

My Dearest Dad,

When Mom died, I wrote her a letter that was read at her memorial service, and you were in the audience. When Jack died, I wrote a letter to him as well, and Gayle read it for me at his memorial service. But I want it to be different with you, Dad. I want you to know how I feel before you go.

Dad, you've always been my hero. You're my John Wayne. I remember when I was young... you were a big, strong, strapping figure of a man that I looked up to. You had the biggest muscles I'd ever seen. At the Lake County Fair, Mom would sit at that auction and bid on mink stoles, while you would take me to ring that bell high in the sky. You used to pick the tallest pole, slam that huge mallet down, and not only ring that bell, but almost knock it off the top! We always won the top prize.

You've always been an honest, no-nonsense, straightforward man, with the strongest of work ethics... I should know – you gave it to me. You enjoyed the simple things in life and I always admired that about you. You've always done right by people and we all noticed. You did your best for me, Dad, and I'll always love you for it. I only wish I can do as well for my sons.

Even though you and Mom got divorced, you always stayed together when it came to me. You always visited me together – in Colorado for my wedding, in London, Rochester and San Diego... we even traveled to Scotland together to buy Uncle George that special bottle of scotch. And you were there with me during Mom's last week to support me. Thanks, Dad, that meant a lot to me.

Dad, we've had some great times together. We went to the Indy 500 in 1966 and witnessed that 16-car pile-up on the first lap... and those wheels flying into the fence... remember? I thought all car races were like that! And this week, ironically, you and I celebrated its 40th anniversary by watching it together on TV. Of course, those cars have nothing on those Volkswagen Squarebacks, do they?!

We went to the Bulls championship games and watched Michael perform his magic. It was a great run – six championships, and they couldn't have done it without the Stech family! Right?!

I really loved our fishing and hunting trips – to Nebraska, to South Dakota, to Wisconsin and, of course, to Michigan. Fishing up at Frankfurt and catching those King Salmon on the boat. Fishing up in South Dakota and catching and eating all those walleye. Fishing up in Wisconsin with Jack and paying that guide... and after paying all that money, we got skunked! We hunted pheasants in Colorado and Nebraska. Remember that time about a hundred pheasants flew up and scared the crap out of us? Those were the days!

When I was little, I'll never forget fishing down by Dale Bridge, and watching you catch the biggest bass, catfish and perch I'd ever seen. But then, Grandma Stech and I kicked your butt

by catching all those perch in their ice shanty. I think that she and I still have the record for the most perch ever caught in one day!

I can still smell Grandma cooking fried eggs and Canadian bacon for you and me. She'll be cooking again for you soon, Dad, and it will be almost as good as Aunt Rosie's noodles and dumplings!

Funny, just the thought of Grandma and Grandpa, Aunt Rosie and Uncle Earl, Uncle George and Aunt Donna, Rita, Sandy, Earlene, Greg and Doug, reminds me of all those wonderful Christmases, Thanksgivings and July 4ths. Those were the best times of my life, Dad. When you and I took Blake on the last trip, we shared Michigan and Mackinaw with him. Our best times have been in Michigan, Dad. It's only fitting that I'll be taking you back there soon, and I'll make sure you have a great view of the water next to your Dad, Mom and Brother Louie.

They say that God works in mysterious ways and I think they're right. You had your stroke a year and a half ago and it was a blessing. You were able to move to California and we've been able to spend the last couple of years together. I remember this Christmas with you at that church that was lit up for a block with a million Christmas lights. That pastor looked right at you. I think he was focused on you at the direction of a higher authority.

Dad, while I don't want you to go, I want you to go when you're ready. Don't worry about me, I'll be fine. I've got Gayle, Blake, Josh and, of course, Noodle. I want you to start your next chapter in Heaven, and look over me and my family. I want you to leave here with a smile on your face, knowing that you have so many more friends and family now in Heaven than you do on earth. You'll be greeted at the gate by your mom and dad; Louie; Ellen; Jack; Eva; and all your army and ironworker buddies. They'll all be waiting and there's going to be one helluva welcome party!

Now that you know all this, Dad, let's continue our journey together, knowing it won't end on earth. Whether you're on earth or in heaven, you'll always be a part of me, Dad. Come to think of it, you're even bigger and stronger than John Wayne! I love you, Dad, with all of my heart. Always have, always will.

Your loving son,

Dave