

## The Basketball Backboard



The plastic backboard was cracked and the wood that was holding it up was rotting, so the symbol of happy times playing basketball needed to come down. Yet, I was reluctant to do so and cried when I did because Danny was the one who used it the most and put up the best shots. It drew Danny and me together, competing for the unheralded honors that usually remained our secret. I actually beat him once in a great while and loved to raze him about it, which usually sparked a “no mercy” game, where it was not even close= I lost badly. However, when I spent any time with Danny, I never lost; I always came away a winner.

Playing basketball in our driveway was Danny’s main athletic activity through his treatments his junior and senior years of high school. Making a long jump shot seemed to validate that he was okay, strong, and healing. Playing music and basketball were two markers of a good day, despite the pressures of school, the treatments, and the underlying questions his illness posed. They were gifts he could develop and share, and I was the main recipient of his basketball skills. As hard as it was to take down the symbol of that sharing, it was time because Danny shares in different ways now, ones that are emerging as I listen to my heart, see those who loved him honoring him by smiling again, living his mantra of seeking Love, Life, and Light in their lives and sharing these gifts.

No more three-pointers in our driveway, but plenty of memories of the ones Danny made and hopes that his spirit of play and fun surprise me in the days ahead.

Frank Riley  
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