

# DJ DANNY DEE



# AUTOBIOGRAPHY

“From Rags to Mixes”



## The Forward

I had an unusual upbringing, so decided to start writing an autobiography a number of years ago. No idea if anyone would be interested in reading it, but that's it finished now. It covers my life from England into Europe and then through America right up until present day.

Below is what I would have put on the back cover if it was ever an actual book. To entice people to want to read it. Give the paragraph a read and decide for yourself if you'd like to read the whole thing....

“If you're reading this back cover it can only be for one of two reasons. One, you have no notion of who I am and are curious in case I'm someone famous. Or two, you remember the Belfast pirate radio station Energy106FM that I used to work for. Either way, you know (or now know) only about 1% of my life....

When I was kidnapped back in 1975, my rollercoaster journey of a life began. It took me on the run from the police and Interpol through many European countries, finally ending up stateside living in California & Hawaii trying to dodge the FBI. I almost crashed a 747 airliner, attacked Charlie Sheen, lived with Harry Krishnas and got pee'd on by Lassie! Yes, it's been a rollercoaster all right. In 1975 I owned only the clothes on my back. It wasn't until 1986 that my life started to form any resemblance to that of a normal teenager. Now, living in Northern Ireland, my DJ career began. Hence the title of this book "From Rags to Mixes". Enjoy the read. Did I mention I was kidnapped?”

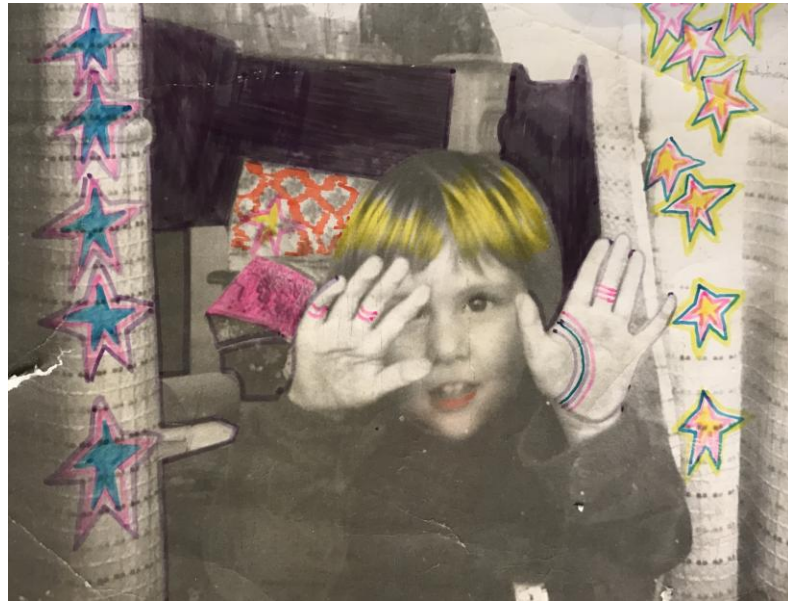
# THE CHAPTERS OF MY LIFE

In chronological order 1975-2026

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## 1: Introduction

It was four o'clock in the morning when the barrage of thoughts started to fill my mind. You know the ones, at first they're all about 'what to do' tomorrow and what needs to be done. Then they start to drift onto things that test the limits of your imagination. Like that invention that will revolutionise the way we hold a pen, or those conversations we have with ourselves about what we would say if a particular conversation happened. I started to think about my life and the places I've been, the things I've seen and the people I've met. My life has been so far from normality that it seems nearly surreal. I guess at the time I just thought that this is just the way it is. I didn't know anything different, and being so young, hadn't anything to really compare it to. As I got older, and started seeing how other people lived their lives, I started to realise that my life was not at all normal. I would see children my age living in nice houses and being driven around in nice cars. Always having nice clothes and riding shiny new bicycles. Whereas my BMX was made up of three different rust buckets barely held together, clothes that I had been wearing for many years that Dad would always say, "You'll grow into them". We never had a car, and while the other children lay in their beds at night looking up at a bedroom ceiling, I was homeless looking up at the stars and tree tops tucked up in a sleeping bag. Sometimes on cardboard or on an old sofa that was there for the dog to lay on in a back yard. It was only then I started to realise what I was missing.... a normal life.



## 2: Me, taken.

I was born Daniel Saturn McCartney in Surrey, England on December 12<sup>th</sup> 1969. My middle name comes from my Dad being an avid astronomer. I lived with my English mother Linda Monica McCartney and my Northern Ireland father William Cecil McCartney (aka King Om) until I was four. In late 1974 they got divorced and as far as I'm aware, it was my mother who got custody over me. This I guess just proved too much for my Dad as he could not accept the fact he wasn't going to be a big part of my life anymore. Within a few months of the separation, my Mom agreed to let me spend a day with my Dad. A decision she has regretted to this day. It was this opportunity that my Dad had been waiting for. I can still picture the day in my mind. He drove an orange MGB Midget with a big picture of Pluto the Dog on the bonnet. Being only five at the time I had no idea what was going on, just that I was spending today with Dad. We had arrived at a harbour of some kind and I thought we must be going on a day trip somewhere. We left the car in the carpark and boarded a ferry as foot passengers. As there were no car ferries where we were going back then he had to leave the car behind. As the ferry pulled away, I could see the orange car sitting by the dock. This was to be the start of an 11 year-long adventure that I will never forget. Until 1986, it was just me and my Dad travelling the world, seeing new places and learning new things. All the while with Dad watching over his shoulder for the police. In the eyes of the law what he did was wrong. Worst still in the eyes of my Mom, what he did was unforgivable. But to him it was just his right. "A son should grow up with his father", he would always say. At my age I didn't know any better, so growing up with just him meant that I never knew what it was like to have a Mom. It was just me and him all the time, that's all I ever knew as a young kid.



### 3: Spain.

The first leg of our journey took us through France and over to Spain. I can remember feeling the heat when we got there, it was sort of sticky or something. I can remember rundown buildings and pigs, lots of pigs. The kids played in the streets, and although I tried to play with them I never understood what anybody was saying. At five years old I probably didn't understand my parents at the best of times, but this was something very different. My Dad managed to get a small apartment in a block of flats that seemed to go up and up forever. There was no lift, just stairs after stairs. He enrolled me in some kind of school shortly after, but it was no use. The teachers and children never made any sense to me, so he took me out of it not long after. I can remember we hadn't a lot of money, so my Dad took to drawing portraits of people sitting in cafés for money. He was very good at it to; the likenesses were uncanny. People would queue to be the next one to get drawn. It turned out that this was going to be our main source of income for the years to come. Although I do recall going around the shop owners begging for change once. After nearly a whole day of this I managed to gather up enough to pay into a movie, only to leave it minutes later finding out it was in Spanish. I told my Dad what had happened, hoping to get some sympathy for all my efforts not paying off. Instead he wacked me one, telling me never to beg for money again. I learnt my lesson and never did. My only other memory was having a crush on a young tourist girl from England. I think she was probably four or five years older than I but was the first English speaking child I had seen in months. She had a brother about the same age who always seemed to laugh at me whenever he could. I was very shy as a child and found it hard to cope with, so I pushed him into the pool with all his clothes on. He wasn't too pleased at all, but his sister thought it was cool and started to pay me a little more attention. I think that friendship, or whatever it was, lasted only a few days. But for some reason it's my strongest memory about our stay in Spain. She left on a bus one day and I cried, maybe that's why it stuck in my head for so long. #LovesYoungDream.





## 5: The Canary Islands.

I don't remember how we got there, but we ended up in the Cannery Islands for a while. It was there that I have my first memory of my late Uncle Ronnie McCartney. He was a very famous Circuit of Ireland Rally Driver back then. My Dad got in contact with his brother back home in Northern Ireland and asked if he would like to come down and see us. Being the kind and loving man he was Ronnie came straight down to see his brother. He put us up in a nice hotel and kept us well fed. Our funds were starting to dry out a bit, and Dad was finding it hard to find interested people in his portrait skills. Ronnie headed back home after a while, but not before letting my Dad know that he wanted us to come home, even if that meant Dad having to face the music. But Cecil was having none of it, he knew exactly what he wanted to do. He just couldn't bear the thought of losing his only son. Before Ronnie left he gave my Dad some money to keep us going. It was generous of him and my Dad appreciated it very much. We stayed on for a few months longer and then left ourselves. We didn't really have a choice as our pictures were appearing in the papers again, even over there! Dad thought that Europe was just too close to the UK, so this time the journey "Was going to be long" he said. The change of scenery we were about to experience was going to be something that I never could have imagined.... America.



## 6: America.

There's one thing you have to realise about my Dad, back then he could do anything he set his mind to. I don't know how he did it, but when in Germany, he managed to find out about getting around the residency laws for entering and staying in America. He met an American woman on her holidays in Germany, and became quite friendly with her whilst she was there. I think she was an artist too, so they had something in common for starters. Also, the fact that she spoke the same language was a big plus. She left Germany to return home, but not after giving us her details and telling us that if we ever wanted to visit, we would be welcome anytime. My Dad very quickly got in touch with her from the Cannery Islands and asked if there was any way she could help us gain entry to the good old U.S. of A. I don't know how he pulled it off, but he got her to agree to marry him over the phone in order for us to obtain American citizenship. I'm not quite sure of the exact details but apparently you could enter America on just a temporary visa, and if you married an American citizen you would then become a fully fledged American citizen yourself. So we got things underway, airline tickets bought and landed in Los Angeles California in 1976. I'm not sure how he managed to raise enough money to pay for the flights, but he did tell me that we now had absolutely no money whatsoever.



## 7: The Flight, and how we all nearly died!

One very interesting thing happened on that flight that I'll never forget, I nearly crashed the plane. Allow me to explain. My Dad was a keen aviator, always going on about planes and his ability to fly albeit light aircraft. Mid-flight, he asked if it would be alright to show his kid the cockpit. Back then it was pre 9/11, so things like this happened all the time. Up we went to see the captain in the cockpit. I remember there were so many instruments and lights, and that how crazy it all looked. The captain sat me on his left knee and told me to hold the controls, saying things like, "Wow, you're flying the plane now kiddo". I was of course very excited, but the captain and co-pilot knew the auto-pilot was on so everything was safe. My Dad starting asking all sorts of questions about this and that, all the time whilst I'm sitting there holding onto these controls and trying to look out the window. As you can imagine, my imagination was working overtime. I was pretending to attack other planes, drop bombs and dodge enemy fire. It was this last bit that caused all the trouble. I remember the controls being very stiff, they didn't move at all. This frustrated me. I'm in control here, why won't it do what I want it to do? I thought. So, I put both my hands on the left side of the controls, jumped off the captain's knee and with all my weight gave the controls one big yank to the left with everything I had. What no one could have foreseen is that a youngster such as I would ever dare to do such a thing, let alone have the strength to do it. You see, what my Dad told me years later, was that the auto-pilot in aircraft in those days had an emergency override feature that knocked off the auto-pilot if the controls were turned harshly. Well let me tell you I nearly pee'd myself when all hell broke loose in the cockpit! As the plane started to bank left the pilot grabbed me and threw me back over his right shoulder towards my Dad. My head banged off the overhead compartment. Maybe this is why I remember it so well. Dad caught me as we both fell to the ground and started to slide to the left. Meanwhile the pilot and co-pilot grabbed the controls and were fighting to bring her round again. I heard screams coming from the passengers behind us. We had gotten to a dangerously steep angle before the pilots managed to bring her back again. "Get that kid out of here!" the captain yelled, loud enough for everyone to hear through the open cockpit door. We walked back to our seats, but not without getting some seriously bad looks from the other passengers. The proverbial walk of shame. They must have known I'd done something wrong. My Dad was told later that had the plane banked another 10 to 15 degrees, it would have gone past the point of no return. Yikes!



## 8: Los Angeles.

So, now we're in the city of angels. There we were, sitting at the airport in California entirely depending on this stranger of a lady to uphold her agreement to take care of us. My Dad was a bit nervous to say the least. But after a couple hours waiting there she appeared, just like Dad said she would. She lived in a nice apartment just back from the beach in a seaside town called Santa Monica. This was the first time I had a bedroom to myself since leaving home nearly two years ago. Every place I can remember sleeping at in Europe I was next to my Dad. This was a strange feeling, I had many nightmares about falling and never hitting the ground. Probably a good thing that last bit, as I've been told you can have a heart attack if you actually hit something in your dream. I don't know if it's true or not, but the falling was scary enough. The dreams eventually went away and I started to get used to this place. It was great, everybody spoke my language lol. When I got enrolled in a nearby school I started to make friends too. My Dad and I would sometimes go down to the beach by ourselves, just the two of us, and sit on the grass banks watching the sun go down. They are nice memories, I will always cherish them. The boardwalks that ran the full length of the beach had to be loads of miles long, just like in the movies. Roller skaters and skate boarders would whiz along this strip all day. It was probably this that got me started with the skate board. I can recall trying roller skates for the first time and nearly breaking my legs. I learnt very quickly that my legs did not go in different directions without pain. I gave the skates up soon afterwards in favour of the skateboard. It was a bright orange plastic board that was very thin and had a pointy nose. The wheels were translucent red and were wider than the board itself. Very 70's. Although I fell off a number of times at first, I was not going to let the thing get the better of me. I practiced so much that at least once a day I had a bruise or a scratch on my legs or elbows. I loved it though. There was nothing like the sensation of freedom when you were gliding down a hill. It probably led to my love of snowboarding later in life, which is quite similar.

Everything was going so well, until our temporary visa was about to run out. I thought this lady who took us in was going to be my new mother, but it was not meant to be. It turned out she had an ulterior motive in the whole marriage thing, and my Dad was none the wiser to her scheme. Also, to top it off, the lady turned out to be a secretly practising white witch! She was a member of a convent and attended their meetings every week. I always wondered where she went because she didn't have a job or anything. What happened next is no lie, she wanted my Dad to go away so she could keep me for herself! What could she possibly want with a six-year-old boy? Kinda freaks me out when I think about it now. As you can imagine Dad was having absolutely none of it. A fight broke out in which her and a few of her friends tried to take me by force and kick my Dad out. He managed to get me away from them thank god, but it didn't stop there. They told him that they had reported us to the police and informed them about our soon to be ending visa, and also about how I came to be with my Dad. We needed to get away from there and fast. We had no money and didn't know anyone that we could turn to. As far as we knew we were wanted by the police to boot. Hitch hiking was out of the question as a cop car could have easily spotted us. We had only one choice, hide in a commune with the Harry Krishna's.

Before I get to the Krishna's, let me tell you about a few things that happened to us on the way to the commune. It involves some famous people and a dog you may have heard of. First off, the commune was at least twenty miles up the Pacific Coast Highway, and we had no way of getting there apart from our feet. So we took the beach way to avoid any police that may or may not be looking for us along the Highway. Let me tell you it's hard having to walk any kind of distance in the sand, much less twenty miles.



## 9: Put some clothes on!

We had been walking for the best part of a day, with nothing but my Dad's backpack which he had managed to grab before escaping the witches of Santa Monica lol. There's got to be a movie in that somewhere. In the pack was a green military metal water canteen, which we filled up whenever possible, and my Dads sketch book and pencils. We had stopped for a rest at an area called Point Doom, just at the edge of the Santa Monica area. The beach was starting to get thinner and we were forced to walk over rocks. We noticed up ahead an area full of sunbathers and beach goers. Except that these people were all naked. We had stumbled across a nudist beach no less. Well, my Dad not wanting to miss an opportunity, started approaching the sun worshipers to see if any of them would like their portraits drawn. Surprisingly, they were quite happy to get themselves captured on the pad. There were all shapes and sizes, but that didn't seem to matter. Nearly everyone wanted their portrait drawn. This was obviously good for us as we were both absolutely starving and broke. After about four or five hours, he had drawn the whole beach, bits 'n' all. We were told of a diner just up the coast a bit, and started for it with the eagerness of getting some grub.



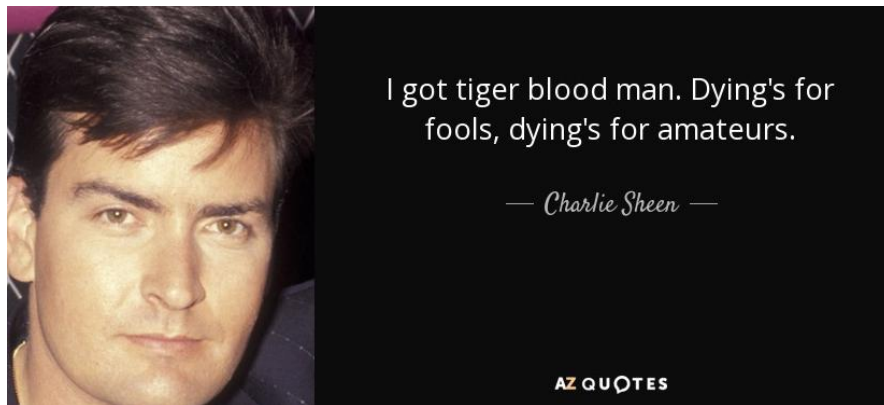
## 10: Kung Fu Master with Beans on Toast.

Upon arriving at the diner, my Dad had spotted this very flash convertible sports car pulling up in the car park. He had recognised the driver from either TV or movies and was straight over to talk to him. They seemed to be conversing and getting on great, but I was getting a little impatient. I wanted food and I wanted it now I kept implying. So the three of us entered the diner together, which I thought was strange since I didn't know who this man was that my Dad found so interesting. The two of them propped themselves up on a couple of bar stools and asked for the waitress. "This is on me", the man said to the both of us, "What'll you have?" At this point I suppose I should tell you who this mystery man is, as it will make what I replied all the more amusing. It was David Carradine. For those of you who don't know who he is, he was "Little Grasshopper" from the 70's TV series Kung Fu. Do you remember the blind man who knew Kung Fu and always saved the day ala A-Team style? That was him. So where was I, oh yes, he had just asked me what I would like to eat. I could have ordered anything on the menu, steak, burger and fries, but no, I was from England and I wanted beans on toast! I can actually remember him not knowing what I was on about in the slightest. My Dad had to ask me if I would care for anything else, I refused of course. I'm six and sticking to my guns, "Beans on toast please!" To say my Dad was embarrassed is an under statement, and to top it all off, the diner didn't serve beans. But because this was David Carradine, the famous actor, they actually sent a member of staff to a nearby supermarket to buy a tin. Ahhh to be famous.



## 11: Dog gone it!

The second story happened not more than a mile from that diner. My Dad and Mr. Carradine had talked for hours, I have no idea why he and my Dad got on so well. Maybe it was because of his Northern Irish accent, or perhaps his artistic and musical talents. Whatever kept them talking did so until quite late that evening. Mr. Carradine eventually left, and so did we. Unfortunately we had no idea where we were going to stay that night. Luckily, the diner told us of a nearby camp site that we could try, but unluckily we had no camping gear. But we headed in that general direction anyway. After following the diner's instructions, we still couldn't find the camp site. It was very late and getting dark, I was very tired from our long walk that day. So Dad decides to find an alternative 'place' to camp. California has a mild climate, so sleeping outdoors anywhere should be ok. We found a very large tree half way up a hill or mountain we were walking up. We figured the camp site must be nearby, and although we weren't going to find it that night decided it would be best to cuddle up against this overhanging tree for warmth and try to get some sleep. We were both so tired that we fell asleep very quickly, only to be woken the next morning at sun rise by the sounds of sniffing and a warm liquid on my legs. At first we were both quite taken back by this large animal around us. It was very pretty and well groomed, so my Dad tried to reassure me that everything was ok, as it was probably just somebody's pet out for a walk. It was then that we heard its owner calling out, "Lassie, Lassie come hear girl!" My Dad couldn't believe it, but as the collie ran off he had a look around. We were right on the edge of a massive estate with big super high iron gates at the front, an absolute mansion. It was later confirmed that it was indeed the home of one Lassie "are kids stuck in a well?" famous pooch! Would've been nice without the pee though.



## 12: Tiger Blood.

One other incident of note happened to us around this clearly celebrity infested area. My Dad met another man whilst out and about who apparently was also very famous. I again had no idea who he was. After they talked for what seemed like ages, he actually invited us back to his house for dinner. There we met his family. Americans can be a friendly lot sometimes, I guess. The kid of the house was about my age, so we obviously started playing right away. After dinner, and while the grownups were talking amongst themselves in one of the living rooms, this kid and I headed off to another big room and started to muck about. Jumping off chairs, throwing pillows, building forts from sofa cushions etc. The stuff kids do. He grabbed a folding chair and started to spin around with it wildly, it nearly hit me. I thought this was hilarious though so said “my turn” and started to do the same with it. The kid laughed as I swung around nearly losing my balance. He then said “my turn” and came in for it, problem was I hadn’t stopped spinning yet. Whack!! He fell to the ground screaming, blood starting to gush from his head! His Dad came running in along with mine. He saw his son laying in a heap on the ground clutching his bloody head, and me just standing there frozen, with weapon in hand. He yelled “Get out of my house!” and threw us out the front door. As we walked away down the street I started shaking, what a horrible experience. But I wanted to know who those people were and “What’s going to happen to that little boy?” My Dad said, “That man was called Martin Sheen, but don’t worry Daniel, Charlie will be fine”.



### 13: The Harry Krishnas, with flowers.

So, on to the Harry Krishna's. After all the excitement of the night and day before, Dad decided that it would be a lot easier if we just took a bus up the coast. Now possible thanks to the nudist beach sun worshiper portraits. A short bus ride and we finally made it to the commune, joy. My Dad went directly to the head Krishna and explained that we had travelled a long way to see how the Krishna Temples in California differ from those back home. A load of bull, but it got us in. The first thing we learnt about living with Krishna's is that there are no free rides, everyone works for their meals and shelter. The second thing you learn is that the food is veeery different. I can't remember the number of times I begged my Dad to take me to McDonald's for nuggets. I eventually got used to their food, but not after a long relationship with Mr. Loo. My Dad volunteered to work in their shop in town. The shop sold Krishna related goods, flowers and frozen yoghurt (a sort of ice cream only healthier) to the nearby townsfolk. I think it's safe to say that it was the frozen yoghurt that kept the business going. After only three days working in the shop, it burnt down. It was nothing to do with my Dad, the frozen yoghurt machines just overheated. So they put him to work on the commune sewer system, talk about a career upgrade lol. He was quite good though, he got a system up and running that worked quite well. I have no idea where he got the skills from, engineering shouldn't have been his thing since he's an artist and musician. Hidden talents I guess. The daily routine within a Krishna camp is simple. Wake up early, pray to Krishna. Have breakfast, pray to Krishna. Do your work, pray to....i think you get the idea. Luckily for me, Dad found a nearby local public school that he could leave me at each day. I don't think he wanted me to fully become one of them, which I'm glad of course. We stayed with the commune for about six months. We finally decided to leave when they told us either join or leave, it was an easy decision to make. Don't get me wrong, they were very nice people and were very kind to us. We were very grateful that they gave us a place to stay while the heat died down, but that way of life just wasn't for us. Next stop.... Hawaii.



## 14: Hawaii.

As we had no idea where to go in California, my Dad, for some reason unbeknownst to me, decided that Hawaii would be a better place for us. Think he watched Hawaii Five-O too much! Anyway, we headed to the nearest harbour where my Dad started asking around if anyone was sailing that way. For those of you who don't know, Hawaii is 'just' off the coast of California. This is what he told me anyway, and that it'd be a short trip. Short trip my arse!! After eventually finding a family that was sailing that way, we hitched a ride, or sail, with them. Two days of vomiting and sea sickness, oh the joy of sailing! It was a terrible journey. I spent most of it down below, only surfacing to puke. It was a small sail boat, all I can remember is that it only had one sail split down the middle. Eventually we arrived at an island called Kauai. This island was slightly underdeveloped at the time, and the main road around the island only covered about two thirds of it. The remaining third was called Desolation Wilderness. We were told by the locals that it's where 'back to nature' hippie freaks camped. So my Dad, in all his wisdom, declared "That's the place for us!" We hitch hiked the journey round, yes it had to be at the other end didn't it. We arrived at the area and bought a small tent, then headed in. We trekked for about 3 hours, walking past campsite after campsite. I remember complaining, "What's wrong with this one?" only to be told it's not private enough. My Dad was starting to go a bit doolaly at this point in our life's journey, much more on this later. We finally arrived at a site that had only a couple other tents at it, and set up ours. Desolation Wilderness is made up of very steep sheer drop cliffs straight down to the ocean. It's very green but rocky, and has these plateaus that people camp on. Usually next to water falls or streams for bathing and drinking etc. To some this is probably paradise. We stayed here for a few weeks, living mainly off the fruit that grew all around us. Bananas, mangos and star fruit to name the best of em. Some weird ones too that I just couldn't stomach. After three weeks of a fruity diet, even my vegetarian Dad longed for a burger. So we packed up and headed back to civilization. Once back in the small town near the end of that main road, my Dad started knocking on doors asking if we could pitch our tent in their back yard. After many failed attempts, one involving a shotgun until he saw me the child anyway, we finally met a nice family with kids that had some wild forest area out back that was theirs. So we set up the tent and enjoyed falling asleep without the sound of a wild crashing waterfall yards from our bed! Sounds nice, but you try getting to sleep with the tap on full.



## 15: The UFO incident.

The first morning in civilization was a nice one. A breakfast of real store-bought food, and being greeted out in the street by kids playing games. Boy was I happy! I made friends quickly, and started my adventures with them. By adventures I mean really complex games, well for a child my age anyways. Alien invasions, covert spy games and hunt the reptile (find lizards) game. I was a weird kid. Within a few days though, it was all about to change. We were going to get run out of the area by the locals, and told never to return under threat of shotgun! Allow me to explain. One night in our tent, I was reading a comic book one of the local kids gave me by candle light on my own. I was startled when I heard my Dad yell out, “Son, come quick....UFO’s!” My eyes widened and my curiosity sparked off big time being a sci-fi geek, so I shot out of the tent and through the bushes where I could hear him calling for me. As I clambered through the underbrush, I could see these flashing lights flying very low from left to right. My heart started to race as I was starting to imagine all that it could be. Aliens! Monsters from another world! What could it be? I eventually made it through and out into the street where some people had gathered. I ducked as a flying disc shot over my head, missing me by feet! I was mesmerized, what was it? Turns out, it was a frisbee, with flashing lights. To be honest, my excitement was still there. I had never seen such a thing, my eyes were glued to it. I had to see it up close, this.... technology. I asked one of the players to let me see it. It was a standard hard plastic white Frisbee with a square 9v battery in the middle of it, and three sets of thin wires leading to LEDs around the edge. It was awesome! To this day, I have owned three of them, and always enjoyed night time games with friends.

So, why were we run out of the area you ask? In my haste to leave the tent to investigate the commotion, I knocked the candle over, which set fire to the comic, which burnt the tent down, which set fire to the bushes, which nearly wiped out the entire cul-de-sac! It was of course an accident, but some locals were understandably upset. We were asked to leave. I felt awful, I knew it was my fault. Dad reassured me it wasn’t, and that the candle probably just burnt down to the bottom and set light to the newspaper under it. My Dad, taking the heat and worry from my shoulders. My hero.



## 16: The Mormons.

There we were, a couple miles up the road, not knowing where to go or what to do. No possessions or money, just the clothes on our backs, and a fear of getting shot. When Dad said, "Lets pray". I looked at him like he had two heads. What was he on about? Pray? For what? To whom? Krishna?? I didn't really know much about religion, but my Dad was starting to take a great fascination with it. Not just one, all of them! He always talked to churchy people and ministers whenever he could, but I never really paid that much attention to it to be honest. I had no interest. But anyway, we prayed. Within a very short period of time, a VW van pulled up beside us and asked if we were lost. My Dad explained what had recently happened to us, who upon hearing of our plight, invited us to stay in his camper van outside his church. Coincidental? Maybe, but it was uncanny. It was a Mormon Church, and this act of kindness led my Dad to like the Mormon faith, more on that later. We lived in this VW camper van outside his church for a few months. I got enrolled in the local school, my Dad got a job doing gardening work, we were eating well, clothed, things were looking up. Perhaps praying pays off after all. After a while, the Mormon guy offered to sell us the van at a very cheap rate. It was probably because we made it our home, and he felt it might be the only home we ever had. My Dad agreed to buy it for what he called, "A frikin steal!" We left the parking lot, and started to explore the island, camping as we went. This went on for another few months until the engine blew up. I knew it was too good to last! He got it towed to a beach camping site where it lay for months, and is probably still there. We couldn't afford a new engine so just lived in it where it was. Back at the Mormon Church where Dad did some of his gardening work, a surprise awaited him.



## 17: The FBI.

All this time back in England, as you can imagine, my Mom was going out of her mind. As an adult now with kids of my own, I can't even imagine how hard and devastating it would be to lose a kid. It would destroy some parents. I'm very glad it didn't destroy my Mother, she's a strong woman, but what she must have went through at that time I can't fathom. It's been around 3 years now since I was taken from her, and she hasn't given up the search. It's gone international now as she suspects we are not in Europe any more. She was right. One day her phone rang, and the conversation went something like this...

Mom: Hello?

American accent Caller: Is this Monica McCartney?

Mom: Yes. Who is this?

Caller: Mam, this is agent Watson from the Federal Bureau of Investigations in Hawaii. Are you the Mother of a Daniel McCartney?

(At this point you can imagine how fast my Mom's heart is starting to beat.)

Mom: YES, yes I am!

FBI: Well Mam, we've found them. Both Daniel and his Father Cecil have been on our wanted list for quite some time now. They are here in Hawaii.

Mom: Oh my goodness! Thank you, thank you so much. I've been going out of my mind for years over this.

FBI: We will be putting Daniel and Cecil on a plane to England soon. Your authorities will have some questions for Cecil McCartney I'm sure.

Mom: This is amazing. I can't thank you enough. So, you have them in custody, right?

FBI: Uh, no Mam. We spoke to Cecil on the phone earlier today. He has agreed to hand himself and the child in tomorrow at our offices here in Kauai.

Mom: ..... you idiots..... (hangs up)

Surprise surprise, Dad decided it was time to leave Kauai, so we immediately hitched a ride on another sail boat (yay says i) to the main island of Hawaii, or the 'Big Island' as it's known. After another vomit inducing 'sail' we arrived at a harbour and had no idea where to go. Luckily the captain of the little sailboat said we could 'crash' on the boat till he needed it again in a month or two, so we did. This harbour is very famous. I don't know what it's called, but it sits right next to a very high hotel with a rainbow painted down the side of it and a lagoon at its base. If you've ever watched the old or new Hawaii 5-Oh or even Magnum PI series on TV you will have seen it. It's always in the opening credits at the start of every show. So we lived there for a month or so, with Dad doing portraits in that hotel whilst I swam in the lagoon. My only two strong memories of that stay were fishing for crabs off the rocks of the harbour only to fall in and narrowly missing an attack by a Moray Eel sea snake. The other was loving Coke-Cola so much that one morning after a boat party nearby, I snuck onboard and went around drinking all the last little sips that were left in the discarded cans, only to see a cockroach crawl out of one I had just drank from. Ahh those memories.



## 18: Aliens.

After living on that boat came to an end, and not because the owner returned but instead because we weren't paying any 'live in' fees to the harbour master (greedy man). We got kicked out. We headed for the main university campus as Dad thought he might be able to teach there. Yeah, cause like that was going to happen. We stayed on campus with some students we met, and I really enjoyed the life there. It felt kinda weird, like I was some brainy super child learning at an adult level. My best memory from my stay there was getting the crap scared out of me when I sat down all excited to watch my second sci-fi film Alien. My first was Star Wars in the cinema in 1977 which solidified my fandom of sci-fi. It was 1979, I was 9 and Alien was all everyone was talking about, so naturally I had to go see it. My Dad snuck me in cause I was way under the age to see it. I was so excited! I sat there in anticipation of space ships, laser beams and rockets, only to scream like a little girl when that face hugger grabbed the astronaut! I remember trying to laugh to quell the fears, "Look Dad, you can see the rollers as the alien's jaw comes out of his mouth....hehe..." Didn't help, nightmares about it for months. We stayed on campus until one of the administrators realised we weren't students, go figure.



## 19: Orange County, or to some, the OC.

So Hawaii was no picnic, very hard to get work or find places to stay. Not very many opportunities. Dad decided, “Back to California” so off we went again. Guess how, yep, another vomit inducing boat trip, how fun. We landed in a small harbour in Orange County near Laguna Beach. No idea what to do or where to go, again. Luckily the captain of said vessel had a larger vessel in his driveway we could crash in. What is it with us and boats?! We stayed there for a while, where I built my first flying model airplane out of balsa wood and very fine paper. It flew! I was so proud. I got three complete flights before it crashed into a heap of kindling. Made a nice fire afterwards though.

We eventually ended up moving, and wound up living with an eccentric art dealer at his house slash gallery on the coast, literally 50 feet from the beach. I can remember going to sleep every night with the sounds of the crashing waves. It was a lot easier on the ears than that tidal wave of a waterfall back in Kauai. Every time I hear waves I think of the place ‘Al Karaly’s Art Gallery’. We lived out the back in a sort of make shift wooden panelled construction, or in layman’s terms a shed. He built very weird and wonderful things this Al. There was a huge soft felted fiberglass red rose for baby pictures for the family, also a life size X-Wing Fighter from Star Wars for taking pictures in as well. I enjoyed playing with it a lot. There was a farmer’s fair once in town, and along with the help from my Dad Al built a huge castle out of wood. The rose and fighter sat outside it, and many people came to get their pictures taken. I sold marshmallows. Yes you heard me, marshmallows. I had this entrepreneurial idea to walk around with a tray hanging from my neck selling marshmallows! Everybody loves marshmallows, right? 10 cents a go. I sold three. Orange County is a very nice place, and Laguna Beach in my opinion is the prettiest part of it. It has everything a kid of 9 could want, surfing, arcades, sweet shops and boardwalk skateboarders. I tried my hand at surfing and was not too bad at it for my age. No tricks or anything, but I could get up and stay up all by myself. Perhaps my love of snowboarding started there. If I ever go back, Laguna Beach would be my first stop. I’d love to see if it’s changed much, I’m sure it has. Maybe someday. We stayed there for just under a year. Next stop.... Lake Tahoe.



## 20: South Lake Tahoe; home.

It was very early in the morning when Dad decided to make the journey. We headed over to the Greyhound Bus Station and boarded the silver liner. I think I slept most of the journey, which took a little over 5 hours. We arrived in South Lake Tahoe at the beginning of 1980. A time when the hair styles were bushier, the cars were looking more modern than before and life was exciting living in this 'turn of the decade' revolution. However we were broke and homeless, not a good start. Dad had met a singer back in Laguna Beach, and he said to look him up if we were ever 'up at the lake'. So we did. He lived on the Nevada side of Tahoe, just around the corner from the casinos that sit right on the California/Nevada borderline. The lake is actually split by this borderline, half in Nevada and half in California. He was a friendly guy, and it was very nice of him to let us crash in his spare room for a few weeks. He had a full recording studio in his basement, very professional looking. One day whilst we were staying with him he was working on a new song called 'Maneater' in his basement. A song that would become very popular in the charts when it finally got released in 1982. We must have been staying in either Daryl Hall or John Oates' house! Looking back, I can hardly believe it myself, but there he was, occasionally not alone, in the studio belting it out. I remember around 1983 I became a fan of Hall & Oates when they became chart sensations and I heard their songs on the radio. I had their albums on cassette, Private Eyes and H2O. I played them to death and could sing along to nearly every one of their songs. A fan must have been born back in 1980. We stayed at his house for nearly a month, but unfortunately as we couldn't contribute financially to the bills he had to ask us to leave. It was understandable. Wish I knew which one it was. I think it was Oates.



We ended up on the roadside again with no idea where to go or what to do. Dad remembered how kind and generous the Mormon Minister had been in Hawaii, so he contacted the local church using the last of our change in a pay phone. About an hour later, a car pulled up and a kind looking man emerged. He shook my Dad's hand and said "Hello young man" to me. He drove us not to a hostel or a homeless shelter, he drove us to his home. It was a lovely house with a yard, garage and in a quiet cul-de-sac with very large houses all round. Clearly a well to do neighbourhood. He led us in through the garage which didn't house a car, instead it housed rows and rows of canned food, rice, dried pasta etc in large quantities. I figured he must be the kind of man who helps people in need. However, I later found out that the minister, Mr. Eugene Topham, was one of those survivalist types. Worrying about invasion or end of the world stuff, so stock piled accordingly. That aside, he, his wife and their older children were very nice to us, and let us stay with them for a few weeks until Dad could get a job. He eventually did, gardening again, and we were soon able to home ourselves in a very cheap motel. \$5 a night I think it was, the same amount my Dad charged for a portrait. So with his gardening job by day, and sitting in Pizza Hut at night drawing families, we were doing ok for a change. By ok I mean we ate, and didn't sleep outside. That was a win for us.



Mr. & Mrs. Topham (2002)



My Dad liked to move about a lot, more by necessity rather than fun. We left the motel, and rented a room above someone's garage in an area of Tahoe called Myers. It was at Myers Elementary School where I started my 'non interrupted' education. I would stay in education right up until we left Tahoe and America in 1986. Myers was a quiet place just outside the town limits and close to 'Tahoe International Airport'. Why it's called 'International' I don't know. Airlines don't land there as the runway is not long enough. It only caters for light aircraft and helicopters. Maybe it just sounds good. My Dad painted an oil painting of the two aerobatic biplanes 'Pit Specials' that lived at the airport and exhibited at shows all over California & Nevada. To this day it still hangs on the wall in the airport. On a holiday visit back in 2002 I visited the airport and saw it there. I have to admit I cried a little. It brought back so many memories. I can remember my Dad painting it in the garage below our room. The smell of the paint is still a strong smell I'll never forget. I think one night I accidentally got a little high on them, as my Dad forgot to open the window and close the trap door.



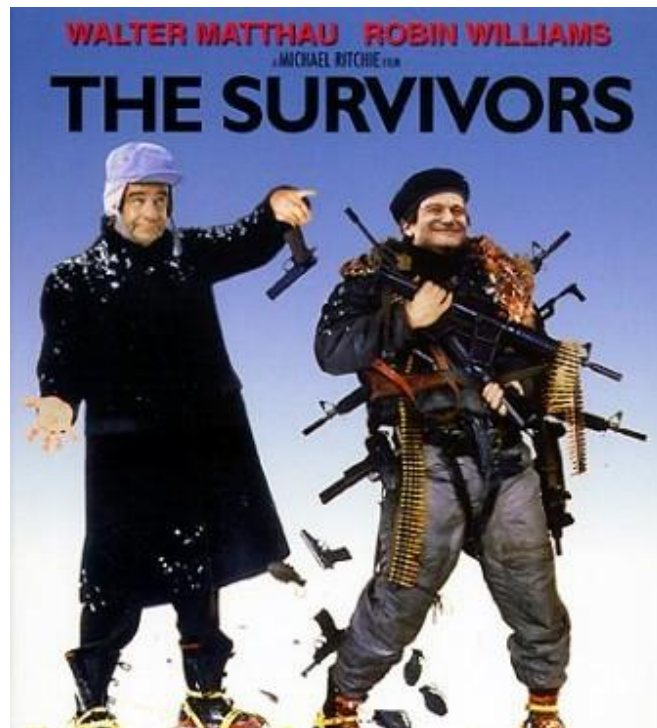
## 21: Airsoft, what not to do!

It was during 1981 that I discovered my love or Airsoft guns, or BB guns as they called them as they shot metal ball bearings instead of plastic balls. I was given an old Daisy cock 'n' fire cowboy style rifle that shot very small copper BBs. It was my pride and joy. I shot at everything with it, cans, tins, bottles and anything laying around. I fancied myself as a covert sniper on missions to take out enemy bases. My imagination ran wild with it. Until one day I decided to shoot at some ducks swimming in the lake. It was a Mommy duck with a string of baby ducks in a line behind her. I have no idea what was going through my mind at the time. The morality of it didn't sink in till after I hit one of the baby ducklings. It started to swim in a circle and fell behind. The mother duck just pecked at it, trying to kill it off because it was endangering the rest of her babies. The sheer shame of what I had just done overtook me, I started to cry and got angry at myself. After the rest of the ducks eventually swam on, leaving the little guy behind. I swam out and got him. I brought him into my Dad who had no idea why I was crying, soaking wet or why I had a baby duckling in my hand. He built a shoe box for it and wired a lamp bulb for warmth inside it. We put some food in it and put it in the garage. He said to leave it overnight, and if it was going to survive, we'd know in the morning. I couldn't sleep at all that night, it just played over and over in my head. "What have I done?" The thought of this little guy was weighing heavily on my mind. The next morning came as Dad woke me, "he didn't make it" he said. I was devastated. I told him what I did, and he said that perhaps I wasn't responsible enough to be shooting a BB gun. At 11 years old, he was probably right. He took the gun away from me, and grounded me for what seemed like ages. In my mind I had killed something, the guilt was there and stayed with me for quite some time. Once my grounding was up and he gave me back my gun, I took it and threw it into the lake as far out as I could. I'd be hurting nothing ever again I told myself. The only good I suppose that came from all that was the morality check. Perhaps at a young age in order to truly learn the difference between right and wrong you have to make some mistakes.



## 22: The Raccoon. No I didn't shoot it.

After a year living at Myers, we moved. We just couldn't afford the rent and were broke again. This time we moved right into the middle of South Lake Tahoe itself. SLT is basically a 5-mile stretch of road running along the shoreline of the lake. The casinos were at one end, Myers at the other. Our next home was at a beach front house in between, but it was so not as glamorous as it sounds. My bed was actually a sofa but not in the living room, it was in the back yard. It was the dog's bed. This is where we stayed for all of one week, as Dad didn't like the fact that a raccoon tried to eat my face off one night. I was fast asleep when I was wakened by the sounds of my Dad yelling really loudly. "Yaaarrrr, get out of here, scat, go on yaaaarrrr!!". I think I might have pee'd a little as I turned to see what looked like a six-foot raccoon hovering over me. It was more like two feet, but I was really scared. It clawed at me, but my Dad managed to throw something and made it run off. Talk about a little creature standing its ground! My Dad was nearly six feet, and it took projectiles to fend it off. My advice if you ever see one, run in the opposite direction. They're crazy!



## 23: Robin Williams.

In the snowy winter of 1982 Dad spotted an advert looking for extras for a comedy film being shot at Lake Tahoe. It was called *The Survivors* and starred Robin Williams and Walter Matthau. The film is about two guys being trained by survivalists on how to survive an apocalypse or the outbreak of war. He applied for one of the parts and got the role. He was going to be one of the many survivalists dressed up in white combat gear going through drills in the snow. There were dozens of them. Unfortunately you couldn't see their faces because of mouth coverings and snow goggles. I was allowed on set in the tents while they filmed. Someone asked if I'd like to help out and I said "Yes please!". Was I going to be in the movie thought I? I was gonna be famous!! But no, that wasn't the plan. Instead, they gave me a box of donuts to deliver to the tents. On a snowmobile. So not a bad gig after all. Guess what my payment was? Not all donuts made it to the tents lol! My Dad on the other hand was on set being filmed for his big moment on screen. Take 1: He waved at the camera. Take 2: he did a little dance. Take 3: He swung his rifle around like a sword. CUT!!! Thus ended his promising career as a famous actor. Unpaid. I got paid though, munch munch. We hung around trying to get a lift back to town, as this film set was taking place on a frozen lake outside of town. You'll never guess whose car offered us that lift. None other than Mr. Robin Williams himself! Dad was very excited, as was I too. I recognised him from *Mork & Mindy*. I had an annual from the series in my backpack that he graciously signed for me. He and Dad talked the whole way back to town, often cracking jokes and trying to make each other laugh. The only phrase I could remember from the journey was Robin describing the current president as, "Slicker than whale shit in an ice flow". Legend.



## 24: Big Trak.

Living in America we didn't have a lot of money, quite the opposite. I always loved the Big Trak commercials on TV but knew in my heart I'd never own one. They were new so expensive. Until one day Dad said "I've a surprise for you". No it wasn't a brand-new Big Trak. Instead, he took me to the back of an electronics store called Tandy. I think it's called Radio Shack now. "What are we doing here Dad?" I asked. "Take a look inside the dumpster" he said. So I did. My eyes went wide as I noticed there were toys everywhere! You see, back then Tandy didn't fix returns, they just threw them away. I jumped right in. There were loads of different toys and electrical items. But can you imagine my surprise when I stepped on a Big Trak!! "Oh my gawd" I yelled! I grabbed it, it looked in good condition. We took it home. Upon putting the big D Cell batteries into it, nothing worked. No surprise there then. Dad said to just push it around instead, so I did. But got bored with that real quick, especially as that flippin advert came on the telly again, showing how you can programme it. I asked Dad for a screwdriver. "Why?" he asked inquisitively. "To fix it" I replied with a huge grin on my face. He gave it to me saying, "Good luck kid". I unscrewed the screws at the bottom and opened it up. So much electronics, circuit boards and wires. I was 12, I knew nothing about electronics, but hoked and poked about when I spotted it; a wire that wasn't connected to anything. "Dad! Dad! I've found the problem!" He spotted that it had come loose from the battery compartment, so twisted it back into place. Boom! it worked! I was jumping with joy. My dream toy was in my hands and working. Hours of fun ensued trying to work out how to use it. I had no manual and of course there were no YouTube tutorials back then. But learning it was half the fun. It just goes to show how much joy you can get from the smallest of things. Oh, and free is also good.



## 25: Happy Campers.

Another move. This time it was back to camping. I hated camping. It felt so uncivilized after being spoiled with the luxury of a bed. But we had no choice, so off we went. Dad managed to buy a small tent and two sleeping bags, and we headed up the side of the lake to a place called Emerald Bay. There were camping sites near the road you had to pay for, or you could head off into the wilderness and find a free one. Guess what we did? It was a 30 min trek to where we pitched our tent, we stayed there for three weeks. I complained so much that Dad finally gave in. It was the summer so no school, but I was bored stupid. There's only so many toys you can make from pieces of wood. So we packed up and headed back, back to the cheap motel we started at before. This time he accepted a job at it as the motel handy man. It paid for our rent and a little for some food. Remember we were illegal immigrants living in America with no Green Card, no Visa or Social Security Number. So it was impossible to get a real job. We just had to take what we could get. The supermarket Safeway was our best friend. Every Friday they threw out all the 'sell by date' stuff they can't sell anymore. Can you just picture me and my Dad hunting through dumpsters lookin for food? Well we did, and boy was it good eatin! Barbeque ribs, cakes and buns, we ate like kings. Well I thought so anyway. Unfortunately it was this bin hoking that led to my Dad being reported to Child Welfare. What happened next changed everything for us. It was going to be a very unhappy time for me...



## 26: The Foster Home.

I can remember the day as clear as if it was yesterday, the day they took me away from my Dad. It was the winter of 1983. I'm 13. We had left the motel, and moved out into the country a bit to avoid the heat we got back in town. The authorities called into the motel asking for us, but the manager said we had moved on. We hadn't. But he was a nice guy and gave us the heads up, so we scattered. Dad was probably afraid of us being deported if they found out our temporary Visa ran out years ago. We were illegal immigrants and would have most likely been deported. He would have probably also been arrested upon arrival back in the UK too for taking me. So to say he was afraid is an understatement. We were staying at a place called Camp Richardson just outside the town limits. It was a very popular holiday destination for campers and log cabin holiday makers during the summer. Snow was everywhere so we were staying in one of the rooms in the hotel in exchange for my Dad helping out fixing things up for the upcoming summer period. I was still going to school every day on the school bus that came round to collect other kids. It was at school child welfare tracked me down. They asked me loads of questions, most of which they tricked me into answering. I guess they were good at what they did. One Saturday afternoon a black SUV pulled up outside the hotel as I was playing outside. Two people came over to talk with me, a man and a woman. I could see my Dad running up the lane towards me yelling my name. As I turned to walk towards him they grabbed me. I screamed at first and then yelled out for my Dad, all the while seeing him run towards me. A third person, a man, emerged from the vehicle and intercepted him. They struggled, but it was too late. They had me in the car and were preparing to leave. Dad was enraged at this point as you can imagine. I don't think he knew exactly who they were, they could have been anybody. Perhaps someone just trying to kidnap me. How ironic would that have been? But after the people identified themselves he calmed down, probably not wanting to make the situation any worse. They talked for ages, then my Dad came over to the car. "Son.....Daniel....you need to go with these people for a bit while I sort a few things out", I started to cry repeatedly saying "No" & "Why" over again. He tried to explain as best he could, but I just didn't understand. I was 13 but still very young minded. I had no choice but to go along with what was happening. He gave me the longest hug you could ever imagine, I cried my eyes out.

My eyes are actually watering as I'm writing this now. It was a very traumatic experience, one I will never forget. My Dad is all I ever knew, it was only ever just me and him. Things were about to get even worse though..... foster home.

They drove me to an office block in the centre of the town. I was there for what seemed like hours. No idea what was to become of me, or what they were doing with my Dad. I soon found out that I was to be placed in a foster home. My Dad was going to a mental institution for evaluation. "A mental institution? Are you serious?!" I could not believe what I was hearing. I thought this was all about us not supposed to be in America. I was surprised that part actually never came up. Apparently it was my Dad and his farfetched ideas about religion, life and outer space type stuff. He read somewhere that you could get some form of welfare if you weren't right in the head. So he applied for it and tried to convince a social worker that he needed some financial help. Boy did that backfire! What was he thinking? For him it was an evaluation, for me it was a foster home. I was driven to the house that was going to be my home for the next 6 months. For 6 months I never saw or heard from my Dad, it just felt wrong. How could they keep a father from his son for so long? Because they were trying to find a legal way to separate us that's why. He later told me that they were trying to get him to admit he was loopy, trying to get him to say and do things that would get him committed. My journey was a different one, one that involved a family that would try and make me feel welcome the best they could. They were the Johnsons, a father, mother and two other foster kids staying with them. They were kind but firm, and tolerated no monkey business. I went to school as per usual, had to be home straight after, and could only play with the other two foster kids, Karl and Jodie. Karl was funny, we hit it off right away. Jodie on the other hand was older than us and was starting to 'like' boys. This scared me a little as I was not at that stage in my life yet. She took an uncomfortable shine to me. I remember Karl saying, "I'm so glad she likes you now, she was freaking me out!" I tried to avoid her as best as I could. Not because I wasn't into the whole girl/boy dating thing no, it was because she had a boyfriend at school who didn't like me. He pestered me about her all the time. "You doin my girl man?" I was like, "No way, she's not my type" etc. It was a weird time to not have Dad around. He protected me from weird things and people like this. He sheltered me from things I didn't understand or didn't need to know. I missed him dreadfully. The Johnsons were not very interactive. Kind of, just there. They never did anything, just watched TV and fed us. I guess it was their job, how they earned a living. I can remember putting jelly (jam) on my toast one morning very thick, just how I like it. Mrs. Johnson grabbed the slice from my hand, scraped most of the jelly back in the jar and said, "We don't use that much jelly here". They were a strict family with set ways and times to do things. I had my weekly chores to do, and if I didn't do them I didn't eat. To be honest, I didn't really like the Johnsons. They were too regimental for me. But what could I do? I did the best I could until the day finally arrived when I could be with my Dad again. That day finally came around July that year, I was so excited to be seeing him again. I wondered all sorts of things though; like had they experimented on him, would he be the same, would he be someone completely different?



## 27: The Reunion.

I was driven to meet him at the house he was now living in. Apparently they got him settled into a new job and rented him a room in a house before I could see him. He was out for nearly a month before this, but was not allowed to see me until he proved he could sustain himself in the 'real' world. There were times I could have sworn I seen him after school, or at the grocery store when the Johnsons were shopping. Maybe he was sneaking the odd peek, it made me happy to think he was keeping an eye on me. The car pulled up outside a nice house at the base of Heavenly Valley, a famous skiing mountain in the heart of South Lake Tahoe. He lived on Ski Run Boulevard, just a 10 min walk to the ski slopes or the beach in the opposite direction. It was perfect. He came out and lifted me up and squeezed the life out of me, I was so happy I cried. The welfare people had a little talk with the both of us, and then left. We were back together again, the way it should be. We talked for hours. I told him all about the Nazi family (sorry) I got stuck with. He told me all about how he put on his best 'normal' behaviour at the centre for the entire time. He could switch the crazy on and off at will my Dad. Funny at times, but also a little scary. But he managed to convince (edit: fool) them he was indeed just a normal person. We ended up living in two rented rooms in this house right up until we left for Northern Ireland in 1986. It was a very nice open plan kind of house, with a fireplace in the middle of the living room. You could walk right round it. Big glass windows overlooking the boulevard and big front yard. You could see the mountain out one window and the lake out of the other. It was just the perfect house in my opinion. As far as I was concerned, we could have lived there forever. He bought me a toy for our reunion I'll never forget as it sparked a passion for them for many years; remote control cars. It was the Tamiya Fast Attack Vehicle and boy was it fast. I've never seen an R/C car go that quick. Took some getting used to. My son has the exact same one now.





## 28: The BMX.

Having very little money for luxury items like a new BMX bike, I enjoyed the 'Rust Bucket 3000' which one should probably get a tetanus shot to ride. Or the 'Loaner 1000' which was usually made up of 5 other bikes donating their last working bits to create one. Most of which will have come from the aforementioned 3000 model.

As a kid living in America, one of my favourite hangout joints was the local 7-11. It's a bit like a Spar or Centra, just with video games. Anytime I managed to scrape up a few bucks doing odd jobs, I'd spend it there on a candy bar and a video game or two.

One day whilst walking into the store my eyes immediately locked onto what could only be described as the Holy Grail of BMX's..... the all-new Raleigh Ultra Burner! I only heard of its existence from other kids, never thinking I'd actually ever see one. It sat up high on top of a middle row of food shelves, like a heroic statue of a Greek god. I couldn't take my eyes off of it. I walked slowly backwards towards the counter, eyes firmly fixed on it. With a five-dollar bill in my hand I turned and asked, "How much is the bike?" Holding my five bucks delusionally dreaming it was enough. He replied, "Five....." my eyes widened "..... hundred dollars" Oh my god I thought to myself! My Dad and I had never seen that kind of money. He added, "What I mean by that, it's the amount someone needs to raise for our sponsored charity to win the bike" Ohhhh thought I, I see. "How can you raise that kind of money?" said I. He rhymed off half a dozen suggestions, all usually formulating around sponsored sports, runs, swims, mountain climbs etc. I asked, and to this day I shudder as it could have been worded far more eloquently, "Can I beg for it?" He laughed and said, "Well, sure, I guess". "Sign me up!" I said.

You have to understand that 13-year-old me had never owned such a thing of beauty, and nothing in this world would have made me happier than to own it. So whatever it took, no matter how high the odds would be stacked against me, I was going to make this happen.

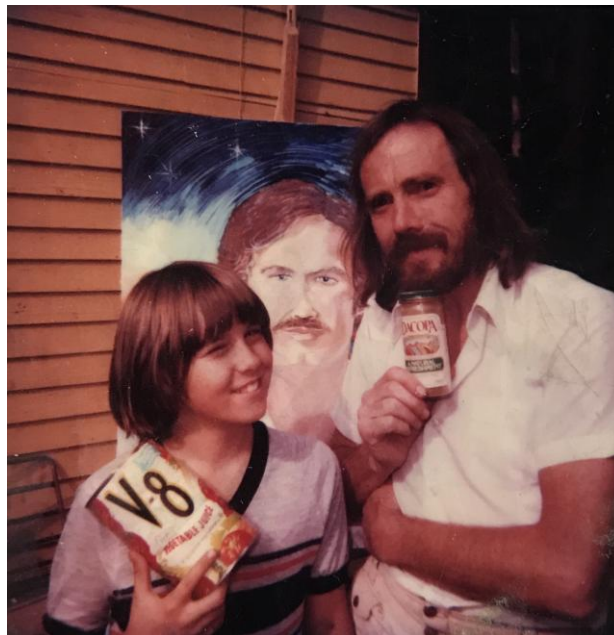
So off I set, plastic charity pot in hand, I headed two miles down the road to our local major supermarket; Riley's. I thought this will be the ideal place, catching people after they bought their groceries. Surly they'd have some loose change, and they did. "Excuse me, I'm collecting for such and such charity (honestly can't remember which one it was), would you like to make a donation?" "Sure kid".

Every day during the Summer so no school from the moment I got up to dinner time, there I was. Calling into 7-11 each evening to drop off the plastic pot and wait while he counted it and added it to my total figure. By week three and four I was having to call into 7-11 2 or 3 times a day to empty the pot. During the 3rd week of me attempting to hit this seemingly insurmountable \$500 amount, the 7-11 guy said, "Here, take the 5-litre bucket instead. You're doing really well kid".

I can remember bringing in the last bucket. So heavy with coins I could barely carry it. Not knowing if I could do this much longer. I waited as he counted it. "Kid, you did it. You've reached the big amount. Congratulations!" My heart near stopped! "Really?" I asked. "Yep. I can barely believe it myself. You been robbin banks?" So I then asked the question I've been wanting to ask for weeks, "Do I get that bike?" looking up at all its splendid glory shining there in the fluorescent light. "You sure do kid, in about 4 to 6 weeks. I'll order it now". I froze. Eyes looking straight at him. I could actually feel my own heart slowing down with disappointment. My eyes started to well up, then tears down my cheeks. Not a sound coming from me, just an internal overload of heart break. He looked straight back at me, his eyes started to widen. He wasn't expecting this. Did he not know how much of my heart and soul I put into this? The day after day grind, the hours and hours of dedication to the cause. Albeit more about the bike than the charity. I'm 13, it's understandable. He started to speak, "You see kid..... that's just a display..... we have to..... order...." He paused. Then something wondrous happened. "I'll tell you what. You've clearly worked very hard on this. We just didn't expect results this soon. Let's get you that bike down off the shelf" My heart exploded.

So there it was, once he got it down. A Raleigh Ultra Burner sitting right in front of me. He asked me to hold it while he went away to get something. With one hand on the handle and the other on the seat, I just stared at it. I wiped away my tears as my heart filled with happiness. Sadness turned to joy followed by a huge cheesy grin I could not wipe off my face. I actually own this. Me. How lucky was I? I was so happy in that moment, I'll never forget it.

But one more last thing happened, before I finish this story. So there I was, standing there waiting on the guy to come back. “This is mine” thought I, with a giggle. I should probably try it out. So I grabbed both handles and swung my keg over the seat right there in the aisle. As soon as my bum hit the seat the front of it shot straight up and I slid off the back and down onto the rear reflector. The handle bars then flopped down and I slid down onto the back tire. I let go of one handle to grab a shelf to steady myself, as the handlebars turned one way the front wheel the other I’m thinking to myself “What the heck?! Raleigh Deathtrap!!” Just as the guy returns with spanner in hand, “Yeah, I’m gunna need tighten this thing up”. 5 minutes later I ride off into the sunset with the biggest grin on my face I think I’ve ever had. Well done kid, well done.



## 29: Tahoe life.

Living in Lake Tahoe is like living in a holiday resort that has the best of both worlds, snow in the winter and a sun-drenched lake for swimming in during the summer. Life was finally getting good. We weren't rich, but Dad seemed to earn enough from a local golf course as a 'Landscape Architect'. That's gardener to you and me. He also painted portraits of people now instead of drawings. We had food, clothes, toys, all was good. I skied in the winter and swam in the lake in the summer down at the marina. They even gave me a summer job there taking care of the speed boats they hired out to holiday makers. My job was to take the boats when they were finished with them, clean up any trash, fill them full of gas and park them in their docks. It was such great fun, I even got to take them out once in a while for a run to the next dock for messages or supplies. I'll really treasure those days, they were just perfect.



## 30: Model Rockets & Floppy Discs.

When I turned 16, it was time for High School for me. I had just finished the 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> grades at Junior High and was ready to take on the world of higher education as a Freshman 9<sup>th</sup> grader. I was really fascinated by engineering and science and regularly at Junior High showed off my rocket building skills with demonstrations for the class out in the football field. I was really into Estes model rockets. You had to build them from a kit, then you put a solid propellant rocket engine into the base, fired the electric igniter and off they flew. Sometimes 1,000 feet in the air. A parachute popped out at its highest point and it floated back down to earth ready for another engine. My class all got hooked on them as well, and we would frequently have competitions to see whose could fly the farthest. Those were fun times. High School on the other hand was really tuff. I was circulating with older kids up to 18 and 19 years old in the 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and Senior 10<sup>th</sup> grades. Us a newbie Freshmen I always got picked on, I got thrown into a trash can on more than one occasion. Kinda reminded me of Safeway's. I just decided to keep my head down and focus on my school work. I had missed out on a lot of schooling growing up, and was definitely behind the other kids. I had some catching up to do. My first love at High School was discovering computers, they were so cool. I remember spending most of my free time in the library on their Apple IIC computers. It had a green screen and could display text and games and that's about it. I obviously decided games were much more fun. I spent many hours swapping games with fellow students, copying them onto 5" floppy discs. Choplifter, Montezuma's Revenge and LoadRunner were my favourites. High School was fun, even though it was only for one year. It's a shame I didn't get to finish it. #ClassOf89





### 31: My First RPGs. Nothing to do with video games.

I excelled in one department a lot more than the others. Although I was quite good at woodwork, I could make nearly anything if you gave me a piece of wood. It was in Metal Shop I really sprang to life. I got top marks in every project they gave me to do. Welding, lathe work, milling, anything metal related fascinated me. So much so in fact that they invited me to join the advanced ROP class. To this day I have no idea what ROP stands for. It was what we did in the class that mattered. Free will. Free to design and construct whatever we could imagine. Some created works of art, some handy contraptions to help wheel chaired people get in and out of cars. Me? I made rocket launchers! Yes, you heard me right. Full on RPG rocket launchers. Well maybe not military grade, but they still looked like the real thing. Plus they actually worked! Remember my model rocket hobby? I created three different rocket launchers that would sit up on your shoulder and electronically fire the engines from those models. How awesome was that for a ‘school’ project? I made two that sat up on your shoulder, one being a more compact version of the other. The third was a 4-way launcher that fired four rockets at once. It hung from the shoulder at around hip level. It didn’t work very well, as the blast from all 4 rockets kind of cooked the user. I nearly took out the teacher with one of the other two during a testing stage. We had all gone outside, class and all, to see me test fire the first shot. I loaded an engine into the rear, attached the ignitor wires, turned the arming key on, counted down from 5 and fired. Swooshhh! The engine fired out of the front end with an almighty sound, completely covering my head in afterburn smoke (I later added a heat shield. Lesson learned). The rocket engine shot up into the air with a scream, stopped mid-air and started to spin out of control wildly. It then turned and headed straight back towards Mr. Thompson! He hit the deck like a soldier in war taking fire! We all recoiled in fear and ducked a little too. After the rocket hit the ground and burnt itself out he rose, dusted himself off, walked over to me and said, “Needs some work”. Afterwards once the adrenaline wore off, we all laughed about it. Version 2 had small fins for the engines, a plate to shield your face from the blast and a more sophisticated electronic firing mechanism. As far as I’m aware, the first one is still tucked far into the corner of the roof space of that Ski Run Boulevard house we lived in. For obvious reasons it wasn’t coming to Northern Ireland with me.



## 32: Airsoft, the right way.... sort of!

I must be giving you the idea that maybe I should have joined the US Army or something. Not just for the rocket launchers or my Daisy BB gun, but for what came next in my line of hobbies. I wanted to get back into shooting BB guns again, so purchased a more powerful cock 'n' fire M16 Assault Rifle look alike. It was awesome looking, completely black with every detail down to the markings looking like the real thing. It fired either the copper BBs or for more accuracy you could load lead pellets in one at a time. However, this was not my most loved weapon. One day I was scouring the pages of Guns 'N' Ammo, as you do, and came across an advert for the M19A "Annihilator" BB Machine Gun. It had a shape that only loosely resembled a rifle, looked bulky and was most likely made of cheap moulded plastic, but I had to have one. I had to have one because it fired a continuous fully automatic line of BBs at the advertised rate of 3,000 a minute. "Are you over 18 years of age?" the coupon asked. 'Yes' ticked I. I sent off my hard-earned pocket money in way of a \$50 postal order. I waited the 10 to 14 days advertised and nearly burst with excitement when it arrived at my door. I opened the box. There sat the ugliest rifle you ever saw. It was indeed made of cheap moulded plastic but I didn't care. I went straight out to the local hardware store and purchased a tin of Freon. Freon was used to resupply fridges with coolant. It was a freezing gaseous liquid that was required to power the gun. I clipped the attachment onto the top of the tin and broke the seal and inserted it into the gun. I then literally poured the BBs into the body of the gun through a hole on the stock. No mags, the body was the mag and oh my god was it heavy. It held 5,000 copper BBs that weighed a lot to a skinny 15-year-old. I went out back and spent at least half an hour assembling every can, tin and bottle I could find. I gathered them all up onto a small sand hill in the back yard. I stood well back and let rip. Oh my frikin god was this awesome! I felt like I had the rotating gatling gun in Predator 'Ole Painless'! The BBs just flew out of the barrel at such a rate of fire it was unbelievable. What took so long to set up took like 30 seconds to destroy. I was in love. Unfortunately that love was to be short lived. A day or so later I decided to go out back around the allotment to shoot whatever I could find, tins, cans, rubbish, a Volkswagen Beetle owned by our neighbour parked outside his house. "I wonder if I could hit that from here?" Sound familiar? I opened up ole 'mini' painless for half a second, only to see the front windscreen fall back into the car.

I ran. However, it didn't take a rocket scientist for the neighbour to work out that it must have been me. BBs everywhere, a commando type kid living next door always out shooting things. My days, scratch that, hours were numbered. 175 bucks that cost my Dad to replace. Guess what part of my body he took it out on? My shooting days from that point on were strictly supervised.



### 33: Friends, not easy to find.

Living on Ski Run Boulevard put you right in the middle of things. It was a main road up to Heavenly Ski Resort, so throughout the winter busloads of skiers went by every day. During the summer it was full of sight seers taking in the views. The road itself was very straight, from the lake right up the mountain. So many people loved to drive to the top of it and take panoramic photos of the whole lake. I used to ride my BMX all around the area and made some like-minded friends on their bikes. At the very top was this one kid who lived with his Dad. His house was very run down and they didn't seem to have a lot of money. We seemed to get along and would head out on BMX runs all over the place. There were some great riding spots here and there, with jumps and woopy do's that went up and down like a rollercoaster. Half way up the hill lived another kid that lived in a kind of tourist attraction house, with thousands of weird things all around it. 10-foot-high beer can stacks, wooden statues of Indians and one side of the house entirely covered in toy cars. People stopped many times to take snaps. He was well into his remote-control cars and got me hooked on them as well. This friendship led to my second 'build it yourself' R/C car, another Tamiya dune buggy called the Grasshopper. Once I built it and Dad helped fund the extras like the remote control, battery, motor and charger it was awesome. One of my very few only 'real' toys; real in that it wasn't made up of broken bits 'n' bobs found in Radio Shack's dumpster. No, this was all brand new and very very fast. We raced a lot, and held mini grand prix championships. We even invited a few other kids round to 'race for pinks'. Winner keeps the other one's car, but unfortunately no one took us up on it. Probably for the best lol.

My third and last friend was Daniel. He lived down near the Marina, and was an all-round computer geeky nerd and my best friend. Although he didn't know it at the time. He was a couple years older than me, and was impressive at everything. Model building, playing video games, doing tricks on his BMX and skateboard. I knew him for about a year, but unfortunately his area got bulldozed by redevelopers and he had to move. A hotel now stands where his house was. Stupid progress. There was one other person that I looked up to, a sort of role model for me. John Toramino was his name, and he was the pizza delivery guy for my favourite hangout Harpo's Pizza. It was located at the shops at the base of Ski Run Boulevard. It had the coolest video games, was always playing music from the jukebox and all the cool kids hung around it. John once asked me if I'd like to help him with the deliveries, I jumped at the chance. He drove a cream coloured 1970's Buick. It was so cool. We'd go on runs all over Tahoe. My job was to hold the million-candle power spotlight looking for house numbers whilst he drove. I loved helping him out and not just because I looked up to him as a cool role model, he shared his tips. Five bucks here and there, I thought I was rich. It was an awesome couple of years those mid 80's, I often reminisce back to that specific period. No cares in the world, just an easily satisfied kid having fun. It was also a great time in my life because in 1985 I kissed my first girl; Cindy Shapiro. She was from Yorba Linda in Oregon and was up holidaying with her folks. For some reason she took a shine to me. We played in the pool in her hotel, ran along the beach and generally just had fun together. Then one day she just kissed me. I was so surprised, I had no idea what to do. It lasted all of 5 seconds but felt like an eternity. My innocence gone. I was now curious about girls. Thanks Cindy.



### 34: Independence Day, and all the treasures.

One thing they do in Tahoe well is the Fourth of July. The Casinos Caesar's Palace, Hurrahs and Harvey's usually all band together for the annual fireworks display. I'm sure hundreds of thousands of dollars are spent every year on the most wonderful display you've ever seen. It lasts for like 40 minutes non-stop. They fire them up over the lake and they reflect off the water like you're watching two sets going off. Thousands of people crowd the shores with their BBQs and carry outs, they bring their own lawn chairs and radios and all tune into the same station, 93.9FM KOWL. They crank it up as the DJ plays all the biggest American classics as the mega fireworks boom overhead. It's a truly awesome spectacle. Although to be honest, my favourite part was actually the next morning at 5am. Every fifth of July I would get up real early just as the suns coming up over the mountains, and head down to the beach with an empty school backpack. I'd start at the casinos beach and work my way along the shoreline into California. The reason; free stuff galore! The amount of stuff people drop, lose or leave behind is astonishing. Cameras, radios, money, wallets you name it. One year I returned home with around 200 bucks worth of cash alone. One year I found a briefcase. I was so excited, but my conscience got the better of me and I handed it in to the local police station. I left my name and address, and two weeks later an envelope addressed to me came through the door with a 50-dollar bill and a thank you note. Maybe this Karma thing works after all.



## 35: Leaving Tahoe.

1986 and it's almost time to say goodbye to Lake Tahoe. It was a very hard thing to do, it's such a beautiful place. My grandmother back in Northern Ireland would occasionally send us the odd £20 note to help us out. She was the only one in the family who knew where we were and she was keeping it to herself. From 1975 to 1980, my Mom would plead with her to reveal our whereabouts, but she wouldn't give up her son. I felt sorry for my Mom, she never gave up searching for me. She contacted police and English Consulates in countries throughout Europe to try and get help in finding us. Our pictures were in many newspapers and it was probably this that made my Dad decide to go further afield. As I got older, I began to understand what she must have gone through. Her only son at the age of 5 being snatched away like that. She never gave up looking, always had hope that someday someone would find me and return me to her. My gran on the other hand was keeping quiet, and tried to help us whenever she could. In 1986 she helped us in a very big way. She sent us a large amount of money, about a grand. She gave us two options with what to do with it; either buy a camper van so we would never be without a home again, or come home. Dad turned to me and asked, "What would you like to do son? Get a VW and travel the States or go home to Northern Ireland?" I was surprised how quick I came to a decision, it was instant. "I wanna go home". Which in a way was weird cause I had no memories of Northern Ireland. So we decided there and then to say good bye to South Lake Tahoe and head home to Bangor in County Down.



Before we left though, we had one last all American past time to do; the yard sale. We had accumulated some stuff, and we couldn't take it all with us. I put aside what I wanted to take with me; some clothes, skateboard, an R/C car, an unfinished R/C swamp buggy boat, comics, floppy discs, a Frisbee and a Sony Walkman. The Walkman was never going to make it to Grans, but I'll get to that later. The rest went up for sale, rocket launchers an all! It was a nice sunny day, and many people came to the sale in our driveway. We made cardboard signs and put them up at all the intersections the day before. "Everything Must Go" the signs read, and it attracted all sorts. I had quite a few model planes, cars and boats to shift, and they all sold. Just about everything went, bar the rocket launchers. So I hid them in the roof space in case I ever returned. The next day we finished packing and our ride appeared. It was a friend of Dads Alfonso who was heading home to Los Angeles and was glad to give us a lift. It was a five-hour journey, most of which I slept. But we arrived safely enough and Alfonso put us up for the night. Our flight out was the next day. That night one of Alfonso's friends that was staying in the apartment grabbed the keys to Alfonso's car. My Dad, realizing all of our stuff was in the car, tried to stop him but couldn't. This guy just tore off into the night with everything we owned. My Dad was panicking to say the least. Alfonso was nowhere to be found so all we could do is sit there and wait, hoping for the best. The next morning, no car, no guy and no Alfonso. It's three hours to our flight, and my Dad was losing it. He was about to phone the police, when suddenly Alfonso turned up and said, "You two ready to go?" Like nothing had happened. My Dad, not wanting to lose his cool said, "Yes, let's go" and off to the airport we went. He checked over the bags and everything seemed ok, but they were kinda ruffled inside. Like someone had gone through them looking for something. He dropped us off at the airport at which time my Dad went through everything. The tickets and passports were there thank god, but my Walkman was not. The bastard stole it. Drat! Along with my Hall & Oats tape. Double drat!!



### 36: Northern Ireland.

After transferring flights in London, we landed in Belfast on a Saturday afternoon. We jumped in a cab, sorry taxi, and headed for an expensive ride to Bangor. Before we flew, I had this picture of what Northern Ireland was going to be like. Growing up in America kind of blinkers you into seeing things the American way. St. Paddy's day was all the Irish I ever knew, leprechauns and shamrocks, horse driven carts on cobblestone roads and thatched roofs. Boy was I hit with culture shock when I glimpsed Belfast from the taxi! What were all these high-rise buildings and big busy roads? It was a city. I just came from a town, and wasn't expecting this. It was a shock to me. We pulled up outside this red bricked semi-detached house in the western part of the Bangor. It was so weird seeing a 'brick' house, everything stateside is wood. They all looked the same too, house after house, identical. You don't get that back home very much I was thinking. It was clear to me that there was going to be a lot I was going to have to get used to. Standing in the door as Dad unloaded the taxi was my Grandmother. She had the biggest smile you could imagine, and hugged us like there was no tomorrow. She looked at me with big eyes and squeezed me quite hard. I was taken back by her strength. She was a kind lady, and couldn't do enough for us. Dad and I shared a room, which was ok. We've done that before. We settled in and had a look around and after a very short while it felt like home. This was one of the main reasons I wanted to leave America. A roof over our head that would never be taken away from us. Stability, I yearned for it. Having lived such a random life of ups and downs it would be nice to just have a place I could actually call home. I was to live at number 5 right up until I branched out on my own in 2000.





### 37: Bangor, 1986.

It's a lovely place, I wouldn't want to live anywhere else. A seaside town that I was going to call home, and still do. Lake Tahoe will always hold a place in my heart as that's where I consider to be the place I grew up. The place I found out who I was. Bangor took that 16-year-old loud American and moulded him into a more normal person. Well, as best as it could lol. I thank my very first friends in the street for enlightening me on the ways of Northern Ireland and keeping me in check. Richard McClinton was my first friend, followed very quickly by Own McCaughan and Phillip Joyce (Joycey). These lads probably saved my life. I was unaware of the troubles in Northern Ireland and they kept me right. Things I shouldn't say, places I shouldn't go at night etc. I was a naive American who didn't have a clue. Thanks lads, I still owe you one.



Me, Dad & Bruce

Later on in Bangor as I started to socialise beyond my street around 1988 I made another new friend; Bruce Crawford. This lad ended up being my best friend as we shared the single most important trait that's needed for best friend status; we shared the exact same silly stupid sense of humour. You need that in a best friend, it's the best bit. You need to be able to tell what the other is thinking that's funny just from a look. We got that. We did everything together too. There was the spring board diving in the leisure centre trying to outdo one another with flips and twists, playing Pool in the local bars while chasing girls and the start of something we still call to this day 'games night'.

Every Monday we got together to play either a split screen video game on a games console or a board or card game, usually sci-fi or fantasy related. Think Dungeons & Dragons stuff. Along the way I found a few more like-minded friends to join us. First there was the Chef Karl Leeman, then the civil servant Bryan Morton and finally Guy Loiacono the hairdresser. The later two still join Bruce & I for games night almost every week. It's amazing we've been able to keep it going since 1988. Kids, that's what we still are, kids lol!



Me, Bruce, Bryan and Guy



## 38: DJing.

It wasn't until 1988 that I started my love of what was becoming dance music. I had started making mix tapes for friends, then started selling them to the lads in the carparks out showing their rides on a Sunday Night. My record collection was already starting to build. My friend Owen was a DJ and showed me how all the equipment worked. He helped me get my first set of decks, an all-in-one flight cased set of Fal Rangers. With his help I replaced the static turntables with variable speed Citronic ones so I could learn to mix. It wasn't the best of gear but it was a start, and I was excited about being able to beat match. No BPM counters in them days lol. A year later I owned my first set of Technics 1210 Turntables. That's when the real fun began.



I was quite fond of a nightclub in Bangor called the Helmsman on High Street. On Saturdays it was Graham Brown 'The Master G' playing all the commercial favourites of the day. If it was on Top of the Pops he was spinning it. My favourite night was the Mondays though with DJ Robbie Nelson. His music was more dance orientated and he didn't play much mainstream. I enjoyed his music the most and it definitely influenced my taste in music. He would occasionally sell 12" copies of the tracks he was playing. I remember paying £20 for a rare import only for it to hit the mainstream chart a few weeks later and was available in Woolworths for £1 lol. But I didn't care. I had it two weeks before everyone else and that's all that mattered. It was Double Dee featuring Dany - Found Love. Awesome tune.



Jay Caulfield



Tony Carmichael

My first residency was at the Strangford Arms Hotel in Newtownards, a nightclub called Mingles. There's a Facebook page I set up years ago with photos from back then if you're interested; Mingles Nightclub. My mentor was a very energetic and vocal DJ called Jay Caulfield. He taught me everything I knew; mixing properly, talking on the mic, volume control, a thing he called programming. It's where you introduce new songs in between two well known songs. Programming the 'people' if you were. I still do it to this day. I took over after he left to do something bigger in Belfast. I was very nervous to say the least, but he had faith in me as did the promoter Cecil Thompson (CT). I can't thank them enough for getting me started on my lifelong career. A nod has to go also to another Mingles DJ on the Friday Nights; Tommy Carmichael. He was a very vocal DJ with his raps and rhymes. I tried my best to copy his style, and I believe in doing so has served me well. I do love to use the mic, it's where the craic is.



In 1995 I started my biggest residency at The Marine Court Hotel in Bangor in a party bar called Calico Jacks. It lasted until the year 2000. Every Saturday the place was packed to capacity with party goers, the doors closed at 10pm to a full house. I got this residency by chance. I just walked in one day at the start of January and asked if there was any work going as a DJ. The manager Paul Doherty had a quick chat with me and asked if I was free this Saturday. Of course I said yes and the rest was history. I built up a friendship with the other Friday Night DJ there Tony Sheridan. He had been there longer than me and was very good at what he did. Between the two of us we filled that venue every weekend. Such good times.

There was a Calico Jacks Revival that lasted from 2013 to 2018 that I played at and it was just as successful. Full of Hen, Stag & Birthday parties every week. In fact most nights all the tables were filled with them before the front doors were even opened to the public. Again, very fun times.

My only three international gigs were at a party bar in Ibiza, an Irish Pub in Corfu and a Hotel/Nightclub in Switzerland. The Ibiza gig was only for a week; free holiday. Corfu I took along my friends Bruce and Alan Cogan. It lasted a month and was again a free holiday. Switzerland was something else though; six months gigging 5 nights a week. I snowboarded during the day, gigged at night and went to the after-hours clubs later. It was an amazing time of my life, so many memories. I learned to snowboard, it became a passion. I wanted to get good at it. I was determined to pull off a trick I had seen many others do. At the end of my stay as the season was coming to a close and the snow was beginning to melt I thought frik it! I'm going for it! I started my run and did nothing to slow down. I was either going to pull this off or be shipped home in plaster-cast thought I. I was doing some speed as I entered the base of the upwards sloping jump. Just as my board left the snow and I was airborne I twisted my body around and sharply looked over my left shoulder. Whoosh! I flew through the air, pulled off a full 360 and landed it!! "HOLY CRAP BALLS!!!" I screamed, "I did it!" I was so proud of being able to do that with barely six months experience. Thankfully a buddy of mine was in the overhead lifts going up and had his camcorder, he captured the whole thing. It's on YouTube as: DJ Danny Dee's (not so) EXTREME Snowboarding Video.





### 39: Mom, and 'the letter'.

In 1975 my Mom lost her only son when Dad decided to kidnap me. I was 5 and had no say in it. From 1975 she never stopped looking for me for 10 years. It wasn't until that time she came to the realisation that she wasn't getting me back. She had to make the tough decision to try and move on with her life. It wasn't an easy decision to make but she had to make it for her own sanity. I completely understand her decision. Don't get me wrong, it's not like she was going to forget about me. It was just time to stop the endless emails, letters and phone calls that were not producing any results. Hope had died and it was taking a toll on her.

Thankfully back then she had support in the way of my now Step Dad Colin Burke. Colin is a lovely man, very loving and caring towards my Mom and also very intelligent. Without him my Mom would have been lost mentally and physically. I'm very grateful he was there for her during those troubling times.

Let's fast forward to 1995. I'm living in Northern Ireland and Mom is over in Manchester. She's no idea I'm here or how close she actually is to me. One day out of the blue my NI uncle Dessie McCartney (former rally driver) with whom I'm close to, contacted her to say I'm here in Northern Ireland. She wrote a letter for me and posted it to him. He approached me and said, "I have a letter from Monica. Would you like to read it, would you be open to reconnecting with her?" My heart skipped a beat, butterflies in my stomach. If I'm honest my Dad unfortunately twisted my mind against her over the years. It wasn't a nice thing to do and I'm not justifying it, but in his mind I guess he was scared of losing me. Thankfully at the age of 25 now I had a mind of my own and could see why he did that. I realise now she's just a parent who lost her child and now wants to reconnect. "I think I'd like that" I said to Dessie. He handed me the envelope. "If you want to reply give it to me and I'll post it to her" he said. My Mom was terrified of Cecil knowing or finding out her address so Dessie was the go between. I went upstairs into my bedroom and opened the letter.

Dear Daniel, it started. She went on to say how she never forgot about me and how devastated she was when I was taken. How she longed to find me or hoped one day I'd come back. "If you would like" she wrote, "I would love to meet you here in Manchester. I wouldn't feel comfortable coming over to Northern Ireland as I could not face your father. I hope you understand" All my love, Monica.

My eyes welled up as you can imagine. For the largest part of my life I never had a Mom. My memories as a 4 or 5-year-old are very broken at best, I don't remember much. I couldn't even picture her in my mind. I never saw a photo. I grabbed a piece of paper and started to write...

Dear Monica,

Thank you for your lovely letter. I would of course love to meet you. I've thought about you a lot over the years even though I can't picture you in my mind. I always wondered what it would be like to have a Mom. I saw other boys and girls with both parents and it made me feel that I was missing something. So yes, let's do it. I'll fly over. I understand you not wanting to come here. Let Dessie know when and what airport and I'll book tickets. All my love, Daniel.

Dessie took the letter and posted it off. This was an exciting time in my life. I was finally getting to meet my Mom after a 20-year absence. Butterflies again.

A week went by, nothing. Two weeks, still nothing. After a month I thought maybe she had a change of heart. Perhaps she thought I'd bring Cecil, a worst-case nightmare for her. I had no idea why she didn't want to connect so I asked Dessie to phone her. What transpired next you couldn't make it up. It's the stuff of movies doing the 'what if/road less travelled' take on things.

Dessie had posted the letter, that part was ok. Monica gave him not her address but that of a relative, just in case the address fell into Cecil's hand. She was heartbroken that I didn't reply to her letter. She never got it. You see, what happened was the postman slipped the letter under the relative's front doormat. Where it lay for 5 weeks. It was only by chance it was discovered after a larger parcel was placed there.

So there she was thinking I didn't care. Me thinking she changed her mind. All the while!! For flip's sake right?!

So now she has the letter and has written back, complete with missing letter explanation. Phew! Thought I. Thank goodness for that. She picked a flight for me and I booked it. Took the flight over, nervous as hell. I couldn't believe I'm about to meet a woman who is my Mother. Will I know her? Will I be able to connect with her? What type of person was she? All these thoughts during the flight.

I landed, walked through the baggage area and out into the lobby. There were dozens of people standing all around waiting for people. I scanned across them and stopped at a woman with long brown hair. That's her. I don't know how I knew I just knew. She was staring right at me too. I walked over, "Monica?" I asked. "Yes Daniel, yes" she replied holding back the tears. My heart was pounding, eyes welling up. I threw my arms around her and we both cried. That hug lasted what felt like forever. It felt comforting. It felt secure. I felt safe. Can't describe it any other way. Reunited after 20 years. Talk about an Oprah Winfrey moment.



Mom is now a continuous part of my life. I go over once a year, she comes over once a year, we sometimes go on family holidays together. She is my Mom. I have a Mom, and a Step Dad to boot. Plus a half-brother in the way of Stanley, a very adorable Border Terrier. Life balance has been restored.



Mom, Stanley & Colin



## 40: Energy106.6FM

It was 1999 and I was just starting to hear about a new Belfast based pirate radio station taking over the airwaves. I listened to it on my car radio whenever I had good reception. It wasn't always easy to pick up. I discovered that the shop in Belfast I frequented for dance music had something to do with it. CD heaven at The Inn Shops on High Street in Belfast was the place.

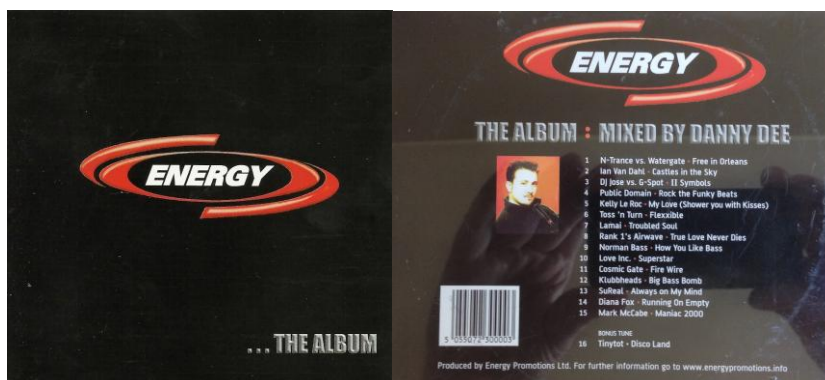


I was going into this place for quite some time when I noticed the big mixing desk and equipment in the corner with a DJ talking into the mic. It was none other than Mr. Lawrence John himself. Voicing out an advert. I approached and asked what he was doing. He explained about the station and the adverts he voiced then got back to it. I watched with fascination, how cool was that. I then headed over to the counter to face Paul Chapman. What he didn't know about the commercial dance music scene wasn't worth knowing. He'd play numerous singles for me with me choosing to purchase only a few exceptional ones each time. I was very fussy. It probably pissed him off, but I was only going to buy the tracks that I thought would work in Calico Jacks. I also purchased the odd Mix CD by an absolute magician at scratching DJ Tommy B. His CDs were never out of my car, awesome DJ. A few weeks later I popped back in but this time it was Lawrence behind the counter serving me. Again multiple songs played but only a select few purchased. Lawrence asked me if I had a minute as he'd like to chat with me about something. I got excited, what could it be? We headed down into the food court of the Inn Shops and grabbed a couple coffees. He said he's noticed me coming into the shop over the last year or so and noticed the music I buy. He said I bought the same music that he himself also deemed top quality. The best of what was on offer.

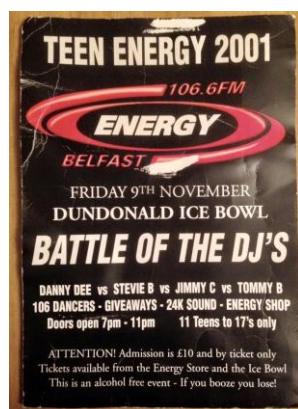
I said, “Yes. I’m really fussy when it comes to my music. If I don’t think it will fill my dancefloor I’m not going to play it”. He agreed with me as we talked more about music. “Based on you and I having similar musical tastes when it comes to dance music, I’d like to offer you a job”. My heart was starting to race. This guy owns a frickin radio station and he’s asking me to join the team! Holy bat crap Batman!! “I’d like to ask you to sell advertising for the station”. What?! Thought I. I was so confused. I was expecting to DJ on the station alongside him or something. But advertising?? “Uh.... what makes you think I can sell advertising? I’m an apprentice electrician”. He added, “I’ve been speaking with you in the store for quite some time, your accent is unusual which I like and your music taste means we might be able to do something along those lines in the future”. Sold! That last bit had me, I’m in! Happy days. He offered me a basic wage which thankfully matched my apprenticeship wage, and also a small commission on advertising that I sold.

As the radio station was blowing up all over the place and more powerful transmitters were being installed on Alien Mountain, the advertising nearly sold itself. Every Monday in the office there were at least a few messages on the answer machine of prospects. I was driving a red Mazda MX3 and travelling to all the cities and towns adjacent to the M1 Motorway, as these places had the strongest reception. The transmitter was on top of a mountain on Monaghan, with all the aerials on the sky-scraping mast tower aiming towards Belfast. So the M1 was hot. I’d walk into shops in my black Energy106 embroidered T-shirt or hoodie and tried to sell an advert. I did this for two years and during that time sold around £250,000 worth of adverts. I guess Lawrence was right, I could do it. But to be honest it was the station. So popular, and much cheaper to advertise on than the rival stations. I’m sure Cool FM and Citybeat hated us very much. I believe the success of the station came down to two things. It was only dance music being played, and when there was an advert break it was just one advert not 6 minutes of them. Plus LJ made all his own adverts giving them a funny sci-fi theme with music in the background. Sometimes you didn’t even realise you were listening to an advert, until he mentioned David Aumonier Hairdressers etc. This was an amazing part of my life, one I’ll never forget and be eternally thankful for.

It was also the first time I was able to do a mix which got turned into a fully legit royalty paid CD Album. Because of its legitimacy it was being sold in HMV, Virgin and all the music outlets in Northern Ireland. I couldn't believe how popular it was, the timing by LJ was perfect. They must've made a bomb off that album. Back in 2001 I was just happy to have my name out there like that. To this day it's still being sold on market stalls all over Northern Ireland. That's 25 years! Crazy.



Do any of you remember the Teen Energy events at Dundonald International Ice Bowl? They were crazy. 2,500 screaming teenagers aged eleven to seventeen lol! The set up was awesome; a massive stage, 24K watt sound system, huge projector screens with a video guy walking around plus the Energy106 Shop for CDs, drinks, glowsticks and whistles. Those whistles were loud! It was my job to organise the entire event bar booking the main act. LJ organised some sensational acts; Lock 'n' Load, Sash, Love Inc and of course our favourite Alice DeeJay. She was amazing, really put on a good show. She asked me to arrange a bottle of water for her on the stage but they were all gone in the dressing rooms. I couldn't get to our shop before she started on stage for a new one, so gave her mine that I had just opened but hadn't drank from. She noticed the seal was broken and was having none of it lol. I don't blame her, very unprofessional on my part. I got her sorted though. They were the biggest events I have ever DJ'd for, and along with the other DJs performing and LJ in his spaceman suit with Lobo the dog in hand we put on quite a show. There's a video my Dad took at one of the events on YouTube. Search: Ice Bowl Teen Energy 2000 with Alice DeeJay.





## 41: Dance Energy, 7pm Saturday Nights!

After being with the station for a year selling advertising, LJ asked if I'd like to put together a two-hour mix for the radio. Holy crap balls again, yes please! 'Dance Energy' was born. He'd start the show with an intro, "In association with Renaissance at The Washington Bar Belfast and Calico Jacks in The Marine Court Hotel Bangor, we present Dance Energy with DJ Danny Dee. Kickin up a storm for the weekend!". As the show was prerecorded I got to listen to my show every Saturday Night before Calicos. Sometimes my set was a recording from one of my gigs. I was so excited about this. I'm on air, right now, people are listening to me! I was very happy and felt very fortunate at this time in my life. After all I went through in America with the homelessness and being poor, to feeling this happy. I just can't describe it.



## 42: Club Energy, 7pm Saturday Nights!

As if it couldn't get any better, I asked LJ if I could use the mic during my show and he said yes. He was understandably a little reluctant as this was his baby, his creation. But thankfully he thought enough of me to share it with me. So there I was, premixed set on minidisc in the player, mic on, press record then play.....whoosh with an Energy106 clip, then LJ's part, then my mix starts and then.... "Hello listeners. You're locked in Energy106.6 on your FM dial. This is Club Energy with DJ Danny Dee, welcome to the weekend". Maaaaan I was shaking like a leaf!! So nervous.

But there I was, actually talking on air, on the radio, to god only knows how many listeners! Each week I read out email or answer machine requests from the previous week. I always included some of the new releases CD Heaven were selling, along with loads of promo records I was receiving from the record labels through the post. I loved dropping new songs. I saved quite a few of these shows and uploaded them to my Mixcloud account. You're welcome to stream or download them, plus they're dated. So if you spot a date you used to listen to the show you might hear your request being read out. Search DJ-Danny Dee on Mixcloud.

A screenshot of a Mixcloud profile for DJ-Danny Dee. The profile shows a circular profile picture, the name 'DJ-Danny Dee', and statistics: 1893 Followers and 453 Following. There are buttons for 'Enable subscriptions / tips' and 'Add socials / links'. The location is listed as 'Bangor, United Kingdom' and 'Current Gigs:' is empty. Below the profile is a list of shows. The first show is 'Club Energy on Energy 106 with DJ Danny Dee - 28th Aug 1999', which has a play button icon, a waveform, and a duration of 1:56:47. The second show is 'Club Energy on Energy 106 with DJ Danny Dee - 6th Nov 1999', which has a play button icon, a waveform, and a duration of 04:06 / 2:01:40. The background of the profile page features a large 'ENERGY 106.6 FM' logo.

This show went on for a year or two until I quite fancied the idea of a co-host. A few tried out but I was drawn to only one of them; DJ Stevie Beck. He was funny, and maaan did we have some fun together! He made me laugh all the time and the craic between us was nuts. He was the perfect fit for the show as he was nuts and I was bonkers, so we covered all the bases lol. I'll cherish the five years we did the show together. Very fun times. He's back on the radio now with the next generation of Energy106. I wish him all the very best. They're lucky to have him.



# AHERN OPENS FIRE ON PIRATE STATION

By JOE OLIVER

**TAOISEACH** Bertie Ahern is set to go to war against a man who once claimed he was abducted by aliens.

He has thrown his weight behind a campaign to shut down a pirate radio station run by UFO nut Lawrence John.

Mr Ahern was recruited by top Ulster Unionist Jim Rodgers in the battle to silence Energy 106, whose round-the-clock dance music is beamed into homes north and south.

Mr Rodgers claims the illegal station - it straddles the Armagh-Monaghan border - is undermining licensed local stations in the north such as Citybeat, Downtown and Cool FM.



LETTER: Bertie Ahern

Now, in a letter, Mr Ahern assures the worried politician: "I have made enquiries with the Director of Telecommunications Regulation and I understand they are aware of the existence of this station and its companion, 'Magic 106' which operates from the same site."

He added: "I have asked that this issue be expedited as a matter of urgency."

Mr Rodgers said: "I am delighted Mr Ahern has taken this matter on board



ILLEGAL: Lawrence John

and that the authorities in the Republic are actively investigating Energy 106.

## Concerns

"A lot of people have expressed their concerns to me that it is having an adverse impact on stations here who are legitimate and paying their licence fees."

"I have also contacted the Radio Communications Agency in the hope of joint action on both sides of the

border." Mr Rodgers said: "I have been talking to retailers who are advertising with Energy 106, and pointing out to them that it is a wholly illegal operation."

"It's clearly unfair competition if the revenue of legitimate local stations is being affected."

But Energy boss Lawrence, who also runs a Belfast bar called the Outer Limits, said last night:

"The legislation in the Republic on this matter is very complex."

"There are some 60 pirate stations in the south and there has not been a single successful prosecution in 10 years."

"I have applied in both the Republic and Britain for a licence, and both authorities tell me that none are available."

## 43: The End of Energy106.6FM.

As Energy was a pirate radio station it's lifespan would be limited. It would've been nice if it lasted forever, or if the radio authority acknowledged the demand for a 24/7 dance music station in Belfast, but alas it was not meant to be. In 2006 after much petitioning from the legal radio stations to get us shut down, the government finally gave in and raided the transmitters on Alien Mountain to cut down the tower. They seized thousands of pounds worth of equipment and essentially shut us down for good. It was an amazing run though. LJ started it up in 1998, so 8 years is a very long time in pirate years.



I will forever be in debt to LJ for taking a chance on me and giving me my own show. He is without a doubt the reason why I'm still gigging to this day. Owen McCaughan ignited a seed, Jay Caulfield taught me the ropes, Paul Doherty got me a start and Lawrence John launched my career. From my family and I to all of you, thank you from the bottom of my heart. I love you all.



## 44: Cecil 1938-2018.

For all his misgivings, like kidnapping me, he was still my Dad and I loved him. He loved me more than anything, I could see it in his eyes. He raised me to be respectful of others and authority, to do no harm and not be a dick. I owe how I have turned out to him and his teachings. He's most likely up there painting pictures and playing songs on his guitar as that's what he loved to do. At times we didn't get along, but that's normal. Every family dynamic is going to have their share of arguments.

He was well known in Bangor fondly as King Om. I think that made me Prince Omelette lol. He was excentric, especially in his older years. Always with the crazy ideas about God and the Universe, aliens being in charge and he loved conspiracy theories. I wouldn't be surprised if he started a few himself. But like I said, for all his misgivings he still wanted to help people. The number of times he tried to sober up the town drunks Jerry & Julie I've lost count. He helped the homeless and if anyone was ever stuck for a place to crash or for food he was there doing what he could. Having come from similar circumstances in America he had compassion for people with similar plights.

Back in the 1960's he knew and hung around with quite a few famous people. Roger Daltry, Eric Clapton and Van Morrison who he drove his van for to their (Them) gigs. He secured a moderate level of fame for himself when EMI signed him up for a record deal. His songs were played on the radio and his album 'OM' did ok. It was through his music he met my Mom. Sadly his career didn't get a chance to take off as he 'took off' with me.

He passed away in 2018 from a brain haemorrhage at Sir Samuel Kelly's Care Home in Hollywood. He was staying there due to his dementia. They are very good people, the carers are very kind and understanding. It's a good home. When he passed it was a very sad time for me having to say goodbye to the strongest man I'd ever known. You just think your Dad will always be there. Uncle Dessie was there for support on that last day. Sad for him too saying goodbye to his brother. May he rest in peace and in our hearts. Love you Dad.



Luke, Charlene, Jackson & Me

## 45: The Next Chapter.

It's 2026 now and I'm 56 as I finish writing this autobiography. Had to do it before I forget everything lol. I feel blessed with my true soulmate of a wife Charlene and our two little boys Jackson & Luke whom I think the absolute world of. I try and remember the lessons my Dad passed on to me and now I pass them on to them. Charlene's family treat me like one of their own which just warms my heart. I play Softball every weekend for my team the Bangor Barracudas with Charlene, and try and stay on top of my Type 2 diabetes by eating as healthily as I can. I look back on my life and see just how lucky I was to not only survive the hardships of America, but for my life to go in the musical direction that it did. Dad was a musician so perhaps he passed something along. Either way, I'm truly grateful for how my life turned out. I'm still out gigging, four nights a week at present, and I wouldn't change it for the world. It's not all DJing though, my career has diversified somewhat over the years. I host Pub Quizzes and Party Bingo Nights now as well. I always say, "As long as it involves a microphone I'm in" :)

If you've made it this far thank you very much for reading. I hope I didn't bore you too much. This was my life and I lived it. It's been a hell of a ride with those ups and downs. At the end of the day though, I can't complain how it turned out.

All the very best folks,

Daniel Saturn McCartney

12/12/1969

Sagittarius

*DANNY  
DEE*



Not The End....