

## *The Power of Children: Making a Difference*

### **Script for Ryan White: *Heather***

Written by Jessica Biernacki Jensen, The Children's Museum of Indianapolis

**Context:** This scene takes place in Ryan's bedroom in his family home in suburban Indiana.

**Character Description:** Heather McNew, Ryan White's best friend at Hamilton Heights high school. She volunteered to be Ryan's lab partner in science class and from then on they were fast friends.

**Materials/Props:** sweatshirt, bulletin board in bedroom with "Almost Famous" pin, Hard Rock Café jacket (\*\*adapt with props that are available\*\*)

#### **PROGRAM/ACTIVITY SCRIPT:**

Hey Andrea —hold on, I'm just going to grab Ryan's sweatshirt. Oh, hi! I'm Ryan's friend, Heather. Andrea and I just came from the hospital . . . Ryan is still unconscious and in critical condition. Things aren't looking good but we are all still praying that he'll pull through again. The weird thing is, this is the first time that Ryan has ever really looked sick to me. I mean, I've known him for what, like three years now and yeah —he has been sick that whole time, but he never shows it. . . at least not to me. He never complains about anything. Maybe that's why hanging out with him is so much fun.

You know, I think this might be the first time I've been in here without Ryan. I remember the first time he invited me to this house. Ryan and I had been friends for a couple of weeks. Actually, we met his first day at Hamilton Heights. I was in science and he sat right next to me at my lab table. I remember the first thing he said to me. He asked if he could borrow a pencil. Of course I said sure and handed him a pencil. He used it in class and then when class was over he gave it back and stared at me. I didn't know why. I just put it in my bag and went to my next class. I realized later he was waiting for me to freak out about it . . . think I was going to get AIDS from it or something. But I wasn't afraid of him. It turned out that we were in every single class together and after a couple of weeks Ryan invited me over for his birthday.

I went over to his house and the only people there were his grandparents, his mom Jeanne, his sister Andrea and PEOPLE MAGAZINE!! Can you believe it?! They were there doing a story about his birthday. . . totally incredible! (*Takes a moment to look around*

The Programming Guide for *The Power of Children: Making a Difference*  
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*the room*) He is so picky about his stuff. I'm barely allowed to touch anything. I just rearrange his GI Joes and see if he notices if he gets (*Catches her mistake. Is shaken*) I mean, when he gets back. (*Goes to GI Joes . . . sees Pin on bulletin board*).

Oh wow! I can't believe he still has that! You see that giant pin...hanging over there on his bulletin board? We both got one in New York. We wore them everywhere! Ryan's says "Almost famous" and mine says "Yes. I am a Model." It cracks me up because Ryan IS famous and I am nowhere near a model. I got this jacket on that trip too. . . Ryan picked it out for me. We were at the Hard Rock Café because CYNDI LAUPER called us there to give us shopping tips. . . No really, Cyndi Lauper! "Girls Just Wanna have Fun?!?" The rock star?! She looks even cooler in real life. Oh. . . and that was the time we saw *Cats* on Broadway!

I get to go to so many places with the family! We've been to California, Disney, New York, benefits, concerts, musicals, we spent a whole day at Michael Jackson's house. . . so many things I would have never done if I hadn't met Ryan. But I did get fired twice. The people I babysit for said they couldn't "risk it" anymore. People stare, say terrible things, leave nasty notes in my locker. . . so there are good things and bad things, but I think it's been worth it. No, I know, it is worth it. But I did come up for a reason! OK, where is . . . (*sees sweatshirt*) There it is!

(*Makes way to Ryan's sweatshirt*) I know Ryan hates wearing hospital clothes. . . he has a "thing" about looking cool all the time! So, Jeanne, his mom, does his hair for him and I thought his sweatshirt would make him feel better.

You would hardly recognize Ryan if you saw him. The medication they're giving him makes his skin look discolored and his face and skin are really puffy. Putting mousse in his hair and getting him out of the hospital clothes helps us all see the real Ryan.

Jeanne even took one of his yearbook pictures and hung it over his bed. We're just making sure Ryan is as comfortable and happy as possible. Dr. Kleiman tells us that Ryan can't hear us and really has no idea what's going on around him. But seeing him look more like Ryan, that makes all of us feel better and, when he wakes up, he won't be mad about us all leaving him in that ugly hospital gown. The best thing would be if I could get him a fresh pair of jeans! He loves em'! We just bought him a pair about a week ago. Ryan and I wanted to skip school for a day and our parents totally gave us permission, so we went over to Castleton and grabbed a couple of pretzels and smoothies and Ryan made me go through every store and find the best pair of jeans possible! I swear he has more clothes than I do! But that's what we like to do together! Shopping and cruising in the 'stang!

Have you seen Ryan's new car? It is awesome! I can't believe Michael Jackson bought him a brand new Mustang kind of like that one on that poster back there (*Gestures to*

*poster on the wall behind audience*) I get to ride in it all the time! We love cruising in Tipton. We always stop by the McDonald's and grab huge cokes and cruise the strip.

Last time we went cruising we started talking about some pretty serious stuff. It was the first time Ryan ever talked to me about dying. It was really weird because I hate talking about death. But when Ryan dropped me off, I felt better, or kind of relieved because he let me know he was thinking good thoughts about where he would go if he dies. The way he described his heaven made me almost feel okay about letting him go. . . .It seems more real now than ever.

I get so sad sometimes and frustrated. . . at him, at myself, at doctors for not knowing what to do! I want to shake Ryan and say "Wake up! Don't give up!" I keep hoping that he'll get better and we can go to Prom. I bought my dress last weekend and I really want him to see it. I want us to dance and have fun like we always do - everything back to normal. I just don't understand. We have been through this before but he always gets better. It's just so hard standing by and watching my best friend get weaker and weaker. I try to stay positive and hope for the best but when I see him just lying there it gets so hard! I feel all of these things and I want to talk to someone about it, but the one person in the world I feel like talking to is in a coma in a hospital bed! *(Takes a breath and realizes that she is saying these things out loud for the first time).*

I'm sorry. . . I'm sorry about unloading all of this on you. It does feel good to get some of this off my chest. If all of this stuff is inside of me, I can't even imagine how Jeanne and Andrea feel. I guess it's good I got this all out here instead of at the hospital. I want to be strong for Jeanne and Andrea and Ryan. Ryan is always strong for us and for everyone. He is so sick and he still fights for his rights and tries to educate everyone about his disease. He has done so much. So I'm going to be strong and brave for him. That's what best friends do . . .

I'd better get going. Andrea is probably waiting for me. I'll give Ryan your love and thoughts too. *(Grabs sweatshirt and exits).*

#### **SUGGESTED FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:**

- **How many of you knew about Ryan before seeing our exhibit today? And where did you learn about him?**
- **Based on what you heard today, and what you already knew, can anyone tell me what Ryan had to face that made his life different from our lives today? What did he have to go through that most kids today haven't lived through?**

- After being discriminated against for being sick, Ryan made the decision to speak out and educate the public about AIDS and what it was like for him and others like him to live with this disease. **Why do you think doing this was so important to Ryan? What was he trying to accomplish? What did he mean when he said “hope is a habit”?**