

“A Classic” —*Los Angeles Times*

Darius Goes West The Roll of His Life

“Certain to stir hearts.” —*Variety*

Award-winner at more than 25 leading film festivals worldwide

The first time I sat down in this world is
the last time I sat down in this world.

I was smiling that day and
I'll be smiling when I leave.

Because when I die,
folks ain't gonna say
“Darius is gone.”

They're going to say
“Darius went west.”

—Darius Weems

Darius Weems wanted MTV to customize his wheelchair on the show “Pimp My Ride.”

The fifteen-year-old also wanted to raise awareness for Duchene muscular dystrophy (DMD).

Introducing Darius and his wheelchair to the millions watching “Pimp My Ride,” would raise awareness of DMD—the number one genetic killer of young people in the world. DMD took the lives of Darius’ uncle and brother, and will one day claim Darius’ life.

Darius wanted to attract more than the declining generation donating to Jerry Lewis’ telethon for Muscular Dystrophy. He wanted a new strategy to spread awareness among a younger generation—among which there might be an individual who will one day find a cure.

Before he died, Darius’ 19-year-old brother, Mario, asked his friend, Logan Smalley, to watch out for Darius.

Logan decided to go west. They would take the ultimate road trip—from Athens, GA., to Los Angeles.

Darius would leave the state of Georgia for the first time in his life. He would see—and live—the world that his brother, Mario, never experienced.

Logan enlisted more friends to help and within six months raised money by placing piggy banks out in the community to collect spare change from would-be supporters, selling movie credits, holding barbeques, and through a generous grant from United Cerebral Palsy.

On their cross-country journey, Darius, Logan and friends found that the 250+ million-year-old Carlsbad Caverns were wheelchair-accessible, yet an Alabama gas station was not. Thus they began to focus on Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant locations. (See list of places they visited to learn which were/were not ADA compliant.) Darius’ own home, in fact, was not wheelchair accessible. He could access his room and living room, but not the bathroom or kitchen. Through a donation by one devoted fan, a home was bought. The community of Athens, GA, rallied to renovate the home and make it wheelchair accessible.

MTV decided against “pimping” Darius’ wheelchair. However . . .

Darius and crew succeeded in raising awareness for DMD and Americans with disabilities.

They also raised \$1.5 million for DMD research

And now: They just launched a One Million DVDs in One Year campaign to raise additional awareness and funds for DMD research.

One Million DVDs in One Year Campaign

The goal: To sell one million DVDs in one year. The year-end date is Darius's birthday, Sept. 27, 2009. Every DVD raises \$17 for Duchenne muscular dystrophy research.

School Program

At film festivals, Darius and crew discovered that middle and high school students were among their most enthusiastic fans. So, they created a special schools version of the film, enlisted the help of professional educators to help develop lesson plans to accompany the movie, and launched the “Know About It” educational program.

2008 Principal of the Year, Mark Wilson, is enabling Darius and crew to reach millions more students.

In early 2009, Wilson’s school, Morgan County High School, will hand-write letters to every high school in the United States, encouraging the schools’ leadership to screen “Darius Goes West.” The school screenings include specially-developed curriculum. For example, in social studies, the students focus upon Civil Liberties, and the ADA.

Jamesville-DeWitt Middle School in Syracuse, N.Y., is hand-writing letters to every middle school, asking them to screen the film and thus help raise awareness, too.

To date, over 200 schools nationwide have signed up for the “Know About It” program. Collectively, these schools have raised nearly \$100,000 for DMD research. And in their “Million DVD” year travels, Darius and crew include school visits wherever they go.

Special Honors—Giving Back

A supporter of “Darius Goes West” established The Darius Weems Scholarship in December 2008, to support an incoming freshman at Yale University.

Darius has been awarded \$42,000, via awards such as the Volvo for Life Award (2008 Finalist, Quality of Life Category), World of Children Award, and the Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes.

Darius has donated all award dollars to Charley’s Fund, an organization dedicated to finding a cure for DMD.

Darius and his mother (who is legally blind) survive on disability. Despite the hardships that life has presented both of them, they give to others. They are a vehicle for change.

Be the Vehicle! Don’t just go along for the ride!