

NEWS

Nick Sagan Reflects on Voyager 1 and the Golden Record

When scientists confirmed on 12 September that NASA's Voyager 1 spacecraft had entered interstellar space (*Eos*, 94(39), 339, doi:10.1002/2013EO390003), the probe was acknowledged as the first human-made object to travel into that realm. The probe and its twin, Voyager 2, each carry a 12-inch gold-plated copper disk, known as the Golden Record.

The Golden Record is a time capsule containing images, music, and sounds from planet Earth that were selected for NASA by a committee chaired by the late astronomer Carl Sagan. The Golden Record includes greetings to the universe in 55 different languages. The greeting in English was recorded by then 6-year-old Nick Sagan, son of Carl Sagan and NASA Pioneer spacecraft plaque artist Linda Salzman.

When it was confirmed that Voyager 1 had entered interstellar space, *Eos* contacted Nick Sagan, now 43 and a writer and producer, for his comments.

Eos: *As a child, you recorded the greeting "Hello from the children of planet Earth" that is included on the Voyager Golden Record. With the recent announcement about Voyager entering interstellar space, what are your thoughts and feelings about this milestone?*

Sagan: Even if I had no personal connection to Voyager, I'd be thrilled. Sending our first craft into interstellar space is such

an amazing achievement, and there's something deeply reassuring in knowing that even if the worst befalls us on planet Earth, some record of us will survive.

That my voice represents the English language on the most distant human-made object in the universe is a tremendous honor and a strange, giddy, wonderful feeling. There's also a wistful element knowing that

a moment of my childhood has been captured and is flying away, never coming back. I have a child of my own now, and watching her discover new things shows me daily how precious these early moments are.

Eos: *What are your recollections of saying that greeting when you were 6 years old? How have that greeting and the Golden Record stayed with you over the years?*

Sagan: My parents plopped me down in front of a microphone and asked me what I'd like to say to extraterrestrials if any happened to exist. It's a little odd to say, but this seemed pretty normal for my family. A fun thing to do. I had no idea what a big deal it was. The older I get, the more it means to me.

Eos: *You have been a writer on a number of projects, including penning episodes of Star Trek. Can you put Voyager and the announcement of the Voyager milestone in context?*

Sagan: I've written science fiction novels, episodes of *Star Trek*, and even a planetary show where a friendly extraterrestrial intercepts Voyager and decides to visit Earth. And all those stories are fueled by questions of "What would happen if?" or "Why hasn't this happened?" or "Wouldn't it be fascinating if this took place?"

But the Voyager milestone is not just a thought exercise—it's an actual, physical accomplishment on behalf of all humanity—and despite the wonderfully reciprocal relationship between science and science fiction, where one will take inspiration from the other, the sheer reality of what has been accomplished with Voyager tends to overwhelm.

Eos: *What do you anticipate and/or hope comes next with the Voyager spacecraft?*

Sagan: The most likely scenario is Voyager simply continues on, speeding farther and farther away from home. As we have no hard evidence that any alien civilizations exist, Voyager may well live out its life as a message in a bottle that no one ever discovers.

Poignant though that is, I often dream about a benevolent alien civilization finding Voyager, reaching out to us, telling the story of how they made it through their technological adolescence without destroying themselves, and showing us how we can do the same.

Readers can follow Nick Sagan on Twitter at @nicksagan and visit his website at nicksagan.com.

—RANDY SHOWSTACK, Staff Writer



Courtesy of Nick Sagan

Nick Sagan (right) with his father, Carl Sagan. The photo was taken circa 1976, when Nick was 5 or 6 years old.