In most ways, Ryan Dant is a typical 15-year-old. He’s a die-hard Dallas Mavericks fan. He plays in youth baseball and basketball leagues. He’d like to be a major league baseball umpire. His musical tastes range from Kelly Clarkson and Justin Timberlake to Creed and blink-182. He’s hooked on American Idol. He knows a lot about cars and can’t wait till he’s old enough to drive. Ryan is small for his age (just under 5 feet tall and barely more than 100 pounds), but he considers it a triumph that servers in restaurants no longer offer crayons with his menu. He has been fitted with braces to straighten his teeth and wears his hair long like his favorite NBA players, Steve Nash and Dirk Nowitzki. He’s eager to start high school in the fall. He’s interested in girls and has his eye on one in particular. “Her name is Melissa,” Ryan says. “Can you put that in the article?” He’s a teenage boy like any other—and that is a miracle.
Ryan has heard his parents tell the story many times, but he has no memory of the day his doctor broke the terrible news to them.

"I was too young," he points out. "I was just 3 then." As for Mark and Jeanne, they can’t remember anything that happened after that meeting. "It’s like we were numb," Mark says. "We were in such a state of shock that the rest of that day is just blocked from our memories." Their desolation lasted nearly a whole year, in fact. "I cried every night," Mark says.

Ryan had been an active boy. At 4, he was one of the best players on his baseball team. But it wasn’t long before he experienced muscle and joint pain. His fingers and toes began to curl and lock. By 5, he had trouble gripping a baseball bat. His dad enabled him to play another season by attaching Velcro to Ryan’s bat and batting gloves. But Ryan, who soon needed help putting on his T-shirt because he couldn’t extend his arms, eventually quit sports. Because of his bloated spleen and liver, his stomach swelled to two and a half times normal size. He had violent migraines and often vomited himself into unconsciousness.

The disease also beat Ryan up psychologically. "When he was younger," Mark recalls, "he would talk about what kind of car he would want to have and how he wanted to be a major league baseball player. By the time he was 8, he stopped mentioning those things."

"Well, there wasn’t much point," Ryan says. "Why should I think about the future if I’m not going to be there?"
What Ryan didn’t count on, of course, was that his father is a stubborn man. Mark and Jeanne Dantz have lived in suburban Dallas since they married in 1982. He’s a lieutenant in the Carrollton Police Department; she’s the manager of software programs at a company affiliated with American Airlines. Before his son was diagnosed with MPS I, Mark’s driving ambition was to become chief of police.

“I said, ‘My son is almost 4. He’s got MPS I. You did it with Gaucher. Is it possible to do this with MPS I?’ And he was really blunt. He said, ‘It’s possible, but it’ll cost millions. You don’t have enough money. The science is not ready; you won’t have time.’ Meaning there won’t be time for Ryan. But the only part I chose to hear was, ‘It’s possible.’”

In the meantime, the Dants started the nonprofit Ryan Foundation for MPS Children to raise money for MPS I research. That money. Then, in December ’94, an expert in genetics told Mark about her former student, Dr. Emil Kakkis, who was developing an enzyme replacement therapy for MPS I. Kakkis was on the verge of a breakthrough, Mark learned, but lack of funding was holding him back. “We were tantalizingly close, scientifically close, but operationally very far,” Kakkis says. “I was surviving on minimal research support that was covering the equivalent of one low-paid technician and a few supplies. That’s not enough to develop a drug.”

Mark decided to pump every dollar into Kakkis’ work. “A lot of parents, when their child gets a disease, are devastated and not very functional as far as getting anything done,” Kakkis says. “Some parents go out and get some information. But very few parents go out and raise research funds and then find a focus for those funds and then get them to the person who can make the drug to treat their child. The thing that’s unique about Mark is he turned his grief into solid action.”

In early 1997, Kakkis’ research got a $5 million shot in the arm from BioMarin Pharmaceutical. And by February ’98, eight weeks shy of Ryan’s 10th birthday, Ryan and nine other young MPS patients entered the pediatric intensive care unit at Harbor-UCLA Medical Center to receive their first infusions of the new enzyme-rich drug.

The results were immediate and impressive. “One day at the hotel,” Ryan recalls, “I had my shirt off and I was looking in the mirror and my stomach had shrunk. My spleen had shrunk. And I yelled for my dad and he came running. I said, ‘Dad, my stomach looks more normal!’”

**How You Can Help**

Fortunately, today parents can find extensive support and information about MPS I, and have the opportunity to meet other families dealing with the disorder. Many resources are available through the National MPS Society in Bangor, Maine, at www.mpsociety.org, or by calling 207-947-1445. Information on making a tax-deductible donation to the Ryan Foundation in Carrollton, Texas, can be found at www.ryanfoundation.org or by calling 214-870-RYAN.

That was just the beginning. For the past five years, every Monday afternoon Ryan has received enzyme infusions—and the transformation has been nothing short of glorious. He’s growing. His once-misshapen body (Continued on page 100)
Crossword
by John M. Samson

The Rat Pack

Across
1. Mahat of the Atlantic City (4)
2. Like Heidi (4)
3. Boris Godunov, e.g. (5)
4. Longston Hughes poem (5)
5. "Over the Rainbow" ending (7)
6. "She's Leaving Home" - Beatles (7)
7. Coffeehouse reader (7)
8. Williams of Happy Days (7)
9. Night author Wesel (3)
10. 1996 Leslie Nielsen film (7)
11. Ocean's Eleven star (8)
12. Telephone inventor (8)
13. Howard Hughes' airplanes (5)
14. Madison in Can-Can (5)
15. Second American in space (5)
17. Cotta (5)
18. Photojournalist Yamasaki (7)
19. Suffix for sheep (7)
20. Finnish composer Kalevi (8)

Down
1. Gratuities (7)
2. At the apex (7)
3. Ocean's Eleven star (7)
4. A Study in ___: Doyle (7)
5. Solti's stick (8)
6. Electees (8)
7. Convertiplane (8)
8. Ocean's Eleven star (8)
10. Fly like Fossett (8)
11. Prince of Arabia (8)
12. Olivar in Oilve (8)
13. Nicole Kidman film (with The) (8)
15. The Blue Man setting (8)
16. All star (8)
17. ___ Fine: Chiffons hit (8)
18. The Best ___ of Our Lives (1946) (8)
19. Forrest Gump author (8)
20. Ocean's Eleven star (8)
21. Suffice for pan (8)
22. Erin of Happy Days (8)
23. Greek P. (8)
24. Gilligan's Island role (8)
25. Thoroughly Modern Milly star (8)
26. Griffith in Crazy Alabama (8)
27. Schwarzenegger film (8)
28. She saved Odysseus (8)
29. "Well, I'll be!" (8)
30. Dagwood's captain (8)
31. Skye in Say Anything (8)
32. Oxford Blues heroine (8)
33. "Blue ___ Fly" (8)
34. Year in Henry III's reign (8)
35. Lady in Cement sleuth (8)
36. In ___ Blood (1967) (8)
37. Jatin in Lord of the Rings (8)

Ryan Dant from page 79

looks normal. His strength and energy have increased exponentially. The headaches have all but disappeared. "And it was probably within six months of his first treatment that he started talking about cars again," Mark says. "I thought that was pretty cool."

It's important to note, though, that Ryan isn't cured. Kakki's wonder drug, which received FDA approval this year and will be marketed as Aldurazyme, doesn't treat the brain or heart valves. Nor can it completely reverse nine years of punishment that MPS inflicted on Ryan's body. His heart valves were damaged before treatment began and doctors found a bit of leaking, which they'll have to watch. Also, Ryan's hands remained frozen in claw-like positions; he underwent surgery in March to straighten the fingers on his left hand.

Meanwhile, Dr. Kakki keeps working to develop the elusive cure—and Mark, now in his 19th year with Carrollton P.D., is still raising money, a pursuit he views as his primary mission in life. "This is a way the Dant family can help change the world for the better," he says. "I keep coming back to the picture of Jeanie and me sitting there, with Ryan on us, and the doctor telling us what would happen. Now, when other families are in that position and hear, 'Your child has a terminal disease,' there will be a comma at the end of that sentence—and the doctor will add, 'But there is a therapy.'"

As for Ryan, at the moment he says he's not going to follow in his father's crusading footsteps, at least not full time. He has other plans. Such as: "Growing up. Marrying someone. Having kids. Becoming rich. Living in a big house. Having tons of cars."

The same dreams, in other words, that all kids have.  

David Martindale is a contributing editor of this magazine.

Paul Rudd from page 74

"I had no idea it would turn into such a phenomenon," he recalls. "Everything changed for me after Clueless." Though he wasn't overwhelmed with movie offers, Rudd found it easier to meet directors without first running the gauntlet of casting directors and producers. In 1996 he turned up in William Shakespeare's Romeo & Juliet, a typically manic outing from Aussie director Baz Luhrmann. Leonardo DiCaprio and Claire Danes played the Bard's star-crossed lovers; Rudd was Dave Paris, Juliet's smarmy rejected suitor. The film was another hit with teens and critics alike.

Rudd appeared to be on the Hollywood fast track, but in 1997 he took a slight detour to Broadway for a major part in Alfred Ulry's Tony Award-winning drama The Last Night of Ballyhoo. "I remember getting into some long conversations with my agent at the time," he says with a laugh. "'Why are you doing this? Why are you in a play?' But I was 25, and I had very specific ideas of what I wanted to do." Those ideas did not initially include taking a lead role opposite Jennifer Aniston in the 1998 film The Object of My Affection. "I was having such a good time doing Ballyhoo that at first I turned the movie down, until the producers worked it out that I could leave and come back."

Object turned out to be one of Rudd's best performances—he's both funny and good-hearted as the gay schoolteacher who develops complex feelings for roommate Aniston. In summer 1998 he worked again for his Object director Nicholas Hytner, this time onstage, playing Orsino in the well-received production of Shakespeare's Twelfth Night at New York's Lincoln Center Theater.

Over the past few years, Rudd has racked up a broad range of screen credits, including the zany independent comedy 200 Cigarettes (with Courtney Love), and Cider House Rules, where he played a World War II airman who's engaged to Charlize Theron and befriended by Tobey Maguire (Spider-Man). He was a horny summer-camp counselor in