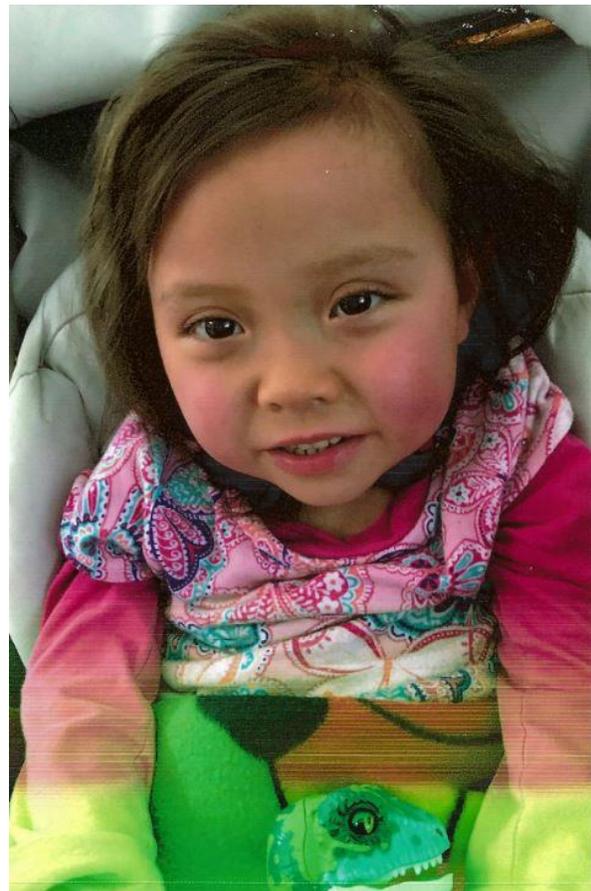




courtesy photo
Kayla, 2, just before she lost the use of her arms and her legs.



courtesy photo
Kayla, 4, loves spiders and zombies.

Kayla needs help COMMUNITY JOINS IN BENEFIT FOR HER

By Jean Bartlett
Tribune Writer

When Grandma arrives at Kayla's home, Kayla, 4, calls out "Grandma" at least three times followed by giving her grandmother an assignment. Kayla Wong is a third generation Pacifican on her mom's side. "Grandma" is Mickey Montgomery.

"My family moved here before it was Pacifica," Montgomery said. "We lived in San Pedro Valley." Montgomery, née Kelley, graduated from Terra Nova in 1967. She has worked nearly 50 years as a hairstylist here in town.

Kayla's mom, Sabrina Byrne, is an Oceana High School graduate. She has worked at both Manor and Linda Mar Safeway. Right now, she's able to work just four hours a week at Linda Mar. Kayla's dad, Dennis Wong, who works at Safeway in Fairmont, is yet another member of Kayla's family who loves Pacifica. Kayla also has two big brothers: Devin, 15, and Kaiden, 8.

"Kayla was born in December of 2013," her grandmother said. "Until February 8, 2016, she was an active little girl, always running around."

On that day in February, things changed in an instant.

"She was walking down the hallway when suddenly her legs buckled and her hands started shaking. Within 15 minutes she lost the use of her arms and her legs. She was rushed to the hospital."

Kayla was totally paralyzed. She was placed on a ventilator. She had a tracheostomy. She was fed through a gastrostomy tube. She was in Kaiser's Pediatric ICU in Santa Clara for three months. Her mom lived at the hospital with her.

"They didn't know what she had at first," Montgomery said. "There is just not a lot known on this."

"This" is Acute Flaccid Myelitis (AFM). It affects the nervous system, specifically the spinal cord. It is rare. In 2016, the CDC found 149 children in 39 states who have it. Its symptoms are similar to complications of infection with certain viruses, such as poliovirus and West Nile virus. The CDC is not certain what causes it.

Sunday, July 1, 4 to 8 p.m., the Pacifica Lions Club, the Pacifica Moose Lodge, Pacifica American Legion Post 238 and Pacifica Beta Sigma Phi Sororities are sponsoring a benefit for Kayla and her family. The Moose Lodge has donated their facility for the event which will be a spaghetti dinner. Tickets are \$15.00 and a silent auction will be held. Donations may be made payable to Kayla's grandmother, Marilyn Montgomery, noted "Kayla's Fund," and mailed to the Pacifica Lions Club, P.O. Box 1132, Pacifica, CA 94044.

Doctors recommended placing Kayla in a facility, but Kayla's parents decided "no" and Kayla came home to Pacifica. Both Sabrina and Dennis learned to do a great deal of Kayla's heavy medical care. This includes suctioning because Kayla cannot cough. Kayla currently has daily assistance from a nurse, who goes with Kayla to appointments and classes.

Kayla no longer has a tracheostomy. She is still tube fed. She struggles with digestive issues. But she can swallow and enjoys water or soda in a sippy cup. She has had some problems with her lungs and her bladder. She occasionally has nerve pain which makes her skin sensitive to touch.

"She has pretty good neck movement now," her grandmother said. "She dances to the beat with her head. She loves being in the water because she can be moved in the water. Early on Kaiser paid for swimming therapy but they stopped. They could not see any benefits. But we can and we are trying to continue it on our own. We have noticed that she now has just a little wiggle room in her shoulders and her core has gotten stronger. She is a quadriplegic but there are these definite bits of change.

"Kayla is not a girlie girl. She loves spiders and zombies. She loves Halloween stuff. She met Spider-Man (community volunteer Ricky Mena) twice at Kaiser in Santa Clara and is a huge fan. She also loves butterflies and birds, and going to the store and the beach."

Those trips are a real work-out for Kayla's mom. Sabrina carries her growing daughter up and down the stairs, along with all the supplies that go with them. Kayla also has tools to help her with independence. She practices with a power wheelchair at therapy which she operates with her head. At home she uses a hat stylus to operate her iPad.

A new student at Sunset Ridge, Kayla attends special classes, twice weekly, for 45 minutes to an hour. Next year she will go to Linda Mar Educational Center. Ortega is planned for kindergarten.

"Kayla is so smart. We are so lucky her brain wasn't affected, nor was her vision, her hearing or her sense of humor. This is her normal and she knows how to give assignments. 'Grandma, can you stop that commercial on my iPad? Grandma, can you get me that thing over there?'"

"I don't know how my daughter does it," Montgomery said, "And there are so many unknown needs as Kayla grows. But my daughter does do it and with so much love."

Pacifica Tribune features writer Jean Bartlett can be reached at editor@jeansmagazines.org.