



# **THE RYAN PERRY**

• FOUNDATION •

May 1, 2019

Dear Ry:

You are hearing Susan's voice because I find it easier to express myself via the written word. You know this; I have written many "serious" letters to you over the years. The difference now is that I have a captive audience; hopefully your eye rolls will be kept to a minimum.

Full disclosure; the past five or so years have been a challenge as you've struggled to find your way. Your path has meandered; both coasts, Central America, and several points in between. Finally, this most recent chapter has ended prematurely in Downtown Los Angeles. Through it all, you've tested my mettle as a parent; my sanity, my patience, my sense of humor, and of course my bank account. I regret none of it, and never once stopped believing in you and your ability to become your best self.

Recently, all the seeds that you had sewn were sprouting. You were starting to feel more comfortable in your own skin, to embrace your passions and to become the fine young man we always knew that you would. Having the opportunity to witness your maturity is comforting to me in these most awful of times. Seeing the impact that you and Belissa had on each other during your brief but intense time together has warmed my heart, as has hearing the enthusiasm in your voice when describing your work in fashion and styling. Your excitement about starting school again made me so happy. I am trying (sometimes successfully) to embrace these positives amidst all of the tears and sadness.

Let me remind you of some of my most cherished memories. I will never forget your childhood; the gleam in your beautiful blue eyes and that crazy red mop of hair. Countless youth sporting events. Watching dumb (some might say inappropriate) movies together. Season after season of NY JETS tailgates, usually followed by the inevitable soul-crushing defeat. Getting to share and pass on my love of Bruce Springsteen and Pearl Jam to you. And (of course) all things Jerry Garcia and the Grateful Dead. Meals cooked and eaten together. Trips taken (including our great trip to Israel, where the Kirshenbaum kids dubbed you “Freaky Fresh”) and roller coasters ridden. Not to mention dozens of iPhones replaced or repaired. Doing something or nothing; it really didn’t matter. These and so many others, too many to mention; all etched in my soul and forever cherished.

The words “roller coaster” certainly don’t do justice to the events of the past week. Suffice to say that I would not wish on anyone the gut-wrenching emotions I have shared with our inner circle (or anyone who asked, for that matter.) I would not have been able to survive without all of their love and support, for which I am eternally grateful.

Yet through the morass of awfulness there has been more positivity than one could imagine possible. The thoughtfulness and kindness of friends and family has been overwhelming. The humanity of the doctors and staff at Good Samaritan Hospital who shepherded us through your passing made the unbearable a bit less so. And most of all your inner circle, the York Prep Gang and others, have far exceeded any reasonable expectations.

As you probably know, a dozen or so of your posse flew across the US to be with you (AND US) in your final days. Their presence has shown us that great tragedy breeds even greater compassion.

It has also been illuminating. So many of your friends have shared stories with us, not just the fun times (of which there were apparently many), but also the many ways in which you have helped them with their own struggles. And all this time I thought you were just partying and living La Dolce Vida.

We also learned that you were the glue that held your many communities together. Teams and schools and programs and work. You connected them all and made them all a part of Team Ryan. I don’t know where you got those skills from; I certainly do

not deserve any of the credit for that. It is one of many things that I admire about you.

It goes without saying that your spirit will forever be with us. You are likely here right now, impressed with the turnout. Jake and I (and perhaps others) are going to get a suitable Ryan tattoo so you will always be with us in a physical sense. (Yes, you heard me right; your dad, the lawyer, the elder, the non-millennial, and the guy who is deathly afraid of needles, will be getting a tattoo.) The details haven't been finalized, but a bumblebee will be featured prominently. The bumblebee is a symbol of community. Their movement from plant to plants represents the interconnectedness of all living things. The bumblebee is a messenger bringing the secrets of life and service. We will honor you and your life by carrying your bumblebee with us for the balance of ours. And not to worry; Susan will make sure it is impeccably art-directed.

Lastly, even though I am the parent and you the child, you need to know that you have taught me so many things. You have helped me become a better man; to become more able to love and be loved, even to develop a smidge of empathy (not always my strong suit.) To see that the path forward is not always a straight line, and to embrace that. I will try to make you as proud as you have made me.

I leave you with the following thoughts:

- Stay in your lane.
- Put one foot in front of the other.
- Pray for acceptance of things you cannot change, courage to change things you can, and wisdom to know the difference.
- And always try to do the next right thing.

May the four winds blow you safely home, my beautiful boy.

Until the next time.

DAD