

—HI, MY NAME IS BEN Synopsis—

SHORT TAKE: The spoiler-free synopsis

An old man walks onstage and introduces himself: he is Ben, and he can hear, but can't talk. We see Ben being given a small room in New York City to live in, then we flashback to Ben's youth in Iowa, where the young Ben is a rebellious teenager (with a fully functional voice), anxious to get to New York to build skyscrapers. His family, including an unstable mother, Meta, and his sister Helen, doesn't want him to leave. When Ben decides to leave for the army, Meta tells him she never wants to see him again.

We see the older Ben recovering from an illness with the help of his neighbor, Pat. He begins to connect with the people of his neighborhood, including Jorge, a Colombian doorman at a nearby building who doesn't speak English well. Ben teaches him with the aid of a notebook and pen.

Again we flashback to the younger Ben, now in college and about to leave for New York for a job as an architectural

draftsman. News comes that Ben's mother has died. Ben decides not to go home for the funeral. A few years later, he's a successful architectural draftsman about to go on a date with a sweet waiter named James. After the date, Ben learns from Helen that their father has killed himself. Ben returns home but doesn't stay, and after pushing James away, he has a total breakdown, losing his voice in the process.

Years later, Ben is living on the street. He is spotted by an older James, who helps Ben get set up in the room we saw in the beginning of the show. Ben makes more friends in the neighborhood as the years pass, but he eventually learns he has prostate cancer. As he is fighting it, Pat tells him his sister Helen has died, and she appears to Ben to forgive him for his long absence. The details of Ben's life swarm around him, and the next morning his voice returns. But does this medical miracle mean Ben is cured?

SPOILER ALERT! Read the short take for no spoilers.

An old man comes on stage and, via a notebook he uses to write on, introduces himself to the audience: he is Ben, and he can hear, but cannot talk. He tells us a little about himself, but soon enough we are drawn into the show. We see a bedraggled Ben being given a small room to live in, thanks to another man—James. As James leaves, Ben flashes back to himself as a teenager in Davenport, Iowa. The young Ben has a fully functional voice and a reputation as a troublemaker in school for his habit of drawing all over school property, but Ben says they are designs for the skyscrapers he is going to build one day. We see that Ben has a connection with a fellow student, Noah. At home, we meet Ben's family, including his newly-married sister Helen, and learn there is some tension among them—Ben's mother, Meta, isn't mentally stable and gets very upset at the idea of Ben not staying in Iowa after high school.

The older Ben wakes up in 1991, having passed out. Luckily his neighbor Pat is a nurse, and supervises his healing while telling her own story. When he feels better, Ben ventures into the outside world, and begins to connect with his community via his notepad. At a local building, he meets Jorge, a Colombian doorman who doesn't speak much English. Ben offers to teach him, and via his notepad, does.

Back in 1952, Ben is graduating from high school and leaving for the army, which terrifies his mother. She tells him that if he leaves, she never wants to see him again. As we see Ben serve in Korea and then study to be an architectural draftsman, Helen sings about their childhood together. At his dorm, Ben is getting ready for his new life in New York and debating whether to tell his family where he's going when he gets the news that his mother is dead. Ben decides to travel to New York anyway, and sings about how much he loves his new home—a song echoed by Jorge and another doorman, Juan.

A few years later, Ben, now a successful architect with a fancy apartment, ignores his ringing phone while preparing for a date. His date is James, a sweet waiter, and they connect. But when Ben gets home he answers the phone to hear Helen on the other line—their father has committed suicide. Ben goes home for the funeral but doesn't stay, and when he returns to New York he pushes James away. The guilt over his parents' deaths causes him to have a breakdown, at the end of which he is left without his voice.

Act 2 begins in 1990, with the older Ben living on the street. A man passing by stops to give him money and Ben recognizes an older James. James brings Ben to his home, which he shares with his wife, Sarah. They help Ben find a room, as we saw in the first scene. On a walk in the neighborhood, Ben meets a brassy journalist, Joan, and her dog Clementine.

Time passes, and Ben sees a doctor. He asks Jorge and Juan to bring him to the grave of James, who has passed away, and tells them he has been diagnosed with cancer. As a surprise, the doormen and Joan arrange for Ben to have a swanky evening out at the opera, which he loves. When he returns, Pat tells him that his sister Helen has died. She appears to Ben, forgiving him for his long absence. The details of Ben's life swarm around him, and the next day a miracle occurs—his voice returns. However, his joy is short-lived, as his cancer forces him into hospice care. Ben sees a vision of his younger self, and celebrates a life that went very differently than he had planned before he slips away.

At Ben's funeral, Jorge praises Ben's ability to make you see the beauty in life. The community, now united in friendship thanks to Ben, celebrates the lesson he taught them: that everyone has a story, and it's worth connecting with those around you to find out theirs.