

Ryan's Newsletter



The Ryan McElroy Children's Cancer Foundation

198 Route 22, The Atrium Building, Pawling, NY 12564

845-855-0211 www.ryansfoundation.org

Children's Cancer Foundation

OUR FEATURE STORY

Stephanie Reyes

In the fall of 2007, Stephanie Reyes began her senior year as a happy, healthy 17 year old who loved spending time with her family. Her only concern was preparing for life after graduation. While school had always been challenging, she enjoyed learning new things and had her heart set on going to college. Little did she know that by November fate was about to help her make decisions in ways she never expected. Stephanie awoke on Thanksgiving not feeling well. By Monday, what she thought was a cold, had gotten much worse causing her to go to the hospital. Doctors performed a battery of tests which showed she was extremely anemic. They informed her and her mother, Olivia, it was fairly certain she had Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia, a common childhood cancer, but would need to see the pediatric oncology team at Maria Fareri Children's Hospital for an official diagnosis.

Tuesday, November 27, 2007, the team at Maria Fareri confirmed Olivia's worst fear. Her precious daughter did indeed have Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia. Stephanie would have to remain in the hospital and begin treatment immediately. Without warning her terrifying and uncertain journey into the world of cancer had begun.

Stephanie was able to return home a month later. She would have to travel to MFCH monthly, but several times a week could receive her chemotherapy and radiation treatments from Vassar Hospital's pediatric hematology/oncology team (along with her oncologists as they're all are part of Vassar's pediatric specialty program). As Stephanie's illness progressed, the aggressive treatments used to cure her started taking their toll. Naturally, she began to wonder why SHE had been afflicted with this disease. She'd never met anyone who had cancer, especially not a child. After months and endless hours spent with dozens of children much younger than she, her view began to shift. She started to contemplate if possibly God had a plan for her. Maybe there was a reason SHE had cancer, with a purpose greater than just the suffering she'd have to endure. It wasn't long before that purpose became clear to all who knew and loved her.

Despite the severity of her illness, Stephanie was more concerned about the kids she was surrounded by. While she waged her own war on cancer, she became a source of comfort, guidance, and support to the many children she spent her days with at Vassar receiving their treatments from Nurse Kim, Terri and staff. On her worst days she was a ray of light and joy not only to her family at home, but her newfound family at the hospital, from the staff who greeted

her at the door to the parents and siblings of other children. Regardless of how hard cancer was trying to dim the light within her, she refused to let it win. Her contagious smile brightened the day of patients and staff alike. The moment she walked through the doors she put aside how awful she felt for she knew there were others suffering just as much, if not more, on any given day.

As a teen with a cancer, Stephanie spent much time by herself at home. Hospitals aren't the ideal environment for anyone whose immune system has been disabled by a life threatening illness. Although Stephanie was very ill and, at times, fearful to be alone, brothers Danie and Carlos had to continue going to school and work. Olivia, distraught that her daughter and sons were suffering, was doing her best to lead them through each challenge that arose while maintaining the job she relied on to support them.



Each week became more difficult for Olivia to leave Stephanie, but as medical expenses accumulated rapidly it became more essential for her to work as many days as she could. As the months passed, it was increasingly harder for Olivia both financially and emotionally but somehow she managed to keep up. Until the day she went to pick up a single medication vital to Stephanie's treatment only to discover it cost \$500. Confused and distraught she left a message for the medical staff. In less than an hour, Ryan's Foundation was contacted immediately providing much needed hope and assistance that they would continue to provide throughout Stephanie's journey, until the end, if necessary.

This simple act of kindness from strangers touched the Reyes family deeply. Stephanie vowed one day to repay Ryan's Foundation by speaking on behalf of what she felt were small miracles that they brought in to the lives of families like hers. She hoped to become a volunteer and do the same for others. Stephanie's greatest wish was to reach out to other children to let them know they were not fighting this

battle alone. There are amazing medical teams and groups like Ryan's Foundation who truly understand the reality of what the life of a seriously ill child is like or that of their families, each with their own challenges. The isolation that can occur when a teen suffers from cancer can be significantly different from when a toddler or younger child is ill. Teens are too old for a sitter and yet too young to be alone. They're often too sick to hang out with friends or even go to school; most complete their work with a tutor at home. As June of 2008 rolled around, Stephanie and family were elated that her blood cell counts were high enough for her to join her peers for their graduation ceremony. As always, her smile lit up the crowd as she proudly accepted her diploma with friends and family cheering her on. Stephanie knew she had a long road ahead, but was now certain that she wanted to pursue a career as a pediatric oncology nurse.

As Stephanie's treatments intensified over the next few months, her physical strength diminished. Yet her ability to nurture and guide the children she came to love as her extended Vassar family grew stronger each time she looked into a small child's tear filled eyes and was able to make them smile or laugh, despite her own pain and fear. Two days before Christmas 2008, with the hardest phase of her treatment behind her, Stephanie left the fourth floor of Vassar wishing all a Merry Christmas expecting to see them after the holidays for her next phase of chemotherapy. On Christmas Day she felt feverish and, as she grew progressively worse, was air lifted to Maria Fareri Children's Hospital. Within days, unforeseen complications caused Stephanie Reyes' battle with ALL cancer to end with little warning almost as quickly as it began.

On December 28, 2008, Stephanie Reyes journeyed on from this life long before she was ready to leave the arms of those she loved most. Her sudden departure left her family mourning their loss. In time, they were able to rejoice and cherish her living spirit she so generously shared with them and anyone blessed to have met her.

There are many lessons Stephanie learned and passed along by example without realizing the wisdom she bestowed at such a young age. The greatest of them being that regardless of what cancer may have taken from her and every child she met, for some, like her and Ryan McElroy, it is their life here among us that matters. It is the unforeseen blessings and magical moments that arise in spite of the suffering that live on indefinitely. Moments that enable Olivia Reyes, her sons, family and close friends to feel the warmth of Stephanie's smile upon them as they carry her living spirit with them wherever their journey may lead them.

PEOPLE WHO GIVE BACK:

SEAN & JILL JOHNSTON

Poughquag, New York

As most are aware, our destiny is often chosen for us. Such is the case for me with Ryan's Foundation.

The McElroy's live but a stones throw away from my home, Locust Farm, in Poughquag, New York. Chip graduated from the NYS Police Academy a couple of years after me. Since then we have worked together at the Dutchess County Sheriff's Department. At first I knew of Chip casually. I heard about Ryan's battle with cancer; the sadness, the pain, and the heartache. I felt compassion toward him, but I could distance myself easily enough. Then my wife, Jill, and I attended one of the Foundation's Galas. Tears streamed down our faces as we watched Chip and his family stand before hundreds of people and share their story with the hope of helping other families. The enormity of their loss and the nobility of this Foundation's work echoed loudly for us that night and more intensely each day after. We were in awe of these people and their strength.

Sometime after that, at a meeting with Chip, I asked about his dreams for the Foundation. He said, "To have a place to call *Home*." I couldn't help but think of my home and the space we have to share. I spoke with Jill and it was obvious that we could, and should, donate some of our property. After all, we can't really possess land, we are merely stewards.

The whole experience of getting to know Chip and having the opportunity to support the work of Ryan's Foundation has really been a gift to us.

"Hello Father"

by Sean Johnston

Hello Father,
You've come to greet me again.
You still hurt,
But time has lessened the
pain.
You say hello with no reply.
Your words turn to anger
As you again ask why.
My final memory has been
etched in stone,
The one haunting memory that
won't leave you alone.
You often wonder if there was
something else to have tried.
Oh! Daddy please,
I love you so much!
It's not your fault I died☀

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NEWSLETTER

EDITOR:

Susan Havelka
.....

IT'S SMALL ACTS OF
KINDNESS THAT
MAKE A HUGE
DIFFERENCE IN THE
LIVES OF MANY!

Thank you!



ABOUT US



Carl Merritt
Board Member

Carl lives in Stanfordville, New York with his wife, Diana, and their two children. Carl is employed by the Dutchess County Sheriff's Office and is assigned to the K-9 Division as well as the Emergency Services Unit.

Carl has been an active participant of the Foundation since 2003 and was elected to the Board of Directors in 2007. He has been instrumental in organizing and running many fund raisers each year and has raised a significant amount of money for the children of the Hudson Valley who are having a tough time. He is committed to support these families in their efforts to improve the quality of their ill child's life. His objective is to heighten awareness of the plight of these children and to generate additional support for the Foundation's efforts. Carl reflects the respect the Foundation has for every child and adult that steps forward to volunteer and make a donation of time or money.

"It is wonderful that families involved in the most important battle of their lives have *somewhere* to turn and I'm just humbled to be part of it," Carl said. "The people we help and the outpouring of support for the Ryan McElroy Children's Cancer Foundation has grown dramatically. I am committed to creating and maintaining a Foundation that will make a positive impact in the lives of sick children and their families. I believe in giving back to society and this is my small way of paying it forward."



Annual Golf Outing

The Ryan McElroy Golf Tournament will be held this year on June 27 at **The Powelton Club** located at 29 Balmville Rd., Newburgh, New York (845) 561-7409. We are excited that again this year the whole family is included, not just golfers! The Powelton Club has opened it's doors for Ryan's Foundation!

The Powelton Club is a full service private country club established in 1882 and is one of the oldest country clubs in the United States. They offer 18 holes of golf, 6 American red clay tennis courts, 2 swimming pools and a magnificent clubhouse. The Powelton Club golf course is presently 6,063 yards in length with a rating of 70. The existing design is known to be challenging, accentuated by wonderfully quick greens, tight fairways with deep roughs, and troublesome pin placements. The golf course is always excellently prepared and certainly a great test of golfing skills.

Golf Outings are a great way to gather friends, family and co-workers together for a fun day of golf and networking while raising money for children in need. Hope to see you there!

Please visit our website for more information.
www.ryansfoundation.org

Registration: 10 am
Shotgun Start: 12:30 pm
Cost: \$175 golfers
\$100 non-golfers

Includes 18-holes of golf,
cart, lunch and dinner.
Raffles & Prizes!

Lunch 11am -12:30 pm

Evening Reception
6:30 - 8:30 pm
Includes:
"2 Hour Open Bar"
Hot & Cold Hors D'oeuvres,
Seafood Station, Pasta
Station, BBQ Station,
Carving Station, Bread
Station, Powelton Club
Dessert Station,
Coffee/Tea

FUN FAMILY EVENTS - SAVE THE DATES:



JUNE 4 SPORTING CLAY SHOOT

@ TMT Hunting Preserve
302 Schoolhouse Rd. Staatsburg, NY
8:30am - 5pm

If you haven't already participated, you will want to join in the fun this year. There are 15 different stations on the course and plenty of shooters having a ball! The Clay Shoot has a live auction and plenty of raffle prizes. This is a fun day for all while helping to raise money for children. Call Carl Merritt at 845-489-8725 or Art Hart at 845-546-7928 for more information. Sponsors are needed.



AUGUST 20 FAMILY PIG ROAST & CLASSIC CAR SHOW

@ Freedom Park
212 Skidmore Rd. Pleasant Valley, NY
(Rain Date: August 21)
12pm - 5pm

Freedom Park will once again be our location for this year's Family Pig Roast & Classic Car Show. As in the past, we have lots of entertainment planned for the entire family; live music, clowns, petting zoo, food and drink. This is a fun day for all. We hope you can make it this year. Contact Jeremy Busolt at 845-702-7303 for more information.



JUNE 12 5K WALK/RUN

@ Lakeside Park
2 Lakeside Dr. Pawling, NY
8:45 1/2 mile run for Kids
9am 5K run/walk start

Help us raise money and awareness by participating in or contributing to our 5k Walk/Run at Lakeside Park. Starts at the Park and continues through the scenic village of Pawling past the special bronze memorial statue of Ryan, then back to the park. We will have food and entertainment. We encourage kids of all ages to participate for a good cause. Contact Lori Decker @ lorirun4@hotmail.com for more information.



OCTOBER 27 Annual Fall Festival Tasting Event

@ The Grandview
Poughkeepsie, NY
6pm - 10pm

Ryan's Foundation, now along with Hospice of the Hudson Valley, will be holding the Fall Festival Event for the 5th year at The Grandview in Poughkeepsie, NY. Tickets are \$50 in advance. Entertainment, Auctions, Raffles, Vendors, and plenty of Food, Wine, Beer to keep you coming back again and again. Contact Steve or Erin Reverri for more information.



JUNE 27 ANNUAL GOLF OUTING

@ The Powelton Club
29 Balmville Rd. Newburgh, NY
Registration 10am

The Annual Golf Outing will be held again this year at The Powelton Club in Newburgh and includes the entire family, not just golfers! The Club has opened it's doors to us which includes golf, swimming, and tennis. We hope you will join us this year for a great family day while helping us to raise hope for children in need. Please contact George Busolt at 845-797-8308 for more information.

"raising hope"

Volunteers are always welcome! Contact any board member if you would

like to help out! Watch for information on more events planned for

this year in upcoming Newsletters!

2011 CALENDAR

- June 4 Sporting Clay Shoot
TMT Preserve, Staatsburg, NY
- June 12 5K Walk/Run
Lakeside Park, Pawling, NY
- June 27 Golf Outing
Powelton Club, Newburgh, NY
- August 20 Family Pig Roast & Car Show
Freedom Park, LaGrangeville, NY
(Rain Date: August 21)
- September 17 Spin-A-Thon 2
World Gym Brewster, NY
- October 27 Annual Fall Tasting Event
Grandview, Poughkeepsie, NY

Ryan's Foundation reminds you about our EFT feature on our webpage. Please consider signing up for recurring EFT donations so that we may continue our mission of never having to say NO to a child in need.

www.ryansfoundation.org



FROM THE EDITOR
Ryan's Newsletter is published by The Ryan McElroy Children's Cancer Foundation, a non-profit 501 (c) 3 organization, dedicated to helping children who battle childhood illnesses and cancer by providing support that improve the quality of life for them and their families. If you would like to receive your news-letter by email & help us cut costs on printing and postage, please let us know. If you have a story you want us to know about, please contact our newsletter editor:

sghavelka@gmail.com



GOOD NEWS CORNER

Hagan Elementary School raised hope when they collected water & soda bottles for deposit return at their book fair and donated \$10 to our Foundation!

Great Job Kids!

Hagan Elementary School held a Family Fun Fitness Night on February 25th and raised \$158 for Ryan's Foundation! Thank You!

Topical BioMedics gave 5% of their sales this quarter.

New Fairfield Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation donates through EFT every month.

North East Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation donates through EFT every month.

Danbury Physical & Rehabilitation, PC donates through EFT every month.

With summer on the way folks are always searching for places to go and things to do. Back to school sales start EARLY this summer. The college kids have to shop in July to head back to school in August. Don't forget the grills, patio sets, party needs, pool & lawn supplies. Most retailers offer AWESOME coupons when you shop online. From searches for necessity items to graduation gifts and travel deals, folks can donate to us around the clock at no added expense on their part. Often you can save with the coupons and with gas prices being expensive you don't have to leave home.

Goodshop.com & Goodsearch.com & Marketamerica.com. These search engines give money back to Ryan's Foundation every time you search or shop online. All you have to do is sign in, shop at your favorite retailers and they send \$\$\$ to us. No cost to you at all. Just sign in to Goodshop/Goodsearch: RYANSFOUNDATION or sign in to Marketamerica.com/ryanmcelroyecf

Ryan's Foundation is looking for sponsors for our Newsletter. If you would be interested in helping, please contact sghavelka@gmail.com

I want to help donation form

Enclosed is my gift of \$ _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Phone (day): _____ Phone (evening): _____

E-mail: _____

_____ My check is enclosed. (Make checks payable to: The Ryan Foundation.)

Charge my donation to: _____ Master Card _____ VISA _____ Discover

Card #: _____

Expiration Date: _____ / _____ / _____

Signature (X) _____

MAIL COMPLETED FORM WITH YOUR CHECK TO:
The Ryan McElroy Children's Cancer Foundation,
198 Route 22 Atrium Building, Pawling, NY 12564

ALL DONATIONS ARE TAX DEDUCTIBLE

A \$100 donation will cover transportation to a hospital. A \$250 donation will pay for food or utilities.

A \$500 donation will pay for lodging or rent. A \$1,000 donation will pay for mortgage or medicines.

Please help and embrace the tiny things in life. Thank you.

Donate Today