

A Miracle for Ryan

Two years ago a tragic accident put entertainer Pat Boone's grandson in a coma. Today Ryan says confidently that he will be entirely healed.

One day in the spring of 2000, Ryan Corbin telephoned his mother. "I don't know what it is, but God is going to use me in a big way," he said sheepishly, almost embarrassed.

Twelve months later—on June 19, 2001—Ryan and some friends headed up to the rooftop deck at his west Los Angeles apartment building. They wanted to catch some rays, but Ryan never made it.

He fell through a skylight, plunging 40 feet down, banging against two stair railings and crashing onto a cement floor. He fractured his skull, broke his jaw and mangled virtually every internal organ. His heart stopped beating, and he was not breathing.

Paramedics applied emergency aid and rushed the 24-year-old grandson of pop-music legend Pat Boone to the UCLA Medical Center. What followed was touch-and-go. Surgeons removed his spleen, placed him on a ventilator and pumped 36 pints of blood through his body just to keep him alive.

Ryan had not damaged his spine, but he had suffered serious head trauma and was comatose. Doctors told the family it was likely that he would never again be a contributing member of society. How God could use Ryan "in a big way" was suddenly far less clear.

Why do bad things happen to good people? Many people stumble

over the question. If ever there was a good person who had something very bad happen to him, it was Ryan Corbin.

Friends and family members alike cast him as gentle-hearted and sensitive, a fighter for everything good—even a modern-day David. “My brother has a heart and a spirit that are so pure,” says Jessica Corbin, 24. “Don’t get me wrong. The guy has his faults, but from an early age he had a real beauty and serenity, a rest and a faith in God.”

Indeed, Ryan was just 4 when he invited Jesus into his life. Not only did he obtain salvation, but he also received a prayer language at that time. Later, as a student at Pepperdine University, he deepened his faith. “I know I am going to reach my generation for Christ,” he once told his grandfather. “I just do not know how.”

Ryan started with his family, encouraging his mother to grow in her faith, discussing spiritual matters with his then-unbelieving stepfather, Mike Michaelis (who has since become a believer), and challenging his younger sister. “We had heated arguments,” Jessica recounts. “Ryan was affected so much by prayer, but I was only affected by what I saw. In a way I was jealous.”

After graduating from Pepperdine, Ryan wrote a full-length screenplay on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus—set in contemporary times. “He does it in a way that the Dan Rathers and Peter Jenningses would have to deal with the reality of who Jesus is,” his grandfather describes.

Indeed, he aspired to influence his generation and beyond as a film or TV producer and director. In fact, he was already

paying his dues. Before his accident he worked as a production assistant on the Will & Grace TV show.

Ryan never told his bosses that he was Pat Boone's grandson. He did not want to use his lineage (he is also a descendant of pioneer Daniel Boone and his aunt is singer Debby Boone) as a door opener; rather, he sought to make his own way.

Though Ryan never saw a camera he did not like, he was even more enthralled with the deeper things of God, and was fully devoted to his family and friends. It was characteristic of him to discuss concerns with his pastors—such as the spiritual power behind Islam. And a girlfriend once almost left him because he was too spiritually minded.

But it was also typical of him to put together a video tribute on the occasion of his father's 50th birthday or leave a gracious Father's Day message on his stepfather's voice mail. "That is just the kind of guy he was," Jessica says. "He was always doing something for somebody."

Such a nice guy—so why did this tragedy happen?

The Faith Team

After the accident, neurosurgeons offered grim news: They believed that Ryan would always need a ventilator and would most likely remain in a vegetative state. They further hinted that the family might want to consider how long they wanted to keep him alive.

Ryan's father, Doug Corbin, would have none of that. Rather,

he set the stage for the weeks, months and now years that would follow. "You have a great medical team, and you saved his life," Doug told the UCLA staff, "but we are a great faith team. So let's work together." The doctors may not have realized that the faith team had already been activated.

Shirley Boone-Ryan's grandmother and Pat's wife—was the first to arrive at the UCLA Medical Center the day of the accident. When she pulled up, the paramedics were still there.

"Lady, don't get your hopes up," is all they said. "I did not have a second of fear," Shirley told Charisma. "Nothing hit me but this Scripture: 'I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord' (Ps. 118:17, NKJV). I knew that I knew that I knew."

Shirley never doubted, even when Ryan remained in a coma for the first six months and was largely unresponsive for the first year.

Pat was in his Hollywood office when Shirley called with news of the accident. He immediately dropped the business of the day—he had been putting together details of his new record company, The Gold Label—and rushed to UCLA.

"My heart was in my chest," he recounts. "I was praying: 'Lord, heal him. Lord, hold him in the hollow of Your hand. Let Your angels minister to him.'"

As a famous Christian, and a board member at The Church on the Way in local Van Nuys, Pat has prayed for many people. He even wrote a book—years before Ryan was born—titled *A Miracle a Day Keeps the Devil Away*.

Now he and his family needed a big one. It was as if God were saying: "OK, Pat Boone, everyone knows you are a Christian. Now it is time to see how your faith really works."

When Pat prays for a sick person, he usually envisions Jesus coming into the room. "When Ryan was hurt I prayed like I never prayed before," he says. "I said: 'Lord, I am not asking You to reach down and heal Ryan—You have inhabited him since he was 4. I am asking You to rise up strong and bless him with Your Holy Spirit, repair him from within.'"

When Ryan fell, his mother (who is Pat and Shirley's second of four daughters) was vacationing in Spain. "Time stands still when you hear something like this," says Lindy Boone Michaelis. "But what the doctors said did not go along with how I felt. I was totally walking by faith, and I knew enough to pray."

During the early days, the family mostly tried to hold it all together. But there were some small ironies. For one, the day before the accident, Pat had been at the UCLA Medical Center donating blood—along with Shirley Jones and Charlton Heston—to promote . Nurses later told him that some of the blood he had given most likely was tapped to save Ryan's life.

For six weeks after Ryan's fall, he was in the UCLA Medical Center Intensive Care Unit. During that entire stretch, at least one family member was camped out in the waiting room, praying and hoping. During this time Lindy felt that God was telling her that she was going to go to Bible school. "Not a literal school," she says, "but through this God was going to start talking to me and teaching me."

An early lesson came when Larry King invited the Boone clan onto his CNN TV show. King, an admitted agnostic, has often asked the why-do-bad-things-happen question. Perhaps this would be an opportunity for God to answer. Yet Lindy hesitated.

'The Miracle Boy'

"I was in agony and felt like it would expose me in my pain to the world," Lindy says of Larry King's request. "This was a private matter. But the more I thought about it, the more I thought: Wait, if Ryan had the chance to go on Larry King Live and talk about his faith, he would not hesitate. I decided, I am going to step up for him."

Ryan was still in a coma when in July 2001 Pat, Lindy and evangelist Kenneth Copeland appeared on Larry King Live and beckoned people around the world to join them in prayer (CNN broadcasts King's show in 220 nations, reaching an estimated 50 million potential intercessors).

The reaction was immediate and overwhelming. People called the hospital, a hotline was established and King invited the Boones and Copeland back. In fact, King has now dedicated four hour-long telecasts to Ryan, tracking the answers to prayer as "the miracle boy" has defied doctors' predictions and slowly progressed in his healing.

On the shows, King has interviewed Pat, Lindy and Jessica—getting from them mostly medical updates and personal insights. On the same shows, King has asked Copeland, Max Lucado, Robert Schuller, Jack Hayford, Rick Warren and Ryan's pastor at the Vineyard Christian Fellowship of Malibu, Dave

Owen, weighty theological questions.

“Each hour has been devoted to prayer, how God answers prayer and, Is there a God?” Pat says. “Larry keeps asking the question, ‘If God is love why does He let these things happen to good people?’ So, right there on CNN, to 50 million viewers, we are telling about the cross and the Resurrection!”

For the third show, King visited Ryan, who had been moved to a specialized care facility. By then Ryan had emerged from his coma, no longer needed a ventilator, had responded to Jessica feeding him pudding, could sing with his mother and was able to shake King’s hand. At the end of the segment, King said, “Next time we will do this in the studio.”

On Christmas Day 2002, the usual prayer warriors were assembled around King’s interview table—plus one. Joining Pat, Lindy, Jessica and Rick Warren was Ryan—in his wheelchair, but very much aware that he was seated across from the man in the suspenders.

Ryan, though unable to openly converse, recited the pledge of allegiance, sang with his grandfather and said, “Thank you,” to King.

There was not a dry eye in the studio or in millions of homes around the world. CNN replayed the show twice during the week and once as King’s weekend special.

“Larry is awed,” Pat Boone says. “He requires a sign, and he has selected Ryan as a sign that there is a God and that He does answer prayer.” Pat believes that when King sees a healed Ryan walk into the studio for his next interview King will re-

examine his doubts and perhaps accept God.

“The power of prayer is not just what it does to the object of that prayer, but also what it does to the person praying,” Lindy says. “Ryan is an obvious miracle, but the miracle that has happened in me is part of the answer to prayer. The miracle that happened when Jessica accepted the Lord is part of the miracle. [See related article on this page.]

“Lives being touched all around us are as big an answer to prayer as Ryan being able to talk. Larry King’s response is an answer to prayer. The joy that I get is that Ryan had such a desire to make a difference, and he is.”

For the Glory of God

A gentle breeze saunters in from the west and the last hint of azure lingers in the Southern California sky on a Saturday night as pristine and full of hope as any in recent memory.

Lindy pulls her copper-colored van into a handicapped parking spot and walks to the passenger side of the vehicle. Just like she does every Saturday night nowadays, she helps Ryan disembark and steers his wheelchair toward the Saddleback Valley Community Church sanctuary in Lake Forest.

Ryan likes coming to church. Tonight, between sips of Minute Maid apple juice that keeps his energy level up, he nods to the beat of a worship song and sings along—if the musicians crank up a Steven Curtis Chapman tune he will get really excited. He then listens intently, not missing a word of Rick Warren’s lesson on the power of words.

This is a healing in progress.

Having improved enough to move from medical facilities to his mother and stepfather's house, Ryan's daily regimen typically includes physical, speech and occupational therapy. He also watches television, listens to music and eats on his own.

"He still does not initiate much," Pat says, "but he almost always responds."

Indeed, the words are coming. One day, out of nowhere he said, "Live"—as in "Live from New York." More and more he will hold one tone—"ahhhhhhhhh"—as long as he can. "He is finding his voice," Pat adds.

And he will answer questions. A therapist asked what the letter "L" stands for in the metric system. Ryan said, "Liter."

This is Ryan the movie buff, the Lakers fan, the one with the quirky sense of humor—family members say they see signs he has lost none of this. Furthermore, they believe that Ryan's faith not only is unshaken, but it also has actually strengthened.

"Why did God let this happen to Ryan?" Pat asks. "I think Lindy had insight. She wrote down that God saw in Ryan somebody who He could use in this way, somebody who He trusted, even to endure it once he realized what had happened—which Ryan does now."

As soon as Ryan was able to speak, Lindy asked him if he still loved Jesus.

"He said, 'Yes,' as most definite as he could," Lindy recalls.

"Do you feel His presence?" she queried further.

"Yes," he answered.

"Ryan, do you ever lay in bed and say this really sucks?" she probed.

"No," he said, forming a gentle smile.

Mike Michaelis asks Ryan, now 26, "Are you going to get completely well?"

Ryan always answers, "Yes."

Then Mike asks, "Why Ryan?"

"For the glory of God," he replies.

Lindy finds a paradox in the fact that Ryan was attacked (the family considers it a spiritual attack although they do not blame Satan outright for pushing Ryan).

"Ryan, it will be so wonderful when you will be able to express the message God has given you," Lindy tells her son.

Again, he nods resolutely in the affirmative. Does Ryan have a

message?

“Yes, I do.”

He leaves no doubt.

“There is this mutual trust,” Lindy beams. “Ryan trusts the Lord so much, and the Lord trusts him to be somebody who can go through this and come out the other side.

“Ryan is expecting to be able to walk again. He is expecting to make a difference in this world.”

God Can Use Tragedy

Ryan Corbin's accident in 2001 had an unexpected result: It brought his sister to faith in Christ.

For six months Jessica Corbin had been standing strong for her brother Ryan's recovery. She had encouraged her mother, assured her half brother and held her grandmother tight. But she could last only so long.

The pressure came crashing in on the day after Christmas 2001. “I hit a wall,” she told Charisma. “I was still dealing with the reality that my brother was not all right. I desperately turned to God and said, ‘Help me.’”

God was not a stranger to Jessica. As Pat and Shirley Boone's granddaughter, she is part of one of the most visible Christian families in America. As a child, she regularly attended church. But something was missing.

"People would tell me I was a Christian, but I never knew how I got to be one," Jessica says. "Christianity as I understood it was a choice—but I never made a choice, I was just born that way."

Jessica never doubted God's existence, but the passion she saw in her brother and others never reached her heart. "It was like believing in Santa Claus," she says.

In a way Jessica felt like the black sheep of her family. "There were times when I would say, 'I am not a Boone, I am Jessi!'" she admits.

She never wandered that far astray, but she did insist upon coming to God on her own terms. As a result, she did not regularly attend church and studied various religions as an undergraduate at UCLA.

When Ryan had his accident, she was living in San Francisco and working as a reporter for TechTV. "I didn't have a strong bond with Jesus," she says. "So I just tried to quiet my angst and focus on Ryan. My faith did not really have a face. All I knew was that I believed in Ryan and his character."

Jessica gave up everything to be by Ryan's side—she quit her job, moved back to Southern California and was disconnected from her circle of friends. Then came the day after Christmas 2001.

“Reaching the end of myself forced me to take a step off the ledge and let God carry me,” Jessica says. “What is amazing is that you do not know what is there until you take that step, then it all makes sense.”

Jessica’s head knowledge about Jesus finally reached her heart. For that, she had Ryan—and in an undeniable way his fall and struggle for life—to thank.

She was not the only one moved toward God by this tragedy. When word went out for people to pray for Ryan, actor Danny Bonaduce (who played “Danny” on the 1970s TV show *The Partridge Family*) responded. Not particularly religious, Bonaduce nonetheless went home and told his wife they needed to pray for Ryan.

“I told Danny, ‘You do not know Ryan, but he would have gone through all of this just so you and your wife would pray together,’” Pat Boone says. “Ryan is that committed to being used by God.”

Would Ryan accept the fall, the coma and the slow struggle back to any kind of normalcy just to see his little sister grow closer to Jesus?

“In a heartbeat,” says Jessica, wiping away tears. “In a heartbeat.”

For updates on Ryan Corbin’s condition, and for information on the Ryan Corbin Foundation, started by Doug Corbin and Jessica Corbin to help people who suffer from serious injuries, visit

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