perhaps most important): wander. I wish the two of you many happy journeys throughout your lives.

Your father

Tim Brandhorst is a writer, editor, and publisher. He lives in Chicago, Illinois, with his wife, Amy, and their twins Emery and William.

Take Solace, My Son, in God's Promise of Abounding Grace

The hero son,

We recognize heroes as those who persevere in the face of incredible adversity. The hero calls upon great inner strength and character when seemingly insurmountable odds are stacked against him, odds that would prompt others to give in and simply accept fate.

The hero thinks nothing of personal recognition or gain for his actions. We heap platitudes on our heroes and adore them with great accolades. We often lavish them with awards and remember them through ceremony.

My son, you will never receive any recognition or award for the battles you fight, but you are a hero nonetheless. You wake each day to face incredible adversity, yet you continue to summon some power I can't imagine just to survive in a cold world that to you seems frightening and confusing.

You are alone with your fears and anxieties, even when surrounded by people. You have no way to communicate and no one who can answer your questions. If I could, I would remove your pain and help you enjoy life as other boys do. I would watch you grow and develop into a fine man and take your place in the world.

As your father, it brings me to tears to realize that we will likely never engage in normal conversation and never do even the simple things that I always dreamed we would do before you were born. My son, you don't deserve any of this, as none of it comes as a result of your doing. You see, you were born with severe autism. But take solace, as I do, in knowing that through

God's limitless grace when we get to Heaven we will finally speak and have eternity to enjoy each other's company.

Love,

Dad

Major David Kirkland is a very experienced forty-nine-year old military Search and Rescue pilot in a position of leadership. His wife and he have a severely autistic son from whom they have learned what things are important in life. He has gained more knowledge from his son than from all of his other exploits.

Progress Is a Line through a List

To Duncan, Colin, and Iain,

Many of these things, you have heard from me before, sometimes ad nauseam, but you know the advice comes from the love Mum and I have for you and the hope, as we see you go into the world with a passion for life, that we have been able to give you something to help along the way.

So, prepared like the engineer I am (“progress is a line through a list”) and with all the love and hope I have for your future, here is my “Message in a Bottle.”

On Goals

Don't waste your life drifting along in the stream. Each of you is a successful rower and knows the effort, commitment, teamwork, and focus it takes to win. Always apply those principles to everything you do:

1. Aim high and believe in that goal. Never waiver.
2. Prepare yourself to achieve your goal. Visualize. Never waiver.
3. Respect those around you that will help you achieve that goal. Never waiver.
4. Listen to your critics only to improve yourself. Most of what you will hear is jealousy. Never waiver.
5. Keep a balance in your life. Work hard / play hard . . . but first work hard.
6. Celebrate hard when you get there. Share the joy.
7. Set your next goal. Never waiver.

Remember, in order to finish something you must first begin. Plan and prepare, “pack your chute” as I have often said, but at some point trust your wits and “jump”!

On Career

People are important in your career. Bosses, peers, subordinates, associates, and customers all have a role to play in your success.

1. Always make yourself more important to the Company than the Company is to you.
2. You will need the help of others to achieve your goals. Remember, leadership is the art of getting someone to do something you want done — because they want to do it.
3. People are motivated by the future.
4. Respect is earned not granted. You earn it by giving respect.
5. Walk like you’re going somewhere — always!
6. They say the bigger you are, the harder you fall. This is true, but the climb up is well worth it. You will fail, count on it; but you will also survive. Never let the fear of failure get in the way of your dreams.

On Life

We are not on this planet alone. We have a responsibility to share our gifts and talents with others, and to care about their welfare.

On Family

You are the product of generations of family that hope for your future.

1. Respect that heritage and teach your children the same.

2. Let your kids make mistakes. It's the only way they learn that failure is not a terminal illness.
3. Never buy your child their first car. It is a milestone to independence that they should have all to themselves.
4. When everything around you seems to be dark, there is always family to count on.

On Relationships

Life is a road with many twists and turns . . . for both of you. You need a life partner who will help you hang on in those difficult times and who will count on you for the same.

1. Love with passion. Don't hold back for fear of getting hurt.
2. Choose a partner who makes you laugh, usually at yourself.
3. Marriage is the only partnership where each partner must give more than 50 percent. Be a giver.
4. Marriage is like a garden. It needs tending. Be true to your commitment to each other. When you'd rather strangle them than fix the problem, fix the problem.
5. Share your successes with each other.

On Religion

There are things in the universe that can't be explained. If you want logical explanations for everything, don't hold your breath. Even in science we sometimes use unproven assumptions because the belief in a reasonable assumption proves our theory. In religion it's called "faith." Don't knock it.

Church for the individual, the family, or our society as a whole regardless of denomination or culture, provides Compassion, Community, and Hope to us all. Someday that will be important to you.

Mum and I love you very much and as the next chapter unfolds in your life (and ours) we are as excited as you are about the journey. Give 'er!

Love,

Dad

Angus Beattie, PEng, is a loving father and partner. His business success in construction and design is indisputable. From coast to coast in Canada, you will see the built legacy that has benefitted from Angus's vision. But, more importantly, you need to get ready for the work of his boys — his greatest design and construction project yet!

Goodnight

Dear Branson, Morgan, and Mitchell,

Tomorrow I fly my first trip since September 11. I would be lying if I said I was comfortable going back to work and being away from each of you. For the first time in my pilot career for United Airlines, I realize that returning home following a trip is not guaranteed.

Tonight, as each of you sleep, this realization fills me with wonder. Have I done my best as a father to share with you thoughts and ideas that will bring meaning to your life should I no longer be in it? Have I whispered to you words of hope and given valuable memories? Have I shared with you some of my most important beliefs in case I don't have the opportunity to share them with you tomorrow? Tonight I am afraid of the answers. . . .

I made a promise to a friend a number of years ago that I would never again stand on the sideline of life watching the game go by as others made their contribution . . . without adding to it some of my own. Tonight, perhaps for the first time, I understand fully the contribution that is mine to make and the legacy it will leave behind. It does not involve fame, fortune, or world enterprise; it involves *each of you*. From this moment forward I honour my promise to a friend and jump fully into what I know to be life's greatest privilege, fatherhood.

Some endeavours are best begun tomorrow, next week, or next year. Not this one. Like viewing your perfect sunset filled with reds, oranges, and blues, other opportunities last only a limited time and must be viewed now before they are lost forever. Eventually, for all of us, the sun will set and take with it our opportunity to share, influence, guide, and touch. Tonight you must know that each of you provide the colours comprising my perfect sunset. I will let the sun drop no further without sharing more of myself with you.

Each of you will discover in life a handful of people that bring to you their life-changing voice of value. These people are truly the gardeners of the soul and their voice needs to be cherished. One of those voices in my life, and the friend to whom I made a promise years ago, was Jason Dahl. His voice was silenced on 9/11 as the captain of Flight 93 when his aircraft was hijacked by terrorists and crashed in a baron Pennsylvania field. Jason was a colleague, a mentor, an inspiration, and a friend. It has been over two weeks since 9/11. I cry most every day and I miss him.

Jason's constant challenge to me, and the one I pass on to each of you tonight, was one of personal contribution. On 9/11 Jason provided gentle encouragement to me one more time, not by words spoken but by observing his family and his life lived. Jason's contributions were many. His most important contribution, however, and the one that will ensure his legacy, was the gift he gave as a father and is best illustrated by his son Matthew's eulogy last week.

"My father never, ever, missed a chance to read with me," Matthew said. "Every night he was home we would lay in bed together and read stories. We would spend time together talking, reading, and laughing. I have brought along our favourite story, and, if it is all right with all of you, I would like to read it, just one more time, for him."

He read *Dr. Seuss's Sleep Book* cover to cover. The first few pages he was able to change his voice so that if you closed your eyes, just for a moment, it sounded like Jason's voice reading. Finally emotions took over and Matthew reached the end of the book. After a long pause staring down at the closed book, Matthew looked up and finished his eulogy. "Goodnight Dad."

Tonight I commit to making a better contribution to each of you every day, a father's contribution, by sharing with you words that have brought me meaning, books that have brought me motivation, places that have inspired me, and ideas delivered from those who have touched me most. Tonight I

would like to share with you words and ideas inspired by my friend Jason Dahl.

Each of you has a unique gift and talent to share with the world. It is a gift that only you can give. When found, nurtured, and shared with those around you, your gift will change the world. The moment you commit to discovering and utilizing your gifts and talents an incredible life journey will begin for you. Abraham Maslow said it best, “A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write, if he is to be ultimately at peace with himself. What a man can be, he must be.” Tonight I invite each of you to understand it is never too early to begin thinking about what it is that you must be and never too late in life to find it. Pursue what is in you with every ounce of your being.

As you begin to seek out this seed of potential, know that no far away shore needs to be visited and no exotic destination sought. Your gifts lay not with others or alongside any material thing but wait inside you. It is there you must search and there you will find that the potential for you and for your life is without limit.

If there was only one seed I could share that would begin for you the miracle process it would be this: share your incredible gift with the world. It is not enough to simply find your gift — you must share it with others and understand your contribution will make a difference for those around you. The world and all in it are waiting for your contribution. It is your contribution that will create a legacy and make the world a better place as a result of you having lived in it. There is no other reason for your time here. The answer to life’s toughest questions will always appear when you learn to first help others.

I would never have been able to predict the tragedy of 9/11 or the loss of a close friend. I also understand that tragedy and adversity are part of life. While I struggle to deal with the days and months ahead, I will remember that adversity is part of the learning process and many times carries with it unseen gifts of

its own. While I am not sure of the reasons behind 9/11, I am positive that what can appear to be your worst moments in life is sometimes just an invitation to yourself and to your next magical journey — a journey you would never have had the courage to take unless forced to do so. As I move forward I will search for this next magical journey. The only gift presented from this tragedy may be the reminder of the importance of fatherhood. If so, it is enough and it is a blessing.

Daddy leaves on a trip tomorrow. If, for some reason, I don't return I would like to share with you words (from Richard Bach) included in my eulogy for Jason: "Don't be dismayed at good-byes. A farewell is necessary before you can meet again. And meeting again, after moments or lifetimes, is certain for those who are friends."

To be with me again, anytime in your life, is simple. Look inside yourself to find your gifts and talents. Use your unique gifts and leave the safety of the sideline and instead jump fully into the game of life with both feet and start helping those around you. Make a difference. Make sure the world is a better place for you having lived in it. It is in this game you will find me, waiting for you. It is in this sacred place you will find me smiling at you, cheering for you, and waiting to hold you again. Know tonight it has been my life's greatest fulfillment having you as my children. Most importantly, know that we are friends and we will be together again, forever.

I love each of you more than I can put into words.

Good night.

Dad

Mark Hoog is a commercial airline pilot. He lost a very special friend and mentor during the terrorist attack of 9/11. He was so kind to share this letter to his children with us. Reprinted with permission from Mark Hoog. Copyright 2006.