

Ryan White

Ryan White was born on December 6, 1971. Only three days later, his family was told Ryan had hemophilia, a genetic disease affecting mostly boys, making the blood unable to clot. Ryan was treated and hospitalized many times throughout his youth. It was on December 26, 1984 that Ryan's mother told him he had contracted AIDS from a transfusion of tainted blood used to treat his hemophilia. He was only expected to live a few months.

Ryan was a fighter and was determined to continue with his life in Kokomo, Indiana. However, in the early 1980s, there was little known about AIDS and much of what people believed was not actually true. The community of Kokomo, as well as Ryan's school, ostracized Ryan. They were afraid of contracting the disease themselves. People refused to shake hands with Ryan or his family in church, people would run from him on the street, his locker at school was vandalized with the word "FAG," and a bullet was even fired into his house on one occasion. Many parents insisted Ryan be kept from attending school.

However, Ryan did not give up. He had a great love for learning and fought for his right to attend school. He pursued a court case against his school in Kokomo and won, but the problems did not stop there for Ryan. He was still treated no better by the other students. Ryan tried to remember they were not against him personally, but against the AIDS disease. Finally, Ryan's family decided to move to the community of Cicero, Indiana. Cicero welcomed Ryan with open arms. He attended Hamilton Heights High School, where students had all attended an informational seminar on AIDS.

Ryan continued to speak out against discrimination toward people with AIDS. His mother, Jeanne, and sister, Andrea, were two of his biggest supporters. His story made national news and Ryan made many appearances on talk shows and at charity events. Many well-known celebrities openly supported and befriended Ryan White, including Michael Jackson and Elton John. His life story, "The Ryan White Story," aired on network television.

Ryan White lost his battle with AIDS on April 8, 1990 - five and a half years after his original diagnosis. He left a lasting impression on America and raised awareness of AIDS. He is an inspiration, as he took an incurable disease and turned it into a way to fight against discrimination and educate America about the needs of people with AIDS. On August 18, 1990, Congress passed Public Law 101-381, the Ryan White Comprehensive AIDS Resources Emergency (CARE) Act. This Act was created to help states, communities and families cope with the growing impact of the AIDS epidemic. Ryan's mother, Jeanne, continues his fight in his honor.