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Who Was Ryan White?



The Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program was named for a courageous young man named Ryan White who was diagnosed with AIDS following a blood transfusion in December 1984. Ryan White was diagnosed at age 13 while living in Kokomo, Indiana and was given six months to live. When Ryan White tried to return to school, he fought AIDS-related discrimination in his Indiana community. Along with his mother Jeanne White Ginder, Ryan White rallied for his right to attend school - gaining national attention - and became the face of public education about his disease. Surprising his doctors, Ryan White lived five years longer than predicted. He died in April 1990, one month before his high school graduation and only months before Congress passed the legislation bearing his name in August 1990 - the Ryan White Comprehensive AIDS Resources Emergency (CARE) Act.

Listen to Jeanne White Ginder recount those early years of struggle, pain, and triumph. Scroll down to listen to all five dialogs:

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How Could He Have AIDS?

Ryan was one of the first children with hemophilia to be diagnosed with AIDS. [Play audio \(MP3 - 545 KB\)](#)

Ryan White was diagnosed with AIDS on December 17, 1984. He was one of the first children, one of the first hemophiliacs to come down with AIDS, and it was definitely a time where there was no education and there was hardly any information on AIDS at the time. So I was living in Kokomo, Indiana, and Ryan was attending Western Middle School, and it was something that I really didn't even believe he had. I felt like, "How could he have AIDS?" He was a hemophiliac since birth, and I just felt like "How could he be one of the first ones?" I felt like somehow, in some way, it was going to be something else. I really never really believed he had AIDS for quite a while. At that time, of course, he had no precautions, or anything. There were no precautions at the hospital. And all of a sudden the CDC shows up and the CDC started putting in all kind of precautions, you know: the gloves, the gowns, the masks and so forth, and started talking to the nurses and so forth. It became apparent just like overnight that all of a sudden things were different.



Mom, I Want to Go to School



Ryan really became famous because of his fight to go to school. [Play audio \(MP3 - 639 KB\)](#)

When Ryan was diagnosed, they only gave him 3-6 months to live. So at that time, I thought every cough, every fever, I worried that it was going to be his last. And I really never thought he'd be healthy enough to go to school. But as he started getting healthy, as he started gaining weight, he started to ask, "Mom," he said, "I want to go to school, I want to go visit my friends. I want to see my friends." So I really kind of put him off for awhile and finally he just said, "Mom, I want to go to school, I want to go visit." So it was a long process, we had to go through almost a year and a half, he didn't go to school for about a year and a half. He was worried about taking the 7th grade over again, and he didn't want people to think he was dumb,

because he was a very smart and intelligent kid. So it was a long process. Through court hearings, we thought it would take one court hearing, and we'd have all these medical experts in so to speak, and then everybody would be educated, but it didn't happen that way.

It was really bad. People were really cruel, people said that he had to be gay, that he had to have done something bad or wrong, or he wouldn't have had it. It was God's punishment, we heard the God's punishment a lot. That somehow, some way he had done something he shouldn't have done or he wouldn't have gotten AIDS.

Mom, You Don't Get It

Mrs. White Ginder recounts Ryan's excitement over getting a summer job. [Play audio \(MP3 - 541 KB\)](#)

Then we moved to Cicero, Indiana, and there, the community welcomed us. And it was all because a young girl, named Jill Stuart, who was president of the student body, who decided to bring in the medical experts and talk to the kids, and then the kids went home then and educated their parents. So Ryan was welcome, he got to go to school, he got to go proms and dances. He even got a job. It was kind of funny, he came home once after he turned 16 and told me he had a job for the summer. I thought, "Oh my gosh. Who is going to hire you, knowing who you are?" I said, "What are you going to be doing," and he said, "I'm working at Maui's Skateboard shop." I said, "Really? What are you going to be doing?" and he said, "I'm going to be putting together skateboards." And I said, "How much are they going to pay you?" and he said "\$3.50 an hour." I said, "Ryan, that won't even buy your gas to Indianapolis and back." He said, "Mom, you don't get it. I got a job just like everyone else does." So it was really important to Ryan, to just be one of the kids, and to just fit in. He never bragged or anything about who he was, or what he got to do, he just wanted to be around his friends.



He Was My Son



[Play audio \(MP3 - 196 KB\)](#)

Well a lot of people will say, "Your son was such a hero" and all that, but to me, he was my son. And you know, sometimes it's so confusing, because he was my little boy, and to share him with everybody, because he wasn't perfect, but at the same time, he was my son.

His Legacy Would Be

People are receiving better quality HIV care and living longer HIV. [Play audio \(MP3 - 329 KB\)](#)
At the time when Ryan was diagnosed with AIDS, I mean, we heard of so many drugs coming out, and none of them was worth anything. By the time you heard of one, there would be another one out, and you would never get the research for one. And none of them worked. And so even in the early 90s, when I was hearing there was hope, I kind of thought, "You know, we had that hope, too, but they didn't pan out." But they did pan out! The biggest contribution I think that Ryan made is, and I didn't know it at that time, that his legacy would be that people are getting their drugs and their treatment and that people are living with AIDS.



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