

## **Ryan Victor "Houdini" Monson**

As we gather today to remember Ryan Victor "Houdini" Monson we come to grieve, to say goodbye, to let go. For each one here I know it still has to be numbing to think that we are actually sitting here doing this. In your worst nightmares you could not imagine being here. So we come today to do those things we have to do to heal. But I also want you to come for another reason: to celebrate the life of a young man who was intelligent, witty, a little ornery at times. A fine young man. I believe that in each relationship we have, we give gifts. Not those gifts that we wrap and give as Christmas or birthdays, but those precious gifts that come out of time spent together, laughter shared. Each of you who were privileged to know Ryan received some common gifts. Ones that most of you got. Each of you also received some unique gifts, gifts that no one else received. As we gather today, ask yourself the question - What gift did Ryan give to you that you are going to hold near your heart until the end of your life?

I am going to share with you 2 poems that seemed appropriate for Ryan today. The first is called No Person Is Ever Truly Alone.

### **NO PERSON IS EVER TRULY ALONE**

No person is ever truly alone.  
Those who live no more,  
Whom we loved,  
Echo still within our thoughts,  
Our words, our hearts.  
And what they did  
And who they were  
Becomes a part of all that we are,  
Forever

The second is called A Friend.

### **A FRIEND**

A friend is someone with whom your heart  
will blend  
To bring you joy, comfort, and solace which  
even death cannot end.  
A friend is someone whose love will permeate  
your heart  
In quiet simplicity, and though fate decrees  
that you must part  
You know within your being that God has  
richly touched your life again  
By granting you the privilege of having had  
such a friend.

from The Self Within, a collection of poems  
by Betty Clauson

Now we are going to pause in a moment and listen to three minutes of a piece of music that Ryan loved to use as background in yo-yo many competitions. As we listen, consider the question that I asked you: What gift did Ryan give to you that you will hold near your heart for the rest of your life.

(At this point we listened to 3 minutes of Ryan's music from Yo-yo competition).

(Obituary from the Kansas City Star: )

Ryan Victor "Houdini" Monson was born on May 31, 1988, in Kansas City and took his life at his home in Kansas City North, on October 4, 2005. He was the son of W. Victor and Kathryn J. Monson. Ryan was an honors student in the International Baccalaureate program at North Kansas City High School and competed in Cross Country for his school. Before high school, he attended Meadowbrook Preschool, Gracemor Elementary, and Maple Park Middle schools. Ryan was an excellent student and loved learning new things and challenging himself. He collected baseball cards, legos, and especially yo-yo's, which he used in regional, national, and world yo-yo championship competitions. He was ranked 19th in the country at the 2004 national competition in Chico, CA, and was an avid member of and contributor to the online yo-yo community. He is survived by his loving parents Victor and Kathy Monson; his sister, Katie, who is a student at Truman State University; his maternal grandmother, Veda Johnson, of Sumner, MO; his paternal grandparents, Bill and Jewell Monson, of Grandview; and many cousins, aunts, uncles, and friends who will sadly miss him. He also leaves behind his beloved dog, Maxie, and cat, Allie.

Memories from Ryan's dad:

Remembering Ryan

Ryan was a creator. From the time he could first make his hands do what he wanted to, he used them to create things. Splashes of color on paper. Tinker Toy "inventions." Huge Duplo forts and houses and towers and cities. Later, he was never content to use his Legos to build just the airplane that showed on the package, but had to see what else he could make out of the little plastic bricks. He discovered Popsicle sticks and created complex objects out of them. He reproduced the Globe Theater of Shakespeare's time using nothing but Popsicle sticks and glue.

As he got older, his creations became more complex. At about the same time, he became interested in yo-yos and filmmaking. He told me once that the reason he never did as well on the compulsory tricks at the yo-yo contests as he did on the freestyle was because it just wasn't as much fun to perform a trick that someone else created. He much preferred to create his own yo-yo tricks, but unlike some of his cohorts who "hoarded" their new tricks to use at the next competition, Ryan would film his trick and post it to the Internet with complete step-by-step instructions so anyone who wanted to could use the trick he had created.

You know, when you are sitting in a car with someone for six or seven hours at a time, you talk about a lot of things. As Ryan and I went from yo-yo contest to yo-yo contest over the last couple of years, we did a lot of talking about what he wanted to do and what he wanted his life to be like after he was out on his own. Some of his ideas were pretty wild, but in none of those discussions was there even the remotest possibility that he would not be around to bring those plans to light.

He could not stand to see animals mistreated, and wanted to pick up every stray dog he saw (including some “lost dogs” who were at the time tied to a leash and being walked by their owners.) If an article in the newspaper mentioned a dog that had suffered at the hands of a human, Ryan was furious and wanted to rescue the injured animal himself.

His closest friend was his dog Maxie, who slept on his bed when Ryan wasn’t around and greeted him with kisses when Ryan came home from school.

Ryan wasn’t perfect. Perhaps his greatest fault was impatience. He never wanted to wait and see how something turned out. If he wanted a special item for a school project, he would come home from class and insist that we immediately go out and get that item, even if the project wasn’t due for a month. I watched him attempt some yo-yo trick over and over and over and over again getting angrier and angrier at himself, until he could finally get it right. Like many teenagers his age, he could be surly and disrespectful at times, but I hope he knew that no matter what he did or said, his mother and I loved him to pieces.

I miss him already and I will miss him always. I just wish he could be here to read all of the posts on the yo-yo message boards about his death, and to see all of the really good friends that he had. Ryan, wherever you are, I love you.

Dad

Memories from Ryan’s mom:

“Ryan was a competitive yo-yo player. He was rated #19 in the US in 2004. He collected yo-yos and sold and traded them. He had custom-made yo-yos he used in competition. Ryan and his dad traveled the Midwest states and California and Florida to attend competitions. We could tell when Ryan was around even if you couldn’t see him because we could hear the whir of his yo-yo string.

Ryan was an International Baccalaureate student at NKCHS. He made excellent grades and through the years, he thought about lots of career options, moving from orthodontia to neurosurgery to a film maker to attend West Point or another military school. He always had to be the best and put great pressure on himself to succeed.

When Ryan was a little boy, he was always building things that ranged from arranging strings around his room that would set a booby trap and dump trash on his dad’s head when he opened the door, to a replica of the Titanic from Legos. He was famous for designing bear traps around our cabin in Canada.

Ryan was a collector of many things ranging from hotel soap to sticks, rocks, baseball cards, Beanie Babies, yo-yos and recently girlfriends.

Ryan was a volunteer throughout his life, starting as a costume character at the Gracemor PTA Book Fair and lastly for a Hurricane Katrina supply drive.

Ryan attended German immersion camp in Minnesota and was a four year German student. He delighted in talking in German to his parents who never quite knew whether to pass the salt or feed the cat or just say “I love you” back.

Ryan loved Indian Lake in Northwest Ontario. He liked feeding the ducks, learning to swim, lounging in the hammock, picking blueberries and eating them, building rafts and other water conveyances, looking for bears, swimming and fishing.

Mom

I had the privilege to get to know Ryan through many of the other memories of his parents as well.

Ryan loved his family. He loved his grandma’s hot rolls. He liked developing new muscles. He was thrilled to be taller than his parents and sister.

Ryan loved his dog Maxie and Cat Allie. Maxie particularly was his buddy. Like his approach to much of life, Ryan was sensitive to the underdog (literally and figuratively). Maxie was a dog that was abandoned on the roadside. When he was tied up at the shelter and Ryan saw him, his mother asked him, “Ryan, is that your dog?” And he said, “Yes, mom. That’s my dog.”

He enjoyed his Play Station and his Dell Juke Box, his computer and filming equipment. He also occasionally liked finding and pushing his family’s buttons just a bit, too. Ryan enjoyed music – particularly Techno.

Ryan was a creative person – enjoyed making things with Popsicle sticks – Globe Theatre which teacher still uses to show what it looked like. A Trojan Horse, forts, even a jewelry box for his mom.

As most that knew Ryan are well aware, Harry Houdini was very special to Ryan. He read everything he could get his hands on about Houdini. And as Houdini, Ryan was a master with the yo-yo.

Ryan was a person who loved to learn new things. When he read, he wanted to read what was real – biographies were his favorite. As a very intelligent person Ryan liked to develop theories about things, and really wanted to be the first to consider a particular concept. Ryan wanted to not just be good at what he did, but the best, and he pushed himself, sometimes too hard. Whether it was yo-yos or school or cross-country or his videos – anything – he did it too best of his abilities with everything that he did.

I mentioned that Ryan was sensitive to the underdog. Two things that always made him mad were people mistreating people and mistreating animals. And he valued and cherished those who treated others and himself kindly. One example was his plan to invite his elementary school teachers to his graduation. And he expressed to his mom, “Won’t they be proud of me?” And she said, Yes, Ryan. They will.

This morning before coming here I looked online at Ryan's obituary. You can access that at <http://www.legacy.com/kansascity/LegacyHome.asp> . There is a place that you can write comments. After looking up his name there is a place where you can leave comments and memories. I printed out eleven pages of notes that people had left from around the world: I also went to the site called Skilltoys.com, where there is a place where yo-yoers talk, and I would like to share some of these comments. I would also like to say upfront that I don't think that Ryan had a clue as to the range that his life went, his life experience, and his gifts. Some of these postings were from Calgary, Mexico, Indonesia, South Africa, Belgium, the Philippines, Netherlands, Singapore, Switzerland and states all over the United States. He touched a lot of lives.

“I believe that the measure of a man is the work he does in this life. Know that Ryan helped literally thousands of people through his videos and comments; not just nationally, but around the world. For a life so short, that's an outstanding achievement.”

“As a father myself, I can only imagine what your family is going through. You have the love, support, and thoughts of all of us in the yo-yo community with you. Your son will live forever in all of us.”

“I think we can all keep Houdini alive by doing the things he did. make instructional vids. Teach someone to throw. Help the new guy making his first or second post. I've often seen him on yomania, a board frequented by newbies, offering advice and tips when no one else would. Being outside of USA, I will never know him personally. But in this board, and the bigger community of yo-yoers, I am shock, and speechless. I always thought his posting was interesting. A great 'net' person. But I too feel as we has a death in the family, even I'll never get to meet up with him. What ever his problems was, I wish he could have vented here. He got friends here. So in some ways, I hope this community could show his parents, what a great guy HH is.”

“Even in South Africa Houdini's presence was felt....i learned much from his videos (never having the privilege of meeting him in person). His absence is truly felt.... And felt hard :(“

“Ryan, We will never forget you!!!”

“World was my first big yo-yo competition and I went there and was so intimidated by everyone being so good and seeming like they knew everyone else, I recognized HH from one of his videos and went and said hi, he introduced me to some and showed me the ropes. He made me feel like I belonged.”

“Houdini Lives” and “R.I.P Ryan Monson”

I asked you to consider the gifts that Ryan gave to you.  
I also believe that in life we are given other gifts that help us at a time like this.  
Some Thoughts:

It is a difficult time. A time when we are each numb, not being quite sure what to do. Ryan Victor Houdini touched a lot of lives. At a time like this how do we get through? How do we make it from day to day? We come together to honor and remember him, to comfort each other, and to try in some way to help each other to begin to heal. We are here most of all to celebrate his life. Each of you are here because Ryan died. But more so you are here because he lived. Because he touched your life. Because you are different because you had the privilege of knowing him.

I mentioned that we often give gifts to each other. I also believe that we have other gifts in life that help us to get through such a difficult time.

One is Family. What would we do without our families. We run in different circles. It seems like this is the life we live in our community, the society in which we live. We often don't talk to each other as much as we would like to. We think things but do not always get around to saying them. But right now each of you who are here, who grieves – your families are here for you...to give you grace and strength and love through crying together through the grief, through laughing together about wonderful times, remembering those times of laughter and sharing orneriness. We come together to give grace to each other through silence. Our families are the most precious of gifts.

But right next to that is Friends. I don't think Ryan realized just how many friends he had – how many people who considered him a friend. This is a time here now where your friends will come out of the woodwork to give you strength and grace, to just be with you, to do all those things that blood relatives do, but so many more. Bringing over a casserole, sending a card, just sharing with you that in some way they have been touched and will be there for you also.

Another that we have is memories. This really is a time of memories. We have joyful Memories, family memories, individual memories- fun memories and funny memories. We have thankful Memories – each of you. Maybe each time you see a yo-yo you will have one of these. Maybe sometime if you see someone putting together a popsicle stick structure you will think of Ryan. So many memories that you will find yourselves stopping and saying thank you. There are also healing Memories. Ones that will bring warmth and grace to you, even at that moment if you will allow it to help you.

You know, when someone takes their own life there are so many questions, so many things that we absolutely do not understand. And the question that erupts from our soul is WHY. And you know the truth of it is that even if there was some answer to the question of why, it would not take away the hurt. It wouldn't take away the grief. We don't understand. It is okay to ask questions, but we cannot get stuck there. We know that Ryan dealt with depression – but we all do at some time – every one of us. Whether it's a short term depression that is brought on situations – as adults, as teenagers we all have difficult issues in our lives. There are those who deal with it on a chronic basis – it is actually a medical condition. As much as especially us male types try to resist that. We just know that we can do it on our own. But again, we really do not know what was going on in Ryan to bring him to the decision to do this. So what we can do is

come together and give grace to each other. We can remember that if we are there in the midst of such a difficult time, we can talk to someone. Feelings are important. Emotions are a part of us – the wiring within us. But sometimes they are wrong. When we feel hopeless, that there is no way out, as if we were in a pit. There is always a way out. And we have no idea how many lives, how many hands would reach in and touch us and lift us up, and help us if we will but ask.

We need to understand that within these kind of circumstances that we can't make someone do this - we don't have that much power. And unfortunately we sometimes we really truly do not have the power to stop it if this is a choice that they have make. So we come together to give each other grace, to celebrate Ryan's life, something that I suspect he would have wanted us to do.

I have talked about those gifts that we have that help us to get through a time like this. One of those is the process of grief, as much as grief does not feel like a gift. But it is. It is a pathway for us to heal. And you know, as many books have been written on how we should do it, grief is an individual thing. We all do it differently. Some people are criers and others there are no tears. Some want a whole bunch of folks around them and others want to be essentially alone. Some work out their grief by making something. Some of the folks on the yoyo site have talked about doing something in his honor, creating a scholarship, doing something. There are so many different ways that we must walk that path – each our own individual way. I would encourage you to allow yourselves to be open to your own unique pathway. Allow yourself to grieve. There really is healing on the other side.

One author expresses the naturalness of the process of grief this way:

#### THE NATURALNESS OF GRIEF

Grieving is as natural as  
crying when you are hurt  
sleeping when you are tired  
eating when you are hungry  
or sneezing when your nose itches.  
It is nature's way of healing a  
broken heart

It really is a natural process within us that leads us to healing. This same author expresses the healing of our grief as the healing of a cut finger.

#### STAGES OF GRIEF

A cut finger-  
is numb before it bleeds,  
bleeds before it hurts,  
it hurts until it begins to heal,  
it forms a scab and itches until

finally, the scab is gone and  
a small scar is left where once  
there was a wound.

Grief is the deepest wound you have  
ever had. Like a cut finger,  
it goes through stages and  
leaves a scar.

From the book, *Don't Take My Grief Away* by Doug Manning.

Right now it is an open wound – a gash. But as you allow these many gifts, these many friends to help you to heal there will be healing. There will be a scab that forms, and then a scar. And like a physical scar there will be times when it is sensitive, but the pain will not be so great.

How do we say goodbye to Ryan? We do it the best we can. Within the wonderful care of our families, within the love of our friends, within the wonderful memories that even now come flooding back. Those parts of Ryan's legacy that continue to live on in each of you who were privileged to know him. And yes even through the process of grief.

As we close our service we are going to listen to one more piece of music, one that Ryan and his dad listened to each time they headed off in the car for a tournament. And I would like for you to consider as we listen, the gift that Ryan gave to you. How has that made you different? How are you going to live your life differently having known him. What legacy of Ryan's is going to live on in you? Shall we listen to the music...

Listen to 3 minutes of quiet music.