

StoryCorps Interview at The Children's Museum of Indianapolis

Jeanne White and Heather Stephenson

Heather Stephenson: Coming to the museum, I remember the first time that I went in Ryan's room. I literally cried like a baby. Is coming to the museum and being in Ryan's room a comfort to you?

Jeanne White: I think it is a comfort to me. And there's funny ways to think about it, too—I don't have to clean it no more. But I think there's a sentimental thing, that I feel like this is where Ryan would prefer to be. He would prefer to have his room in a museum than to be remembered for being six feet under. It's just such a remarkable tribute to him, and as a mom I couldn't be more proud that kids are learning his story.

HS: What do you miss most about Ryan?

JW: I miss his smile and him putting his hand under my chin saying, "Keep that chin up, Mom. Everything's going to be okay."

HS: Did you know that Ryan was my first love? And that there's not a day that goes by that I don't think about him?

JW: Well I think you were his first and last. So you know, everything was always about Heather. Heather, Heather, Heather, Heather. Just by knowing that when I see you, I still see a part a Ryan. You were such a gift to him. You made him smile. You made him forget that he had AIDS. Coming from a community that he was not ever really welcomed in, and to come to a community where he had friends and somebody wanted to be his lab partner—naming you—it was just such a different type of life for him, a type that I dreamed of, but I never thought could happen.

HS: I thought as a teenager that one day, Ryan and I would live happily after, you know how you always think that. And I just wanted you to know how much he meant to me. We were extremely close and I want to thank you for being the best mom in the world.