

Layla and friends 'Cooking for a Cure'

ELIZABETH STEWART
Herald Correspondent

Layla Anne Harris, 4, is a happy, precocious little girl who adores her identical twin, Abbie, and their big brother John, 6, and romps and plays with them and their big, red dog, Houston, either on skates or on family beach trips with parents, Ashley and Johnny Harris.

On Tuesdays and Thursdays, visitors to the Resurrection Lutheran Church 4-year-old Pre-School class see double. The lively blondes are always in the thick of activities and Abbie takes the role of big Sis.

The difference in the twins is that Layla has an extra special challenge in life and she, by all accounts, is a trooper.

In November 2004, Layla, then 2, was diagnosed with juvenile diabetes. She depends on an insulin pump to treat her disease, which eliminates the need for multiple daily shots.

The amazing child proudly checks her own sugar 6-8 times a day, something almost unheard of for a toddler to assume ownership of such a task. No one would ever guess that the decorative pouch (which resembles a small money pouch) she wears at her waist contains the life-saving insulin pump which connects with a tiny catheter in her skin. When it's time for swimming, Layla simply disconnects the catheter on her side, removes the pouch and

dives in the pool.

"We are so proud of Layla," said Mom Ashley Harris who at times is asked by her daughter, "How long do I have to have diabetes?" Mrs. Harris says they pray for a cure in Layla's lifetime.

The 11 children in Layla and Abbie's class at Resurrection Church Pre-school have become great friends of the Harris twins since they all started in Mom's Morning Out two years ago. Says Ashley, "Johnny and I considered taking Layla out of the program when she was diagnosed with diabetes but the staff has been so supportive and helped us so much during that difficult time in our lives when we were scared to death."

Ashley continues the story of her family's courageous fight.

"Early on in my pregnancy we found out that we were having twins. It was a shock at first because instead of one baby (John was 2) we were to be blessed with two more babies. Our three children were very healthy. Two years ago they came down with an illness doctors called "hand, foot and mouth disease" associated with day care childhood illnesses. Layla was thirsty, would not play with the other children and went to the bathroom a lot. She didn't lose weight but appeared thin. We rushed her to the pediatrician who quickly diagnosed juvenile diabetes and Layla was in the hospital four days. All

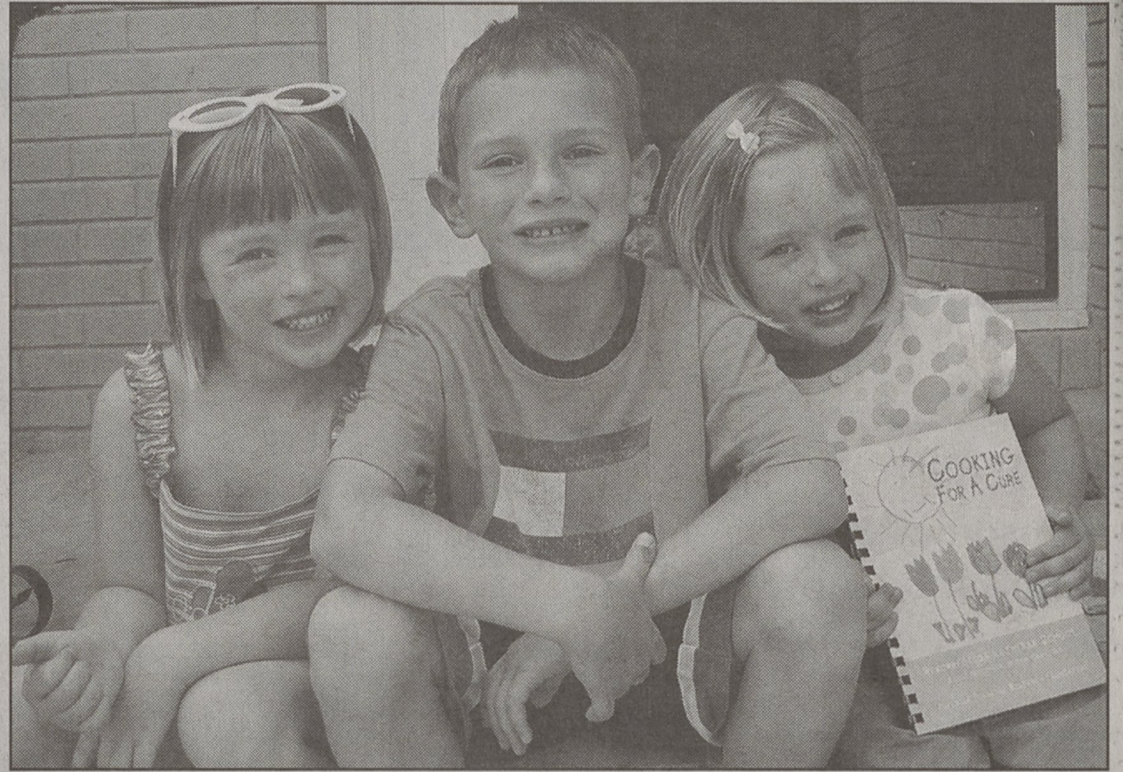
the time we prayed that something else was the cause of her illness."

Family and friends and parents of children with Type 1 diabetes were the support system they needed. Last year the Harris family walked in 'Walk for a Cure' at Carowinds Theme Park and helped raise \$20,000 for the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation. They didn't walk in the recent fundraiser this year because, with the help of Marsha Brown, the twin's teacher at Pre-School, got the idea to undertake a cookbook project to raise funds for the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation.

It was a monumental task, according to Ashley, and was completed in four months after mothers of preschoolers helped with soliciting, compiling, editing and typing the recipes for "Cooking For A Cure."

Brown chaired the committee with the assistance of Ashley Harris, Lisa Medlin, Kelly Bell, Lori Lewis and Amanda Tackett. Young Layla drew and colored the pretty tulips on the front cover of the hardbound cookbook and her sister, brother and classmates helped decorate the book by inserting drawings at pages of favorite recipes submitted by parents of the preschool class.

"The project has really mushroomed and we have printed hundreds of cookbooks which are available at the church, the Chamber of Commerce downtown, or by



LIB STEWART / HERALD
Abbie, John and Layla Harris outside their home in Kings Mountain.

contacting me at home for a \$20 donation," said Mrs. Harris. She said all the proceeds will be presented at the Walk for a Cure next year in which her family will participate.

Founded in 1970 by parents of children with type 1 juvenile diabetes, the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation has always focused on a single goal: accelerating research progress to cure diabetes and its complications. Nearly 177,000 children and adolescents in the United States have diabetes and statistics show that juvenile diabetes is clearly reaching epidemic proportions. The

risk of cardiovascular disease, kidney damage and loss of eyesight are just a few of the complications of diabetes.

"We are so blessed by having three wonderful children who are so close and even now look out for each other," said Mrs. Harris.

Layla, who sat in her favorite spot in her bedroom, held up the beautifully-decorated cookbook, and also smiled for the photographer as she played and then autographed her book. She said her favorite foods are cinnamon apples, pizza, carrots and hot dog on a bun. She likes to play, swim, ride her bike and look for her

brother, a kindergarten student at North School, to come home from school.

On March 7 Layla's birthday cake was a Cinderella cake and Abbie's cake was a Nemo cake. They helped their brother celebrate his birthday on Feb. 17.

Mrs. Harris formerly taught marketing classes at Cleveland Community College and may return to work in a few years. Now, she enjoys her role as a full time homemaker. Both she and her husband, Kings Mountain businessman Johnny Harris, enjoy their family. After all, the proud Mom says, aren't all children miracles?

Fallen firemen remembered in Shelby service

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On the night of May 25, 1979, a fire raged in the heart of downtown Shelby. Five men died trying to save the community from this untamable threat. Their gallant actions and those of every fireman were honored and memorialized on the fire's 27th anniversary at the Cleveland County Memorial Service for Fallen Firefighters. Underneath the towering ceiling of the Shelby City Fire Department's (SCFD) #2 Station, firemen from across the county, loved ones and quiet spectators gathered to recall the brave men from that fateful evening.

On the night of the 1979 blaze, firefighters arrived at JE's Clothing Store, where the fire was believed to have

originated, on the corner of S. Lafayette and W. Warren streets around 6:30 pm. It looked as if the firemen were winning the battle to calm the roaring fire. The flames appeared to be retreating. But the war was far from over. BOOM! The explosion blew out the front and rear walls of two nearby stores. Three firemen died instantly. The rubble crushed a city fire truck.

The bodies of Shelby Fireman Floyd Sharts and City Utilities Worker Max Bowling, who had gone to the scene to turn off the gas, were found at the back of the clothing store. The explosion ripped off the tops of neighboring businesses sending glass, brick and other debris flying. Wide-eyed spectators, gasping and screaming, watched in terror as the fire spewed forth its second

explosion. More propellants flew through the air, injuring 12 firemen and dozens of bystanders.

JE's Clothing Store and five other businesses in the 100 block of W. Warren St. were completely destroyed. Smoke from the inferno was said to have been seen 10 to 15 miles away.

Kings Mountain Fire Chf. Frank Burns remembers the 1979 fire in downtown Shelby, because he was there. He had started working with the KMFD in the mid-70s and was serving as Volunteer Assistant Chief at the time. "They called every one that could come out," he said. "It was a bad fire." He was assigned a sector of the location to keep the fiery destruction from spreading. Over 100 firefighters from 13 surrounding departments battled the fire.



Kings Mountain Fire Chf. Frank Burns talks with Jeff Cardwell, the Battalion Chief over the Special Ops Gamewell Fire Department, and Shelby City Fire Chf. Roland Hamrick, after the service.

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