



10-69 for Joel

(Trooper needs emergency assistance)

Story and photos by Beth Ipsen, Public Information Office

had a buzz cut party at the hospital. That was a few days after the twins celebrated their sixth birthday in Joel's hospital room. Even if everything goes well during the initial phases of treatment in the upcoming months, there is still more than three years of occasional chemotherapy treatments and monitoring to keep leukemia at bay.

The treatment has taken its toll on Joel and his parents Willy and Adrienne, who have felt helpless as they watch their little boy struggle through the treatments. It's also emotionally affected Nathan, who has had to attend kindergarten without his twin brother the past few months.

"It's not my job to ask why (this happened), it's my job to ask what do I need to do," Willy said. "The only thing I can control is how I respond to this as a parent."

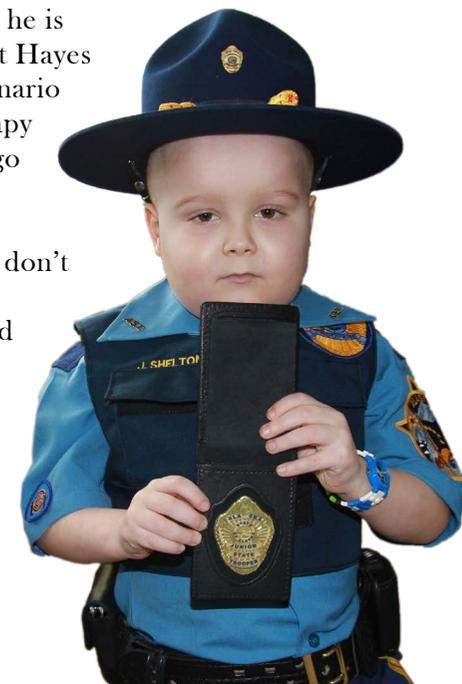
When Hayes heard about Joel from Wasilla Police Officer Dave Eller, who is a friend of the Shelton family, he took Joel's story to heart. Because Joel's dream is to become a trooper, Eller thought getting some swag from Alaska State Troopers would lift his spirits as he is going through a particularly difficult time. But Hayes took the idea to a new level because it's a scenario he knows all too well. Hayes' last chemotherapy treatment to fight cancer ended three years ago on June 1.

"It's life altering," Hayes said. "There are a lot of things that happen to you that people don't realize."

Hayes also knows what difficulties lay ahead for Joel.

"Chemo is like using a bomb to extinguish a fire," Hayes said. "It kills cancer and it kills other parts of your body."

FLASHING HIS BADGE: *The littliest Alaska State Trooper, Joel Shelton, shows off his junior trooper badge.*



Joel Shelton had wanted to be a police officer for several years, but after a chance meeting with an Alaska State Trooper during a family outing to the Russian River last June, his dream got a little more specific.

"He wanted to be a state trooper more than anything," said his father, Willy Shelton.

On March 23, Joel got his wish when Palmer Trooper Ron Hayes swore the 6-year-old in as an honorary trooper and told him to have the courage for the task at hand – to beat leukemia. Joel also was given a replica of a trooper uniform complete with the vest, a Stetson with a plastic trooper badge, small pants with the yellow and red piping up the sides and a black duty belt.

Joel has worn the uniform a few times on good days after recovering from another round of chemotherapy. On May 20, Joel used his leather-covered incident report notebook for the first time, jotting down notes for a pretend investigation into a bank robbery.

"I got arrested multiple times. I got shot by Nerf guns," Willy said of the play day with his twin sons, Joel and Nathan, and 4-year-old son, Eric. "Apparently I was a burglar at a bank."

Joel has had many ups and downs during his battle to overcome B-cell acute lymphoblastic leukemia, but he's holding true to his trooper status. There have been several rounds of chemotherapy, spinal injections and doses of steroids. He's endured nights of insomnia, fevers and vomiting, plus constipation and swelling of his face and stomach. There are drugs on top of drugs in order to combat the effects of other drugs. Because his immune system is greatly compromised, there is a constant fear of getting an infection. To overcome his fear of losing his hair, Joel, Willy and Nathan



TAKING THE OATH: Trooper Ron Hayes delivers the oath of being a good little trooper and courageous boy to Joel Shelton while his mother, Adrienne, listens.

Hayes, who has children the same age as Joel, has also seen the good that accompanies coping with cancer – the outpouring of kindness.

“Gilda Radner said ‘If it wasn’t for the downside, having cancer would be the best thing and everyone would want it.’” Hayes said. “I understand it much more now. It really makes you put your life in perspective.”

For Joel and his family, that kindness has even come from total strangers. It also came from those who make a living out of answering calls for help.

Lisa Streicher, wife of Palmer Trooper Jim Streicher, teamed up with Palmer Police Officer Kristi Muilenburg to make the uniform. Muilenburg is a cancer survivor. Hayes got an Alaska State Trooper flag and recruitment poster to give Joel and an AST T-shirt for Nathan to make sure he didn’t feel left out. Then he made plans to visit Joel at his Wasilla residence.

The Sheltons knew Hayes was coming that day and had hoped the trooper would bring his patrol vehicle. What happened was totally unexpected. Hayes and seven other Alaska State Troopers in uniform, including cancer survivor Lt. Rob French, plus Officer Muilenburg’s daughter, Tessa, and Palmer Police Officer Jason Crockett showed up at the Shelton house that



FULL HOUSE: Troopers Sean O’Brien, Chris Havens, Lee Phillips, Peter Steen, Ron Hayes, Ryan Anderson, Palmer Police Officer Jason Crockett, Trooper Joseph Hess, Lt. Rob French and Tessa Muilenburg visit the littlest trooper, Joel Shelton (in front), as he battles leukemia.

Saturday morning. Not just one, but several patrol vehicles lined the road in front of the Sheltons’ house.

After Joel was sworn in as a new trooper, he donned the uniform that was a little small due to swelling from taking steroids for his treatment. That has since subsided and the uniform fits the boy much better now, his father said.

Willy said the outpouring of support, especially that morning, is overwhelming.

“A package comes at least twice a week, most of the time from strangers,” Willy said. “I tell people it’s the most horribly, wonderful thing to happen ... You wish every kid could learn this without any of the baggage that goes with it.”

However, the March 23 visit and trooper uniform stand apart.

“He’s gone through some really nasty stuff, but Joel would probably double up on leukemia for that,” Willy said.

You can follow Joel’s journey as he battles his illness on Facebook at [Joel’s Leukemia Updates](#).