

Daniel: Heaven and Earth

I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them. - Isaiah 42:16

The first thing the reader needs to know is that, in every other case story in this book, I have changed people's names. In this story, the central individuals' actual names are used and the reason for this is beyond astounding. I will explain later.

When Daniel first came to the studio with his adopted mother, Patti, it was immediately clear he loved music very much and had an innate talent. Daniel was 25 years old and blind, as well as carrying a few other diagnoses including Autism, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, and Tourettes Syndrome. Although verbally fluent, he would not engage in a typical back-and-forth dialogue. His speech was full of non-sequiturs, seemingly free-associated comments and would cut off the thread of discussion at any time, saying, "I don't want to talk about it." He also engaged in some self-harm, hitting or biting himself, sometimes causing superficial, but not serious, injury. After striking himself, he would ask in a friendly, amused voice, "Now what am I doing?" I'm hitting myself with my...what?" I was supposed to answer, "fist," but I soon learned not to encourage this. Patti said Daniel listened to the radio constantly and could play a little piano. At his first music therapy session, he sat down at the piano and began requesting song after song, mostly "oldie" rock songs or standard folk songs. He would not sing, although Patti said he sang at home. However, he could instantly locate the tonic on the piano, and he played insistent eighth notes on that one key throughout the song while I sang and played guitar. It was clear he knew hundreds of songs and, as one song was coming to an end, before the last line or two, he was already blurting out his next request.

Over time, I tried to help Daniel to calm down his frenetic approach, asking that we come to the end of one song before he suggested another. I taught him to play a two note chord instead of one note but he kept on hitting the staccato eighth-notes so that he played every song in a driving style, reminiscent of early rock and roll. He could play a strong basic beat on a drum and as he continued to improve on piano, he learned to play some left hand bass lines, and soon he was soon picking out the melody of any song. He could do this effortlessly and immediately, without any practice. He also became willing to sing certain songs and his pitch and rhythmic phrasing were excellent.

Hallelujah

It quickly became apparent how valuable this music time was for Daniel, particularly in contrast to the mind-numbing and condescending treatment in the day program he'd been attending. So Patti began bringing him multiple times during the week. For one of these sessions, I teamed Daniel up with a few other clients who came to the studio; two young men with whom he developed material and occasionally played concerts in supportive settings. During another session, he would regularly play with Melinda, a young woman with Autism who came for her session after him. Melinda was an extraordinarily talented singer and we usually did a few numbers together before Daniel left, notably, "Over the Rainbow," Leonard's Cohen's "Hallelujah," and a few others. Patti would listen from the waiting room. One day, when her husband was in the hospital, an enormously stressful and heartbreaking situation (more on this in a moment), Patti sent me a message prior to the session: "I need to hear Daniel and you play "Hallelujah" so bad today."

As it turned out, Patti couldn't make it to the session so I asked Daniel's sister, Alice, who brought him, to film it on her phone with Melinda singing and Daniel on the piano. That evening, Patti sent me the following email:

Rick,

I just came home from the hospital after spending the day with my husband and I cannot tell you how much this video and recording means to me. I'll take it to the hospital tomorrow and play to Peter and he'll be over the moon happy. I explained to him this morning that Alice was with Daniel for music and we hoped to record the song. The video makes it the best. Thank you so very much. Such a ray of sunshine!

The following day, Patti and her husband watched the recording in the hospital numerous times. It lifted his spirits so to see Daniel participating in such a meaningful way, bringing joy to an unbearable situation.

Music therapy has become such an important part of Daniel's life, connecting him with other people, offering an opportunity to develop and be appreciated for his talents. Patti says he is always excited to come to music sessions. He is capable of the most infectious joy when we are working on something that excites him. His musical gift continues to unfold as he plays more and more challenging pieces and his ability to stay focused and collaborate also progresses. Patti feels he lives in a musical world, but it was previously mostly a private world. Now he's sharing it.

According to Patti, "His whole world has opened up. You can't possibly understand what you are accomplishing through your efforts. Music has helped Daniel to find himself through the adversity and handicapping of his autism, OCD, Tourette's and total darkness in blindness. Music truly has given him the gift of life."

While Daniel's musical gift is wonderful enough in enriching his life, there are other gifts he has to share. Daniel was born to a poor, unwed mother in an Asian country. Given up at birth, he resided in an orphanage under deplorable conditions. He was strapped into a crib and left by himself for most of the day with no attention other than the minimum feeding or cleaning - no interaction, no stimulation, no play, no toys. Patti said that these underprivileged, discarded babies were simply left to die. Daniel is blind because he was born with congenital glaucoma that would have been easily curable with treatment. However, it was not addressed at all, no care, no medication. A representative from a U.S. adoption agency that traveled worldwide seeking such abandoned, disabled, but possibly adoptable children, spotted an eighteen-month-old Daniel attempting to amuse himself with a shiny object that must have fallen into his crib. He was passing it back and forth in front of his one eye that still retained a slight capability to discern flickers of light. The representative thought maybe the boy still possessed just enough spirit and playfulness to be adoptable and so brought him back to the U.S.

Luckily for Daniel, he came to the attention of Patti and Peter, a couple that had adopted a number of children with significant challenges. Patti and Peter were told by doctors that Daniel could not be expected to talk. But also luckily for Daniel, Patti and Peter had an eleven-year-old biological son, Peter Jr., who took an interest in Daniel. Peter Jr. was not blind but he was also visually impaired and he wanted to help Daniel. Peter Jr. and Daniel became very close. Contrary to the experts' prognosis, Daniel did learn to talk although he appeared internally preoccupied, frequently talking to himself and making strange, non-sequitur statements. Still, he was a friendly, social, spirited child and he went to a school that served children with special needs. People seemed to like him and to be drawn to him but Peter Jr. remained his closest relationship.

Then, when Daniel was ten, Peter Jr. suddenly and tragically died of an aneurysm. Although Patti and Peter Sr. were devastated, Daniel did not appear to be. Patti noticed him talking to himself which wasn't out of the ordinary, but it seemed conversational, as if he was listening and responding. When his mother asked him about it, Daniel said he was talking to Peter Jr. This was very hard for Patti to handle as she was in deep grief over the loss and, in any case, she wasn't too sure what she believed about life after death and people communicating with the dead. Daniel would tell Patti things Peter Jr. said such as, "Don't cry, I'm still here." This may not sound too convincing for skeptics but Patti also said that sometimes Daniel would ask her questions based on information he couldn't have possibly known, saying Peter Jr. told him about it. If asked about Peter Jr, Daniel would speak about him in a matter-of-fact manner, as if he was right there or was away at the moment and would be back soon just like any family member at work or school. One Christmas morning, Patti was

sitting on the couch and Daniel came over and said, "Move over Peter. I want to sit next to Mommy." "I couldn't handle that one," said Patti.

Patti and Peter Sr. prepared Daniel for life ahead by enrolling him in a residential school for the blind. The school also reported that Daniel would sit in his room and talk to himself and, when asked about it, would say he was talking to Peter Jr. Daniel became very close to his primary instructor at the school, Kenneth. Daniel said Peter Jr. told him that Kenneth had a purple front door at his house. What a person, blind since birth, would know about "purple" was one question to consider but Kenneth confirmed that it was indeed the case. (Later, Daniel was to tell me that Peter Jr. told him I had a brick fireplace in my house which was also true).

Daniel graduated at age eighteen, having learned essential skills about navigating the world as a blind person but when he returned home, there wasn't too much for him to do. He was an energetic, happy young man but because of his unconventional behavior, verbal outbursts, talking to himself, self-involvement and so forth, he couldn't be expected to hold any type of regular job. His mother took him to day programs, swimming lessons, sports programs, horseback riding and, eventually, music.

As it turned out, Peter Jr. wasn't the only deceased person with whom Daniel was in communication. When Daniel told Patti that Gerri told him Joan (Daniel's swimming instructor) needed help, Patti didn't know what he could mean or who Gerri was. When Patti asked Joan about it, Joan broke down crying, saying that Gerri was her deceased sister. Joan then explained that she was in emotional turmoil; overwhelmed, depressed and lonely taking care of her invalid father and struggling with indecision as to whether she should adopt a child.

Daniel's gift has touched my life as well. One day when Patti brought Daniel in for his session, she said on the way he kept saying over and over, "I have a message for Rick." When I asked what that message might be, he said, in his typical manner, "I don't know." However, when pressed by Patti, he finally said, "Dottie loves Lise." That's it; no further elaboration. However, Dottie is my deceased mother and Lise is my sister, people I had never mentioned to Daniel. When I told this story to Lise, she began to weep. She said that very week she had been experiencing a profound wave of grief over the loss of our parents eight years prior and was reading a book by a renowned psychic that outlined methods to communicate with the deceased. She was trying, without success, some of the techniques in the book; seeking a connection, a message of some kind. Through Daniel, our mother found a way to console her, to express her enduring love.

Another example occurred a few months after that. I was climbing a mountainous rockface with my son. About halfway up, I realized it was more difficult and dangerous than I first realized and there was a potential for either I or my son to have a serious fall. As I paused on a precipice and negotiated my impending panic, I

realized there was nothing to do but go on so I took a deep breath and everything worked out fine although I was a little shaken up. The next day, Patti told me that during the time I was on the ledge, Daniel had blurted out (inexplicably for her at that moment), "Dottie is afraid Rick is going to fall."

Daniel began passing along other messages to me from deceased loved ones. He told me that my father and uncle were happy with their mother. He told me my grandparents were together and loved me. These weren't vague statements. He used their names; names of people I never referred to in any way; some of them uncommon Russian-Jewish names. There are other examples too uncanny to be happenstance. Daniel can never elaborate or answer follow-up questions beyond his initial statements. "You have to understand," said Patti, "these are things he hears. He doesn't know what they mean."

Then, as alluded to above, tragedy struck again in Daniel's family. Peter Sr., was diagnosed with advanced, terminal cancer. As Peter's condition rapidly deteriorated, Daniel repeatedly told Patti, "Peter say one, two, nine. Peter say one, two, nine." When asked what he meant, Daniel said, "I don't know." Patti couldn't figure it out. Peter Sr. passed away on January 29th; 1/29. Patti was devastated. Peter had been her childhood sweetheart and they'd been together for over fifty years. Daniel expressed no sense of loss. As when Peter Jr., passed, Daniel would say to Patti, "Daddy say 'don't cry.'"

I Got You, Babe

Patti wanted to maintain Daniel's normal routine as much as possible and so continued to send him to music. During the weeks following Peter Sr.'s passing, Daniel was brought by his older sister, Alice, who lived in Europe but had come home for a while to help out. One day, Daniel and I were having fun with the Sonny & Cher song, "I Got You, Babe." As you may know, the song is a duet with Sonny and Cher taking alternating lines in the verse and singing together in the chorus. Daniel and I had worked on this song before with Daniel taking one part and me taking the other but Daniel was often inconsistent, sometimes singing his line at the proper time, sometimes not, sometimes losing concentration, sometimes mumbling his lines in a distracted way. From a music therapy goal point of view, one might say the song offered a good way to work on Daniel's confidence, sense of collaboration and focus.

On this occasion, I discovered if we sat right next to each other and Daniel held a microphone while I sometimes held his hand holding the mic, I could casually direct the way the mic was pointing; toward my mouth when it was my turn or toward his mouth for his line. Daniel responded to this cue and subtle motivational technique, pulling off a perfect rendition of the song. A music therapy intern accompanied on guitar so I could focus on singing with Daniel. We tried it a second time and I asked Alice to make a

video of us on her phone to show Patti. Videos of Daniel's music always filled her with joy and I thought this might give her a moment's respite from her overwhelming grief. The next day I received the following note from Patti:

Rick,

I think I have played the "I've Got You Babe" video about 50 times since Alice brought Daniel home yesterday. The County Health nurse came to visit yesterday and she watched the video and cried with me! Daniel even sat on our couch with the nurse and sang some of his favorite songs that he does with you. It was amazing to watch him. He enjoyed performing for her so much. When he finished he told the nurse "Daddy say he's happy!" So it's started already. He's giving me messages from his Dad and I know it's all meant to be. I'm sure Peter's spirit is here and I'm sure he enjoyed this video as much as he did the one you did for him while he was in the hospital.

It's golden Rick. In the midst of so much grief you have given us this most precious inspiration. I won't give up. Daniel inspires me enough to want to live and keep going.

Best, Patti

This is what it's all about for me. Music's capacity to lighten unbearable pain, to inspire, to connect, to counter despair, to extend outward - through Daniel to Alice to Patti to the nurse to who knows who else if the nurse told someone about it. A few moments of music, inconsequential, even trivial, to the world at large, touches and uplifts the lives of multiple people.

Now, as to why I use the actual names of Daniel, Patti, Peter Sr. and Peter Jr., as opposed to pseudonyms, as I mentioned at the top of this chapter. Patti told me that the day before one of our sessions, Daniel was being excessively chatty; going on and on about me: "When are we going to see Rick? Is it music time tomorrow? Is it going to rain? I don't want it to rain. Will we still see Rick if it rains?..." He was also talking about (and possibly to) his father when he said: "Daddy says tell Rick, Peter not Paul." Patti had no idea what that might mean when she mentioned it to me. Then she asked Daniel again when he came to music, "What did Daddy say to Rick?" Daniel reiterated, "Daddy says, Peter, not Paul." After a moments thought, my jaw hit the floor. Originally, as I was writing this chapter, I had used the name Paul as pseudonym for Peter Sr. I also changed Patti's name to Peggy and Daniel's to Randall. I could only think that Peter Sr. wanted me to use his actual name in the recounting of this story! If this interpretation is correct, the implications are staggering. It would mean that Peter was somehow aware of my thoughts, his name change existing only in my mind (and on my computer) at that point!

One more story - Daniel walked into Patti's bedroom at 3am and woke her up to tell her that Daddy was there and he was talking to her. In the morning, Daniel told

Patti that Daddy was still there and he was saying, "Happy Anniversary." At first that made no sense to Patti. Their wedding anniversary was months away until Patti realized that the day was, in fact, the anniversary of their first date together fifty years ago!

If one believes Daniel's gift to see beyond this mortal coil holds credence, then it is clear he has much to offer, answering some of the deepest questions of humanity and comforting the troubled. He has certainly provided some solace to Patti through her agonizing losses. But my acceptance of the genuineness of Daniel's extraordinary capabilities come not only from Patti's anecdotes. His imparting of messages to me from deceased family members, mentioning names that he could not know by any stretch of the imagination, constitutes indisputable evidence of the life of spirit after death. What does Patti think about all this? We have frequent conversations and she often follows up with further thoughts in an email. Following one of these conversations, she wrote this:

I believe that Daniel was put in my life for a very distinct purpose. I most likely will never live to comprehend the entire sanctity of the true passage he presents to me. Then I say it matters not to analyze and purport into my interruptions. I don't feel that's important. Others have said it's too bad Daniel is hindered by his blindness and his spectrums. Imagine, they say, how talented he could have become. To know Daniel as I do, I say he's perfect just the way he is. The real beauty in Daniel's spirit is not in what he could have been or could have produced. Daniel's beauty is in the message he's attempting to show this world of cookie cutter persons that he is beyond all those expectations. His gift with music is showing us the comfort and absolute resolve a human finds in being lifted with such an exhilaration it soars to unimaginable heights. There is no psychological therapy or drug therapy to release the mind into utopia that music therapy can give us. I find this so evident just to witness Daniel enjoy his time with you exploring more and more of his world. I treasure each session I can attend with him to give me the feeling that life ultimately does give us goodness and to celebrate each day.

In conclusion, I believe Daniel connects to you, Rick, as you are the direct link to his uncultured talent. Daniel is a as a funnel to the spiritual world. The souls on the other side are drawn to this funnel as a port to interrupt unseen to most in this world. Because you are key to his purpose many will speak to you through him. You are unique in your abilities to find the gifts of the disadvantaged and to display these gifts on the world's stage in life. You possess a genius undercurrent to again relate what is unseen by much of life.

Daniel had come into our lives as a messenger to try to heal, if you may, some of the abomination that is around us in daily life. Life is in need of direction right now. How

many will possibly understand the disadvantaged give us insight to the gift of peace? (personal communication, 10-1-2020)

For those who remain skeptical, I can only offer this quote by Shakespeare from Hamlet:

*There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.*