

## **RYLA 2014 District 5510 Ethan Lipson**

Thank you so much for sponsoring me on my trip to RYLA this year. I learned so much and made so many friends from all around the valley and the world. The activities that we did at RYLA are split into three categories: Fun, Learning, and Speakers. Now don't get me wrong, the learning and speakers were fun, just as I learned from the speakers and the fun. The activities did have major focuses and taught me how to not only be a better leader but also a better person.

On the first day, after we arrived we split into CAB teams. A CAB team is the group of guys or girls that you sleep with and do some activities with. I was lucky enough to have both Simon Woodrich, and Ruben Bloem (the foreign exchange students from Germany and the Netherlands). We then met with our ACT teams or our countries. Each country had a member who was a foreign exchange student from that country. My country was the Netherlands, but then because we were too large and Denmark was too small I was moved with my friend, Casey, to Denmark. The foreign exchange student's name was Mathilde Haahr. In our ACT teams we did most of our activities. The first activity was to make a flag. We did a large group exercise next, and then came inside for dinner. We ate with our ACT teams. After dinner, we listened to Jerry Traylor talk about his life journey. Jerry has grown up with cerebral palsy. Regardless of his disability Jerry has still run thirty marathons, hiked Pike's peak, participated in sixteen thirty-six hour dance-a-thons, and jogged from the Golden Gate bridge to the Brooklyn bridge, all on crutches. Jerry's story was inspirational and taught us to never let someone tell you that you can't.

The next two days were similar to the first. We did many different exercises. We ate dinner with our CAB teams and ACT teams. Some of the learning activities included a few workshops on leadership and ethical choice making. The ethical choices helped us learn how to make difficult decisions that impact our friends and ourselves. We left with the RYLA four-way test. The four-way test is four yes or no questions, if your decision would make one of the answers no then you should not do it. I have a coin and wristband with the test on it. My favorite activity was the rock climbing. We went to the wall and the first task was to get onto the top of the wall. It was challenging but not too hard for me. It took some of the members in my ACT team a lot of effort because they had difficulties. After we got to the top we were harnessed into a zip line. The zip line was so much fun but in order to go down it you had to push yourself off of the tower. This was more challenging than I would have thought. It was a metaphor for how difficult it is to take the first step. We also participated in a "World Cup" Volleyball tournament. We didn't win but we had a lot of fun and it brought a group of leaders together into a team. The next speaker we heard from was Amanda Wirtz. She told us her amazing life story, how she went from nothing to a great life until she was diagnosed with a rare, progressive and incurable disease. She didn't let that keep her down though and she has made a wonderful life for herself and others around her. She is a very smart person and also

very talented, she plays electric violin. Amanda made us think about how different our lives could be and how quickly they could change, but she ultimately taught us that regardless of the situation the reason she is where she is because she “asked the right question” when it mattered. Later we had a presentation about the rotary student exchange program. I loved meeting the kids from across the world. They were so nice and fun to be with. I want to go to Europe for a year now through the program.

RYLA was a wonderful experience and I am so lucky that I was given the chance to attend. MY school does not have an Interact program and I would not have known if not for RYLA. In the near future I hope to work with my school and District Council for 5510 to create an Interact club at my school. I met so many kids that I will never forget climbing with, singing with, playing volleyball with, doing a trust fall with and many more memories. Thank you again Rotary E- club of the Southwest.

The pictures below are from three different activities. They are all group photos of my ACT team/country. The first is of our group after we had just climbed the tower and zip lined. I am wearing the green flannel in the tower picture, and our foreign exchange student, Mathilde, is on the far right wearing pants with rhombuses on them.



The second is a “selfie” taken during a team-building exercise, where we had to cross a field without touching the ground, only those blue pillars seen. We had to work not only in our own groups but also with another ACT team (Finland).



The last photo is another group “selfie” of us with our favorite mentor, Katie.

