

Danny's Ride

What do you plan to do when you turn sixty? Here's a better question for you. What would you do if you were told you had cancer?

Danny Leonard is in great shape for a man who has gone through the rigorous treatment for cancer, not just once, but twice. Of course he needs to be in great shape. He's preparing to set off on a journey which will take him nearly 3,000 miles... on a bicycle.



Daniel Leonard, son of Patrick and Coralie B. Leonard was born Waynesville, NC, but his family moved to Charleston in 1945 when he was 5. That same year his father, Pat, founded Leonard's School of Music in downtown Charleston on Meeting St. The school moved to James Island in later years. Danny began playing drums at age 7. He started with the clarinet and tuba in the 9th grade and then added the oboe and saxophone. During his years at James Island High School he started playing in dance bands around town.

Danny was also an athlete in high school. During his senior year he set a physical fitness record. After graduating from James Island High he received a full music scholarship to the University of Arizona. During his years at Arizona he left college to join the Marine Corps. He set an all-time record for physical fitness and strength training while at Parris island.

He returned to college and in the ensuing period was injured playing intramural football. He returned to Charleston for treatment and spent several days in the hospital. At this point he was unable to return to college. His father, who was supervisor of music for Charleston County Schools, was in the hospital at the same time and needed a teacher. Having completed his music courses, Danny quickly filled the need.

For the next twenty three years he taught in Charleston's public and private schools as well as at the Baptist College and Leonard's School of Music. In 1978, while teaching his band, he challenged the kids to set some personal goals. One student turned the tables on him by asking what his goals were. Danny says that he had always wanted to write a book, so he promised to write a book and ride his bike 165 miles in one day. The following September he rode 191.4 miles in a single day and wrote 3 books during that school year. Soon afterward he began traveling around the southeast doing clinics on the books he had written.

In the early 80's his travels took him to North Texas State University, the top jazz school in the country. He went to listen to his son, Danny Leonard, Jr., audition for the top band. While giving some clinics in the area he met Dr. Roger Warner, chairperson of the Department of Music at North Texas State University. Dr. Warner had Danny clinic the Senior Grad students. He told Danny that books like his were needed in Texas. Some months later, Danny moved to Texas.

Soon his books were in use by most school systems. By then, Danny was giving clinics all around the area. During the next eight years he and Dr. Warner started band programs in 38 parochial and private schools in the Dallas/Fort Worth area. Danny then taught at Nolan High School for two years. Following that, he and a group of parents organized the Leonard Music Institute of Texas, Inc. By the time he left Texas there were over 1000 students in the band programs.

Once back in Charleston, he started to get back into his old routine of exercise and running. One day he got a shocking telephone call. His brother-in-law, Phillip Stockdale, had developed prostate cancer.

Phil had taught at Leonard's School of Music in Charleston for 10 years, where he was a beloved music teacher. Then he and Danny's sister, Patsy, moved to North Carolina where he continued teaching. Danny says Phil was always doing things for people, but you'd never know it. He preferred to keep a low profile. "He was a great musician and just a fantastic human being," says Leonard.

By the time the cancer was discovered it had metastasized throughout his body. He was told his disease had progressed beyond treatment. He was given only a few months to live. He went to Houston, TX for another opinion, but to no avail. The only thing they could do for him at this point was to provide morphine to ease his pain. Danny made a resolution to do something to honor this heroic man. Phil died in September of 1997.

It was at this time that Danny first began planning his cross-country bicycle ride to raise awareness of the need for early cancer screening and detection. He felt that if Phil's cancer had been detected earlier a great life would not have been lost. Little did he suspect that fate would put his plans on hold.

Danny resumed his workout routine. He lifted weights, ran, and rode his bicycle. Meanwhile, he contacted the American Cancer Society. They provided brochures to hand out on his trip and shirts to wear. Still, he continued to feel exhausted each night. Figuring it was because he had let himself get out of shape, he continued his efforts.

During these preparations he was scheduled to teach at Lake Texoma band camp in Oklahoma with a large group of students from Leonard's Music Institute of Texas, Inc. After preparing for the trip, he awoke at 5:00am the next morning to realize that his neck was very enlarged. He was shocked and headed for the emergency room immediately.



After a series of tests they discovered cancer in his stomach, intestines, neck, lungs, and chest. He was directed to Dr. George Geils, Sr. at Charleston Hematology, where it was determined he had non-Hodgkins lymphoma. Danny was advised to begin chemotherapy immediately. He started right away with chemotherapy, and within 7 weeks, to the amazement of the doctors, he was clear of the cancer. Danny continued with the treatments for the full 3 month schedule.

With a clean bill of health and a mission in mind Danny once again began training for his ride. Everything was great. In May of 1998 he married Lynda Glover, a former sweetheart and Charleston native.

By August, Danny was in the best shape of his life. He peddled from Franklin, NC to Highland, NC, climbing to an elevation of 3000 feet. Mechanical problems with his bike called a halt to this trip, but it was a powerful demonstration of what he could hope to achieve. On the 31st, while staying at his mother-in-law's house, to his surprise, Danny felt two nodules on the side of his neck. He suspected then that the cancer had returned.

This time he was aided by the son of the doctor who had helped him in his earlier bout with cancer. Dr. George Geils, Jr., Medical Director of the Roper Hospital Bone Marrow Transplant Unit, started Danny on a low-dose chemotherapy treatment, which would possibly give him a 10 percent chance of survival. He followed that treatment with seven days of high-dose chemo, 10 times the usual dose, and added a newer fifth drug to the standard four.

This treatment had a good chance of being effective, but ravaged Danny's bone marrow and immune system. Last March he underwent a stem cell transplant, an unusual procedure in which his own bone marrow was removed before the chemotherapy and then returned to him afterward.

He continued his training even while undergoing these procedures. At times he peddled an exercise bike while being treated. At other times he composed music on a computer. He was determined to not let this disease get him down.

Following the stem cell transplant, Danny was administered a high protein drug called Rituxan, a strong chemical treatment for non-Hodgkins lymphoma. Many people were keeping Danny in their thoughts and prayers. Today he is in complete remission. He says, "I feel I am alive today because of Dr. George F. Geils, Sr., Dr. George F. Geils, Jr., and the hundreds of people who prayed for me." He also feels strongly that the booklet, "God's Creative Power for Healing," by Charles Capps, gave him the faith to know he would be healed.

Danny is quick to point out that he credits the Lord for his well-being. "The Lord provided the support of friends, family, my loving wife, and a highly skilled medical team to get me where I am today," he says. He is convinced that his ride to alert people to the need for early detection of cancer through screenings is just one more part of God's plan for his life.



The nearly 3000 mile cross-country trek is designed to alert people to the need for early cancer screening. Danny will be accompanied by two other riders, Charles Fox (owner of Fox Music) and Roman Hammes. The ride will begin in Santa Monica, CA, on April 2nd, and end in Charleston, SC, on May 27, 2000. A support team, Floyd Johnston and Sean Leonard (Danny's son), will manage the equipment, communications, and speaking engagements.

Charleston area CBS affiliate, WCSC, is the primary sponsor of Danny's ride. They have provided a Website along with an address and phone number for contributors. Care Alliance Health Services not only contributed to Danny's recovery, they have been extremely helpful in the plans for the ride. The American Cancer Society has also provided much needed support.

Danny says, "I want to do something to honor Phil Stockdale, while, hopefully, enlightening people along the way about the need for cancer screenings and early detection. If I help just one person the ride will have been worth it."

Leonard's School of Music

For nearly forty years Leonard's School of Music was a landmark in Charleston. Many talented musicians passed through their doors, and many are professionals, well respected in their fields today.

Recently, I spoke with two time Grammy award winner, Bob Belden, about his experience with Leonard's School of Music. He was a saxophone student with the school in 1972 and 1973 and toured Europe with the School band.

"Danny had a different approach from what the traditional music programs had in high schools because he didn't have the school's restrictions. He taught the way he felt. His methods were a lot about discipline and the love of music."

Bob continued his studies at North Texas State University where he graduated with a degree in composition in 1978. He performed in and wrote for the One O'Clock Jazz Band, the top college jazz band in the country. (North Texas State University is the only school in the country to win a grammy.) Last year, he received two Grammys, one for his production of the best historical album, "The complete Miles Davis/Gil Evans Columbia Recordings" and another award for his liner notes for the same album. Mr. Belden currently records for Blue Note records. He is currently working on a film called "The Riff" which is scheduled to debut at a film festival later this Spring. He is also in the studio with his next CD entitled "Black Dahlia," due out next Fall.

For many years the chief competitor of Leonard's was Fox Music. Both companies sold instruments and both had bands. Many people played in both the Leonard's youth Band and the Fox Trident Honors Band. In a display of irony, Danny Leonard today considers Charles Fox one of the best friends he's ever had. The two will be peddling nearly 3000 miles together.



Other former students of Danny's are also doing well. Tommy Gill, well known to many for his role in the former Serenade and Charleston Live shows as well as Spoleto and numerous other venues, is also a professor at the College of Charleston. Andrea Dupree has toured the country as a jazz singer, returning to Charleston to perform at Piccolo Spoleto as well as several recurring gigs.

So many people speak highly of Danny and Leonard's School of Music. My wife, Caroline, another former student says, "I learned more about not just music, but life as well from Leonard's School than I did in all the previous twelve years of school."