

# Daddy Dave Round Two: The Journey Home

(2022-2025)

## 11.1 From Bangkok Quarantine to Maple Grove Community

**M**ost people enter retirement with a sense of anticipation, eager to leave behind the stress of work and begin a life filled with leisure and the pursuit of personal passions. It should be a time to reflect on past achievements, explore new opportunities, and enjoy the freedom that comes from a lifetime of hard work. For me, however, retirement brought all of these things and a rather unusual focus, direction, and purpose for someone my age: full-time childcare for my newborn daughter as she grew and matured through her early years.

Retirement gave me a rare and meaningful opportunity to experience parenthood in a new way—to raise my youngest daughter, Anya, with a level of presence and intention that hadn't been possible with my three older children. In those earlier years, the demands of advancing my career and overseeing large-scale training projects often pulled my focus in multiple directions. Now, free from professional obligations, I was able to fully devote

myself to Anya's upbringing, savoring the moments I once had to rush through.

This unexpected parenting experience became as rewarding as my professional accomplishments, though obviously in entirely different ways. Without the constant pull of work responsibilities, I was able to be present for everyday moments that once slipped by unnoticed. The unhurried pace of retirement parenting allowed me to see Anya's early childhood development with a clarity and appreciation that was sometimes missing during my working years.

The skills that served me well professionally—patience, strategic thinking, and effective communication—found new applications in this role. Meanwhile, Anya benefited from having a father who could be fully present, without the distraction of urgent emails or impending deadlines. This second chance at parenting became retirement's most meaningful gift—one that enriched both our lives immeasurably.

When Anya was born, I faced the profound challenge of becoming a parent at 68. A lifetime of experience had given me wisdom and perspective, but age had also tempered my physical stamina. I welcomed every moment of her upbringing with enthusiasm, yet my body often reminded me of its limitations. The early months were particularly demanding—sleepless nights and feedings every two hours left me drained in every sense. After Gig nursed Anya at night, it was my turn to put her back to sleep, often bouncing on an exercise ball to help soothe her with a steady rhythm. I remember one night I was so exhausted that I nodded off mid-bounce, waking with a jolt just as I felt myself slipping—instinctively clutching Anya tightly to keep her safe in my arms.

However, these difficulties paled in comparison to the joy of witnessing Anya's transformation from newborn to curious toddler. I wholeheartedly accepted this balance between aged wisdom and physical limitations. Parenting, I soon discovered, had evolved significantly since raising my older

children. Modern child development research and contemporary techniques require adopting new approaches while abandoning outdated practices. With Gig's guidance, I embraced these changes. When Anya reached six months, Gig explained that certain behavioral changes resulted from something called a "developmental leap", a concept entirely unfamiliar to me. Though I remembered the "terrible twos" from my earlier parenting years, these specific developmental milestones represented new territory. Despite the concepts, I approached it with openness and determination.

The practical aspects of Anya's care became deeply meaningful rituals. Diaper changes, bouncing her to sleep, and reading her favorite books evolved into a regular commitment to her well-being like the dedication I once gave my career. The COVID-19 pandemic intensified our situation, as we cared for a newborn in complete isolation without support from a nanny, extended family or neighbors. With businesses closed and strict quarantine measures in place during Anya's entire first year, we operated in constant all-hands-on-deck mode. Through perseverance, we weathered the nearly two-year lockdown together.

By the time I retired at the end of 2021, the world was beginning to emerge from the grip of the Covid-19 pandemic. In Thailand, although many people continued wearing face masks for another year or so, businesses were reopening, and a long-lost sense of normalcy was gradually returning. One lasting outcome of the lockdowns was the growing acceptance of remote work—and Gig was no exception. We moved my office furniture from the upstairs bedroom to the living room, where it doubled as a room divider between the living and dining areas. Gig's ability to work from home, both during and after the pandemic, was a tremendous help in caring for Anya.

Another welcome change was the revival of our social life. With restaurants reopening, we began reconnecting with friends and family more frequently. Gig and her best friend, Mon—both seasoned connoisseurs of Thailand's vibrant food scene—were quick to embrace the opportunity. Mon grew increasingly close to Anya, becoming like a second mommy. As restrictions

eased, the two of them were able to spend more quality time together, deepening their bond through shared playtime routines and new experiences. For Anya's second birthday, Mon joined us on a getaway to a lovely hotel in Hua Hin, where the four of us celebrated the occasion with warmth, laughter, and a strong sense of togetherness.

In early 2022, Joey traveled to Thailand to begin the process of obtaining a Thai birth certificate—something that hadn't been possible at the time of his birth due to legal restrictions concerning any foreign-born birth parent. During his stay, he divided his time between our home in Nonthaburi and his mother's condo in central Bangkok. He was also weighing a significant life decision: the possibility of relocating to Thailand permanently. The key question was whether he could maintain his job while working remotely. This visit gave him a chance to explore that option and get a feel for what day-to-day life in Thailand might be like in the long term. It was also a terrific opportunity to work on his Thai language, experience Thai culture, and discover the Thai side of his family.

In July of 2022, we finally made our long-postponed journey to Minnesota—our first visit in three years due to the pandemic. This trip served dual purposes: reconnecting with family and discussing our future living arrangements with those closest to us. Though I had originally envisioned spending my retirement years in Thailand, Gig and I had adjusted our plans, deciding to live in the United States for 3-4 years while she pursued American citizenship.

This decision aligned perfectly with our new family reality. With Anya's dual nationality, we recognized that she might someday choose to live in the United States. By securing American citizenship for Gig, we would eliminate potential complications and ensure the family could remain together regardless of where Anya's future path might lead. What began as a temporary adjustment to our retirement dreams had evolved into a strategic decision for our daughter's long-term opportunities and our family's flexibility across borders.

Once we decided to make our home in the United States, our first priority was choosing where to settle for those three years. We considered several possibilities. The Bay Area in California was appealing—it was home to my college friend Michael Clark and my childhood best friend, Tom Bruner. We also looked at the Washington, D.C. area as a possibility since we had lived there before, and it would offer Gig the best job prospects when her current project ended in 2025.

What I expected to be a lengthy and complex decision-making process quickly turned into a remarkably straightforward conversation—thanks to my daughter Tricia. During a family gathering, she stepped eagerly into the role of “decision-persuader.” With her characteristic clarity and firm conviction, she laid out a strong case for settling in the Minneapolis area. Her reasoning was both practical and deeply personal: she spoke about the value of having Anya grow up near family, and she painted a compelling picture of the emotional support and connection we’d find there.

Tricia’s enthusiastic advocacy didn’t just influence our thinking; it made the decision. By the end of the conversation, Gig and I reached a shared conclusion: Minneapolis would be our new home. With that settled, we shifted our focus to the logistics of the move.

The next step was finding a place to live. After plenty of research, we narrowed our options down to two suburbs: Maple Grove and Champlin. From there, we began evaluating apartment complexes that fit within our budget and met our needs and chose two places. We asked Tricia to tour those two properties—one in each city. She quickly ruled out the Champlin option due to its small size, but after visiting a newly constructed complex called Terra Residences in Maple Grove, she gave it her enthusiastic approval. Based on her recommendation, we moved forward with the leasing process.

Initially, I hadn’t planned to include underground parking in our rental agreement, but Tricia strongly encouraged me to reconsider—and I’m grateful she did. Her advice turned out to be invaluable during those freezing winter

months, when that added layer of convenience made a real difference. One obstacle in the approval process was my lack of rental history, compounded by many years spent living overseas. As a result, the screening process took longer than expected, but eventually, we were approved and ready to move into Terra.

Another priority was applying for a spousal visa so Gig could enter the country as a resident alien and begin the three-year countdown toward U.S. citizenship eligibility. That process turned out to be far more complicated than I expected. Fortunately, we had a lawyer guiding us through it. Even with professional help, it still took nearly nine months for the visa to be approved. I was surprised by how long it dragged on, especially since I remembered going through a similar process for Miam back in 1979, and that had taken less than a month. Times change, I suppose.

The year between our visit to the U.S. in June 2022 and our actual move to Maple Grove on June 15, 2023, was a whirlwind of activity and meaningful moments as we enjoyed our final stretch in Thailand. Friends and members of Gig's family visited more often—perhaps sensing the importance of our impending departure. We traveled frequently, both by car and plane, creating memories across the country: sightseeing and dining in Chiang Mai, enjoying a resort getaway—where Anya rode her first horse—in Khao Yai arranged by Mon, and spending carefree days at waterparks and hotels in Pattaya. It was a joyful, adventure-filled time with friends—one we'll always fondly remember.

Another significant shift in our routine came when two-year-old Anya started school for the first time. In September, she began attending Rumruadee, an international school near our home with a preschool program that fit her perfectly. She was welcomed into a warm, nurturing classroom led by a wonderful teacher, Ms. Keri, and quickly began forming positive relationships with her classmates.

Around that same time, Anya had an unintentionally humorous mishap. We took her for a quick trim because her bangs were falling into her eyes, but the hairdresser, mistaking her for a boy—she was wearing a T-shirt and pants—shaved the back of her head before we could intervene. At that point, we had no choice but to let them finish the haircut, which ended up very short and boyish. Fortunately, at just two years old, Anya was blissfully unaware, and her classmates didn't seem to notice—though a few curious parents did ask what had happened.

Anya's early school experience held special meaning for us, as she was a "Covid baby," born during a time when social interaction was limited, and developmental opportunities were often disrupted. Watching her thrive in a structured, social environment was deeply reassuring—it affirmed her resilience and adaptability, and it validated our decision to give her these formative experiences before making the big transition to life in the U.S.

Another highlight of that time was a weeklong visit from my childhood friend Tom Bruner and his family. They were on a three-country tour of Southeast Asia, starting in Thailand before continuing to Cambodia and Vietnam—where Tom hoped to revisit places connected to his time during the war. By the time they arrived, Gig and I had planned a well-paced itinerary, built on the one we had used for the Zachmans' earlier visit. It included a mix of Bangkok's key sights and favorite restaurants, as well as several destinations outside the city, for which we rented a van to explore together.

It was wonderful to see Tom again, along with his wife Rebecca, one of his sons, and his son's partner. One particularly memorable moment came during a conversation in our living room, when I was stunned to learn that Tom had been stationed at U-Tapao Airfield, the same military base where I had been during my overseas time in the Air Force. It turned out that U-Tapao had been the staging ground for his helicopter gunship company, which had flown missions into Vietnam. Neither of us had known this overlap until that moment, and the realization was both surprising and deeply moving, especially when you consider that Tom's helicopter was shot

down and he likely spent time at the U-Tapao hospital. All in all, it was an absolute joy showing them around, sharing our favorite sights, and of course, introducing them to some of the best Thai cuisine the country has to offer.

In January 2023, a significant family milestone took place when Joey decided to move to Thailand permanently. This became possible after he finalized his Thai birth certificate and obtained a Thai ID card. He found an apartment not far from his mom's condo and quickly became an important part of our life during our final months in Thailand. His presence added depth and meaning to that time, and it was especially rewarding to see him bond more closely with his little sister Anya.

Just two weeks before our move to Maple Grove, we celebrated Anya's third birthday with a party that brought together more than 30 friends at a beautifully decorated venue at a place called Maria's. The theme was inspired by the movie *Frozen*, so the space sparkled with icy blues and touches of winter magic—an enchanting contrast to the tropical Thai heat. Anya was overjoyed, especially when she saw her “*Elsa and Anna*” birthday cake surrounded by all of the themed decorations.

A few days later, we hosted a second celebration at our home for Gig's extended family, bringing some of the décor from the earlier party with us. Both gatherings were filled with warmth, laughter, and love—joyful send-offs that gave us one last chance to celebrate with those closest to us before turning the page to a new chapter in the United States.

And so, on June 15, 2023, we departed Thailand. Gig's closest friends drove us to the airport, where they gathered to give us a heartfelt send-off—filled with warm hugs, well wishes, and tearful goodbyes. With our three-year-old daughter, a full load of luggage, and Elsa the dog safely crated in the cargo hold, we began our 24-hour journey to the United States.

Due to Delta airline restrictions on pet travel, we couldn't fly directly to Minneapolis with Elsa. Instead, we routed through Chicago, where we spent



the night before continuing the final leg of our journey in a large SUV. The trip was long and exhausting, but thankfully uneventful. When we finally pulled into the parking lot of our new apartment, it marked more than just the end of a journey—it was the beginning of a bold new chapter, one we embraced with a mix of anticipation, determination, and hope for what lay ahead.

Within a couple of months, we were fully settled into our apartment and, overall, adapted well to our new lifestyle—aside from the occasional winter escape back to Thailand to avoid the cold. For me, the move felt like coming full circle, returning to the area where I grew up. Being close to family again has brought a deep sense of joy and belonging. One of the first events I attended after our return was a high school class reunion—my first in nearly 50 years. Reconnecting with old classmates and reminiscing about our shared past was both meaningful and memorable. After decades of living abroad, being back in Minnesota simply felt right.

There was plenty to do in those early weeks, especially since our two-bedroom apartment was completely unfurnished. Fortunately, we had pre-ordered much of the furniture while still in Thailand, and it began arriving soon after we did. Gig and I quickly found ourselves in the thick of assembling sofas, stools, and tables. It was quite a shift from my earlier furniture-buying experience. Nearly everything now arrives flat-packed and ready for DIY assembly. Still, we managed to get it all put together, purchase the necessary appliances, and arrange for essential services.

Still, even with our winter escapes to Thailand, most of our time was firmly rooted in Minnesota, where we gradually built a new rhythm and sense of home. Life in Maple Grove offered a peaceful balance: quiet suburban living with easy access to parks, shopping, and community activities. Anya began to settle into her new routine as well, eventually enrolling in preschool, after trying two other places we found lacking. This home preschool brought structure to her days and new friendships into her life.

Gig adjusted impressively to the pace of life in the U.S., and over time, we found ourselves growing more connected to the community. We explored local farmers markets in the summer, joined library programs for Anya, and enjoyed seasonal outings like apple picking in the fall and going to summer festivals and other events, such as the State Fair.

Unfortunately for me, one lingering health issue worsened after our move to Minnesota. In the year leading up to our relocation, I experienced a few mild episodes of vertigo, which typically resolved after resting in a dark room. I had three such incidents before we left Thailand. However, about a month after settling in Maple Grove, I was struck by an intense episode of vertigo accompanied by severe nausea and vomiting. It was so debilitating that we called Tricia for help. When it became clear I couldn't stand or walk without falling, we called 911. The paramedics checked for signs of a heart issue—everything appeared normal—but they transported me to Maple Grove Hospital for further evaluation. There, the emergency team conducted several tests, including an MRI, but found no definitive cause.

I eventually recovered from that episode, but the uncertainty lingered until months later, when an ENT specialist diagnosed me with Ménière's disease—a chronic inner ear condition that affects both balance and hearing. It's marked by recurring episodes of vertigo, tinnitus, and, in some cases, progressive hearing loss. While there is no known cure, I've learned that my symptoms tend to flare up when I consume too much sodium—which makes sense, considering how salt-heavy many American foods are. Managing my diet has become a crucial part of keeping the condition in check, though I still experience occasional episodes, especially when I haven't been careful about limiting my salt intake.

One of the greatest benefits of living in Minnesota once again has been the opportunity to strengthen family bonds across multiple generations. Gig and I have reconnected with my extended family, she has built meaningful relationships with my kids from my first marriage and my siblings' families, and Anya has formed close connections with her older siblings, aunts, uncles,

and cousins.

Among Anya's favorite trips are our visits to Remer, where my sister Sheila lives on a beautiful lake. Sheila's daughter, Rachel, has a daughter named Ellie, who has quickly become Anya's favorite cousin. Those visits are always special. We enjoy pontoon rides around Boy Lake, taking in the peaceful woods and natural surroundings. Swimming in the lake, fishing, and just spending time outdoors have become treasured traditions for all of us.

Another of my sisters, Minky, lives nearby in Maple Grove, which makes it easy for us to see her regularly. Her grandchildren are close in age to Anya, so there are lots of opportunities to play together, especially since the city built a small park and playground in an empty lot next to our ground floor apartment. Minky's neighborhood is our favorite Halloween trick-or-treat venue. While it is occasionally intriguing trying to figure out the exact family relationship since Anya is technically a generation older than her similar-age cousins, it doesn't seem to matter to the kids at all. To them, they're simply playmates, eager to run, laugh, and enjoy each other's company.

And then there's the annual Heuring reunion each summer, when all of my siblings and their families gather at a park in Otsego for a day of food, laughter, and reconnecting. It's a cherished tradition that stretches back to my own childhood, when our extended family would come together for special occasions organized by my parents and their generation.

Today, the reunion continues that legacy, offering a rare chance for cousins, nieces, nephews, and now even grandchildren to spend time together. It's a meaningful reminder of our roots—how family bonds endure and evolve over time. For Anya, it's another opportunity to play freely with a pack of cousins, while for the adults, it's a time to catch up, share stories, and celebrate the continuity of family across generations.

Living here again has made writing this book especially meaningful to me, particularly as I revisited the earlier chapters where my memories had grown

faint. Attending class reunions and spending time reminiscing with old classmates brought many past events into sharper focus. Conversations with my siblings have also revealed family history that I hadn't fully understood before—some of it startling.

When I left home in 1970, I essentially left the family behind. My memories of my father were shaped by his younger years, and I didn't realize how much things had changed in my absence. In talking with my siblings about our parents, I was struck by the strong negativity they expressed toward our father—something I hadn't fully grasped. I've since learned that his drinking escalated significantly after I left. His behavior, especially toward my youngest siblings, was completely different from what I remembered from my own childhood. He became verbally abusive when drunk, and would use physical force—tossing my siblings around if they misbehaved or forcing them to eat everything on their plates. I had never witnessed any of this behavior during my youth.

Looking back, I suspect my own drinking during short visits home from overseas may have blinded me to the severity of the situation. Only through hindsight and honest conversations with my siblings have I come to recognize that he was, in fact, an alcoholic. This realization has become painfully clear since returning to live here, and it weighs heavily on how I now view our family's past.

Returning to the place where my story began—now living just a 20-minute drive from my childhood home—has brought with it a flood of reflection on the long, winding journey that led me here. The geography of memory works in mysterious ways; familiar landmarks have become triggers for recollections I thought were lost forever. While I anticipated some nostalgia, I hadn't expected how meaningful it would be to become more present in the lives of my adult children and to reconnect with my siblings and their families.

These renewed relationships have allowed me to connect with my family in ways that occasional visits never could. The small town I returned to, however, is not the same place I left. The familiar bubble of my childhood has shifted and changed, in ways that sometimes saddens me. Still, there's something valuable about being available—not just for the major milestones but for the ordinary moments that actually comprise the substance of relationships.

Our plan, on the surface, remains practical: stay for three or four years, long enough for Gig to be naturalized and receive her U.S. passport, then return to Thailand for good. But as time passes, these deepening family ties are gently reshaping my sense of what the future might hold. Life has a way of surprising us, and I'm reminded of my own past when well-laid plans shifted due to changing circumstances.

The threads of connection that have rewoven themselves here—watching Anya discover the joy of cousins, sitting with my siblings as we piece together our family's history, feeling the quiet satisfaction of being truly present in my loved ones' lives—these experiences have added unexpected richness to what I thought would be a simple transitional chapter. Perhaps that's the most important lesson I've learned: that homecoming isn't just about returning to a place, but about allowing yourself to be changed by the experience of return.

And so, while the chronological telling of my unconventional life draws to a close here, my story certainly doesn't. There are more chapters still to be written, and perhaps some unexpected turns in the road ahead. For me, retirement isn't merely about looking back; it's about continuing to grow, to give, and to savor the richness of life in all its forms—the planned and the surprising, the familiar and the newly discovered.

And that's exactly what I intend to do as I embrace, with full heart and open hands, whatever comes next in this ongoing adventure of being "Daddy Dave."



**Preschool Pals:** Anya enjoys a messy snack alongside two of her PreK-2 classmates. She attended Ruamrudee International School from 8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. It was located 15 minutes from our home. Like most Thai schools—even at the college level—students wore uniforms as part of the daily routine.



**Anya's 3rd Birthday:** Shortly before our move to Maple Grove, we threw a big birthday party for Anya, with everyone we knew joining in the fun. The theme was Frozen—her favorite movie at the time. It was also a farewell, giving us one last chance to spend time with many friends before leaving for the U.S.



**Covid Wedding:** We're pictured here with our close friends Ben and Mot at their wedding, held near the end of the pandemic. Unbeknownst to anyone at the time, Mot had COVID—and within three days, the entire wedding party, including Gig, had come down with it. Thankfully, everyone made a full recovery.



**The Bruners:** My childhood friend, Tom Bruner, and his family visited Thailand in early 2023, so we took them around Bangkok to explore the city. Here we are in our living room, where I was stunned to discover that Tom and I had once been stationed at the same base in Thailand—without ever knowing it.





**Water Fight:** For Thai New Year, known as Songkran, in April, we rented a tuk-tuk, loaded up our water guns, and dove into a massive street water fight in Bangkok—one of the biggest in the world. We got completely soaked, including a very perplexed Anya, but in the sweltering summer heat, it felt amazing.



**Bon Voyage:** I took this photo with Gig's best friends gathered around Elsa in her crate after we checked in for our flight to America. It was a tearful farewell, but we'd be back to escape the frigid winter. Elsa stayed in the crate for 24 hours without food or water, and remarkably, she didn't make a mess inside.



**The Assemblers:** Anya lends a helping hand assembling this stool. After we arrived, furniture in large boxes began arriving at our apartment, most of which needed to be assembled. Gig and I had become quite skilled after years of buying IKEA products. I even bought an electric screwdriver to make it easier.



**The Siblings:** My two older kids, Tricia and Joey, pose with my youngest, Anya, in our Maple Grove apartment. With a 40+ year age gap, it's certainly a special dynamic, but it makes no difference to these three closely bonded and affectionate siblings. I'm amazed every day by the novelty and beauty of it all.



**Cousin Ellie:** Anya's favorite trip is to Sheila and Randy's lakeside home near Remer, a three-hour drive. Here, we're treated to a pontoon ride around the lake, joined by my niece Rachel and Anya's favorite cousin Ellie. Sheila and Randy also take care of Elsa when we travel to Thailand—Elsa loves it there!



**Thai Boxers:** During our Bangkok trip in early 2025, Jared and Anya posed with boxing gloves raised, ready for action. Dining at a restaurant before attending an electrifying Thai boxing match, this was Jared's longtime dream, arranged by Mon who secured VIP tickets to the impressive, dazzlingly arena.



**Disneyland Hong Kong:** In December 2024, the girls—Gig, Mon, and Anya—took a trip to Hong Kong for a three-day adventure at Disneyland. Posing here with Minnie Mouse, it was a special all-girls outing that dazzled Anya, who was thrilled to meet so many of the Disney characters she had only seen on TV.



**Sneaky Photo:** Tricia took this photo during Gig's 40th birthday celebration she hosted. She secretly recorded this moment and included it in a seven-minute video she prepared featuring birthday wishes from all of Gig's friends. This thoughtful keepsake captures a precious moment we'll always treasure.