



AIDS CARE AND TREATMENT  
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## THE RYAN WHITE STORY

Ryan White was diagnosed with AIDS at age 13 and gained international notoriety fighting for his right to attend school. In the process, he opened the hearts and minds of millions of people. He was, as Ted Koppel described him on *Nightline*, “an extraordinary young man; brave, tolerant, and wise beyond his years.”

During the time between his diagnosis in 1984 and his death in 1990, Ryan was featured on numerous television shows and magazine covers and was the subject of a television movie about his life.

He became friends with world-renowned athletes and entertainers, including Elton John, Greg Louganis, and Michael Jackson, all of whom offered Ryan and his family their support. He spoke out often and eloquently about the challenges he faced and the need for greater compassion towards people with HIV and AIDS. Despite the ravages of the illness to his body and the discrimination he faced, Ryan remained a positive, healing force throughout his life.

Ryan contracted HIV through blood-based products used to treat his hemophilia. He learned that he had the virus when he contracted a life-threatening lung infection. At the time, he was told he had no more than six months to live. While recuperating and thinking about the limited time he had left, Ryan told his mother Jeanne that he wanted to live a normal life, go to school, be with friends, and enjoy day-to-day activities.

Unfortunately, Ryan’s school and his community responded with fear and ignorance. The local superintendent refused to allow Ryan to attend school, a move supported by teachers and parents. Ryan and his family fought the decision, but Ryan was forced to “attend” school by telephone for months while his case made its way through an administrative appeals process. Once the state board of education ruled that he should be allowed to return to school a group of parents sued to keep him out. The courts ultimately ruled in Ryan’s favor, and he did return to school.

Sadly, he was met with taunts and unfounded rumors and some students chose to be home-schooled rather than attend with Ryan. Ryan weathered the storm with tremendous patience and grace, never demonizing those who sought to demonize him.



Ultimately, though, the family decided to move to another community. According to Ryan, they made this choice because of their “desire to move into a bigger house, to avoid living AIDS daily, and a dream to be accepted by a community and school.” They moved to Cicero, Indiana, where Ryan enrolled in Hamilton Heights High School and was welcomed with open arms. The students had taken it upon themselves to learn about AIDS and educate their parents and teachers, as well. Ryan thrived in his new environment, attending school events, learning to drive, and making the honor roll.

Ryan’s story captured the attention of the media and the public and his courage, determination, and positive attitude made him a hero for many. Though constantly surprised by the notoriety he received because of his seemingly simple wish just to go to school, Ryan nevertheless recognized the value of the spotlight and seized the opportunities he was given. Throughout all of his appearances, he gave voice to the desires of thousands of people with HIV/AIDS who wanted only to be treated with respect and compassion and given the opportunity to live as normal a life as possible. Ryan’s visibility and outspokenness were especially crucial in the early days of the AIDS epidemic.