

Death can't strike out heart warming friendship

Kid keeps dead pal's spirit alive

By JOE BERGER

Freckle-faced Landy Cox and his impish pal Patrick Jenkins frolicked through childhood side by side, sharing laughs and little boys' dreams — and a love that even death could not destroy.

Landy is white, Patrick was black. They never seemed to notice.

"Those boys had a beautiful friendship," said Landy's mother Cathy. "Two brothers couldn't have been closer."

Then, three years ago, tragedy tore them apart. Playful, bright-eyed Patrick died in a bloody heap at the age of 10 when he rode his bike in front of a car.

And from that day on, Landy has done the living for both boys — fulfilling a vow whispered over his lost buddy's coffin.

"Landy is keeping Patrick's spirit alive," said a friend.

The touching tale began in the halls of a primary school in Holly Hill, S.C.

Patrick and Landy — so different on the outside, so similar underneath — met in the second grade and became best buddies.

"You could hardly pry those two apart," one teacher recalled. "They played together and worked together. The bond between them was something special."

Landy lived in Holly Hill and Patrick lived down the road in Harleyville, so Patrick's mother hadn't met her son's carrot-top chum. But she'd heard about him, day in and day out.

"He never said, 'Mama, Landy's white,'" said Linda



Jean Jenkins. "It would just be 'Landy this, Landy that.' I thought he was a little girl. I never heard of a boy named Landy."

Patrick was fast becoming a star for his youth league baseball team. Landy was a couple of months too young to sign up, so he followed his pal's progress from the sidelines.

Then it happened. With a squeal of tires and the terrifying sound of metal tearing against metal, Patrick was gone.

Landy and his family drove around until they found Mrs. Jenkins' home.

Cathy Cox recalled the heartbreaking meeting.

"When (Patrick's mother) saw him and that red hair, she said 'You must be Landy Cox,' and she hugged him."

Mrs. Jenkins said she fell

in love with little Landy at first sight. "He just took my heart," she said.

The next day, standing over his fallen friend's casket, Landy whispered: "Patrick, you won't be able to do it, but I'll do it for you."

That spring, Landy played baseball for the first time.

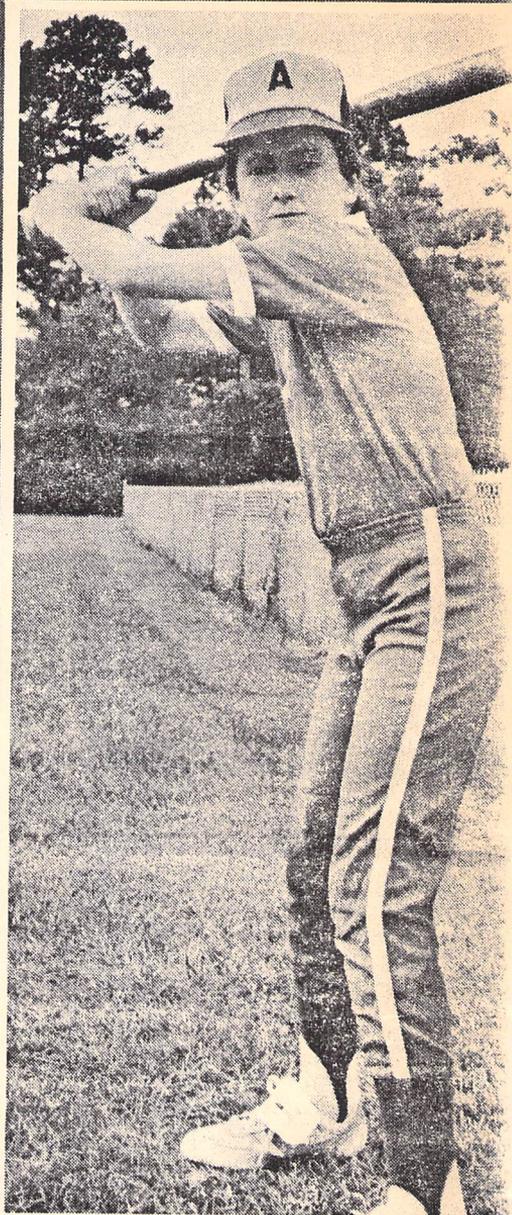
"Patrick wanted me to play," he said.

He joined Patrick's team, wore Patrick's old jersey.

Two seasons later, he had improved so spectacularly he was named the team's most valuable player.

That day, as Mrs. Jenkins and the team's other loyal fans looked on, Landy and his father Tommy took the field together. At Landy's request, his dad moved to the mike and told the story of a friendship that would never die.

And then Landy presented



SLUGGER Landy Cox, above, promised on the casket of his pal Patrick Jenkins, left, to keep the boy's spirit alive.

his coveted trophy to Patrick's startled mom. He'd won it, he said, because Patrick couldn't be there to win it for himself.

"The way I feel is, it's like

Patrick is living through Landy," Mrs. Jenkins said later. "For him to play baseball because of Patrick well, when I look at Landy look at Patrick."

**FELIPE GARZA COULD NOT WIN
DONNA ASHLOCK'S LOVE
BUT HE GAVE HER HIS HEART**

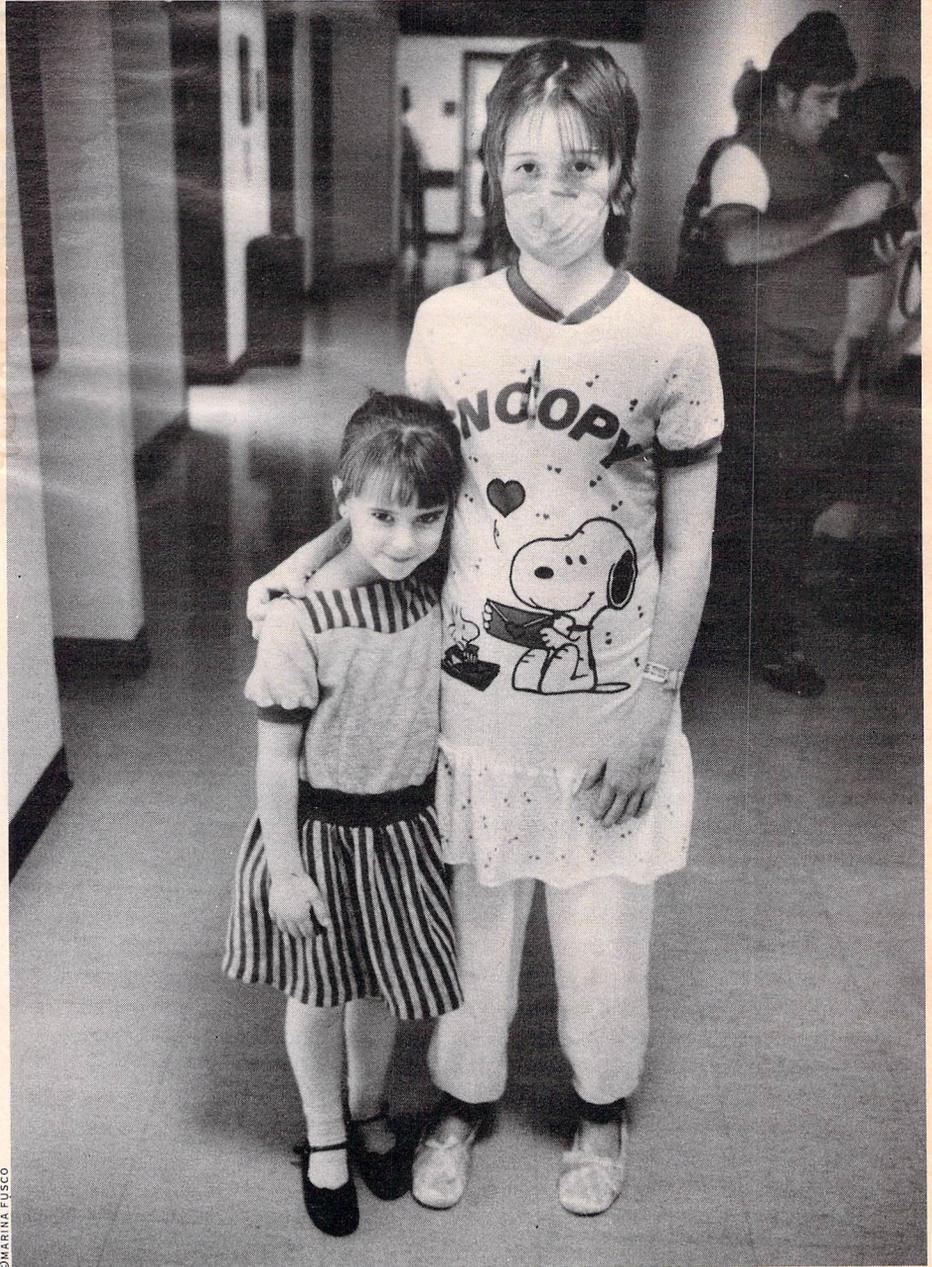


She had just a few weeks to live, but Donna (with little cousin Jennifer Roadlander) would not agree to a heart transplant until her parents promised they would both quit smoking. The donor, Felipe (above), predicted his own death.

Now that Donna Ashlock is out of intensive care, you can usually find her in her room at San Francisco's Pacific Presbyterian Medical Center, watching her favorite soaps or, augh! doing freshman math with her tutor. Or you may catch her dressed in her Snoopy pajamas, kidding with the nurses or perpetrating emotional blackmail against her visiting parents. "When she was the only child in the cardiac unit," says Raymond Ashlock, her father, "if Donna wanted something, the nurses gave it to her. Now, she says to us, 'Oh, you can't say that to me. I have a bad heart.'"

To look at this perky, freckle-faced 14 year old, you would never imagine that she was on the mend from a heart transplant operation, with excellent chances for living a normal life. Nor would you guess that she was a principal in a bizarre sort of Romeo and Juliet story, a tragedy with a partly happy ending—one that retrieved Donna from the verge of death and ennobled the death of her donor, 15-year-old Felipe Garza Jr.

On Jan. 4 Felipe, who'd been experi-



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encing severe headaches, collapsed with a brain hemorrhage that proved fatal. Some days earlier, he told his family he had had a premonition. He was going to die and he would like the girl he loved, Donna Ashlock, who he had heard needed a donor, to have his heart. "Felipe's a hero," says Raymond Ashlock. "He gave me back my daughter."

Felipe and Donna were from Patter-

son, Calif. (pop. 5,000), a farming community ("the Apricot Capital of the World") in the rich San Joaquin Valley. The two kids went to Patterson High School. Like everyone else, they hung out at a hamburger joint on Highway 33 named the Tiger's Den, where Donna swept up, cleaned tables and Felipe played the video games. Felipe was called "Pino" by his family, short for *pepino* or cucumber, because he

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Legacy

was so skinny. He was a poor student, but he enjoyed working with his hands and was full of mischief. "He liked to have fun, pulling tricks and playing games," says Don Penland, a school custodian who monitored him in a work experience program. "We'd be putting stuff in the dump truck and he'd pretend he was going to drive it. But he was so short he couldn't reach the gas pedal. He was a normal kid, but he had a way that would capture you. You could see that sparkle in his eye."

According to her friends, Donna appreciated Felipe's sparkle, but it didn't ignite her affections. Donna was something of a tomboy who liked to ride her bike about Patterson and listen to her records; besides, her affections were engaged elsewhere. She was going with a boy named Arthur Oliva. Still, Felipe tried to get Donna's friend Jessica Figueroa to intercede for him. "He really enjoyed her company," says Jessica, "and they looked cute together. They were so tiny. After school he'd come to my house and say, 'Get me together with Donna.' But I told him that she wouldn't because she liked Arthur. Donna would always say that Felipe was sweet and everything, and he'd cheer her up because he'd sing songs and dance to them at the same time and make us laugh."

Last Dec. 15 Donna finished work at the Tiger's Den at 5 p.m. "About 9 she couldn't breathe," says her mother, Mary, "and she was doubled over with



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pain. At 10 we took her to the Del Puer to Hospital in Patterson." The doctors thought at first that it was appendicitis, but tests two days later revealed that Donna had an enlarged heart. She was transferred to Moffitt Hospital in San Francisco, where on New Year's Day the Ashlocks were told Donna had to have a heart transplant. On Friday, Jan. 3, she was taken to Pacific Presbyterian to await a donor.

On Saturday night Dr. Barry Levin called the Ashlocks and said he'd found a donor. "He said the news was both good and bad," Raymond recalls. "Then he asked, 'Does Donna have a boyfriend?' We said, 'Yes.' And he said, 'A call has come from Doctors

At Felipe's funeral, his half brother, John Sanchez, threw himself on the casket. Raymond Ashlock, at left with wife Mary, says, "I had my doubts about organ transplants before. Now I think they're fantastic."

Medical Center in Modesto. He's died of brain damage.' We just about freaked out. We thought it was Arthur. Dr. Levin said if we didn't take this heart, another one might not come along in time and she'd only have two to four to six weeks to live. So we said we'd do it. We didn't find out until the next morning that it was Felipe, not Arthur."

Three days after the transplant, a funeral service was held for Felipe Garza at Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Church in Patterson. High school classes were canceled so that students could attend. Felipe's friends, Latino youths in windbreakers and white shoes, hung around outside talking in hushed tones. Inside, the church was filled almost to capacity. On the casket was a bouquet, a single red rose surrounded by baby's breath with a ribbon reading, "With Love, Donna Ashlock." Just before the service, his family went up to the open white coffin to say goodbye to Pino. Father Tom Cargo noted, "There's a strange irony . . . Felipe's heart continues to beat in Donna." If the youngster with the sparkle in his eye could not make two hearts beat as one, he would make one heart beat for two. —Written by William Plummer, reported by Nancy Faber and Michele McCormick