

Todd shines despite juvenile diabetes diagnosis

Granddaughter of Ronnie Van Zant, late lead of Lynyrd Skynyrd, connects band to finding a cure

Aria Todd is a rambunctious 10-year-old with a passion for dancing. Busy with dance classes, sleepovers, weekend trips to the lake and attending class at Neptune Beach Elementary, she's like many kids her age. One thing, however, is very different. Two years ago, Aria was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes, a disease that prevents the pancreas from producing insulin, essential in regulating blood sugar.

At the age of eight, she frequently felt shaky, thirsty and hungry. Out of caution, Aria's mother, Melody Todd, took her daughter to the doctor – where she received shocking news that would change the lives of her family forever. Her little girl had diabetes.

At her mother's encouragement, Aria continued to participate in her favorite activities, including dance. Adorned with a bedazzled insulin pump, she returned to dance class. Her friends even help her check her blood when needed.

Just as she had to make changes in dance class, Aria also had to make adjustments in other aspects of her life. Affectionately nicknamed "The Cucumber Kid," she maintained a healthy lifestyle prior to her diagnosis but became more cautious about her diet's content. Sugar-free popsicles and diet sodas replaced the sugar-laden varieties, although Aria is allowed a few splurges, such as indulging in cake at her recent red carpet-themed birthday party. More taxing changes such as checking her insulin every few hours, changing her pump and being kept up at night when she is "low" make juvenile diabetes a daily reminder of her condition.

When Aria's mother was asked why she became involved in the juvenile diabetes cause, she replied, "I want to find a cure. The hardest thing is when your child is sick and you can't take it away or fix it. I want to do everything I can to fix it."

Aria's affinity for the arts may be linked to her famous grandfather, Ronnie Van Zant, former lead singer of the Southern rock band Lynyrd Skynyrd. Along with Melody, Skynyrd is dedicated to the cure. A portion of recent ticket sales from their tour went to Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation (JDRF), raising nearly \$40,000. The Van Zant and Lynyrd Skynyrd families are official honorees of this year's Miracles in the Moonlight gala. Their goal is to draw awareness of Type 1 diabetes and assist JDRF in connecting with markets that were once unreachable. The gala occurs October 23, three days after the 33rd anniversary of Van Zant's fatal plane crash.