

Brothers hurt in train crash stay strong during recovery

By [Kim Kimzey](#)
kim.kimzey@shj.com

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Camden Harris and his brother, Morgan, laughed as a remote control car whizzed past them.

Morgan begged his big brother to let him take the remote. He smiled — his baseball coach calls him Smiley because he always seems to have one on his face — as he sent the car zooming down the driveway of their father's Boiling Springs home.

Camden and Morgan are like many boys their age — rambunctious, energetic and fond of things with speed.

Both brothers are big NASCAR fans.

Their father, Bryan Harris, recently surprised them with a trip to the Charlotte Motor Speedway where they attended the Hisense 300 — their very first NASCAR race.

State Sen. Shane Martin, R-Spartanburg, made the trip possible. Martin introduced the boys to racers and crew members, and they watched the race near Pit Road.

Martin had heard their story. He wanted to help make their dreams come true.

Martin has a son the same age as Morgan, 9, which happens to be one year older than Camden was when the brothers suffered life-threatening injuries in the fatal Cleveland Park train crash on March 19, 2011.

Their mother, Misti Miller, pulled Camden from beneath a train car. Morgan, knocked unconscious, had been thrown onto a creek bank.

The last thing Morgan remembers is the third turn around the track.

Camden can recall the series of questions from emergency responders as he was airlifted to Greenville Memorial Hospital.

Both parents praise the care he received from Regional One flight nurse Travis McGinn, as well as many others.

Harris said Camden's right leg was almost amputated. He suffered a broken femur and his femoral artery was torn, along with soft tissue and muscle.

Harris said three tourniquets were placed around Morgan's leg. One bystander used a belt, another a shirt, and emergency responders placed another tourniquet on his leg.

While Camden was hospitalized in Greenville, Morgan was in the pediatric intensive



ALEX HICKS JR/alex.hicks@shj.com
 Brothers Camden, 12, left, and Morgan Harris, 9, suffered life-threatening injuries in the Cleveland Park train crash on March 19, 2011, but have since recovered.

care unit at Spartanburg Medical Center. Harris said Morgan spent most of his 25 days there on a ventilator.

"It was just a day-by-day, hour-by-hour thing," Harris said of Morgan's condition.

Morgan suffered a skull fracture and developed a lung infection from water he inhaled after the accident.

Miller said she and the boys went to Cleveland Park to enjoy the day.

"That day has changed our lives forever," she said.

She said it's hard to explain to two little boys — then 5 and 8 — why bad things happen.

There was no simple explanation for why 28 people, enjoying a beautiful spring day, were injured after a miniature train derailed or why 6-year-old Benji Easler died.

Miller said they still had each other. Being together, coupled with faith, got them through trying times.

She said the accident drew the family closer together and gave them a greater appreciation for life.

"You don't know from day to day what's going to happen," she said.

Miller said it doesn't matter anymore if the beds are made or the dishes are done — she cherishes time with her sons even more.

"I want them to appreciate the people who helped them, and if we hadn't had all the help and assistance, we wouldn't be where we are today," she said.

Miller praised Spartanburg Medical Center's pediatric intensive care unit.

Miller said Morgan's chance of survival was 7 percent, but doctors and staff never made her doubt their abilities.

"It did not define us, although I thought it would," she said.

There were fears that they might never recover.

Harris said Miller called him after the crash and told him the boys had been hurt.

Harris, a firefighter of 26 years, tried imagining the scene as he sped there.

"I haven't been there and seen all of it, but I've seen enough," he said.

The worse calls, he said, are the ones that involve children.

After spending weeks in local hospitals, both brothers received a couple of weeks of physical therapy in Atlanta.

During their recovery, they received gifts from Hendrick Motorsports, racing legend Rusty Wallace and JR Motorsports.

NASCAR veteran Mark Martin called Camden in the hospital.

Camden said Martin told him that he had been injured, knew what the boy was going through and wished him well.

Camden said the most difficult part was physical therapy.

He felt like he would "give out" every time he stepped on the injured leg.

Harris said the boys are doing well.

Camden is on a skeet shooting team. Harris said Camden ranked first in his class at a competition only two months after starting the sport.

Morgan plays baseball. Both boys enjoy riding four wheelers. And, of course, they like NASCAR.

Camden would like to race cars, while Morgan wants to work in the pit.

Dr. Daniel Saad with Paladin Pediatric Surgery treated Camden.

"Treating Cam was a pleasure," Saad said. "He was an inspiration to me about perseverance and determination."

Saad said Camden told him he would play baseball again. The surgeon watched as Camden took ownership of his recovery.

"It's so fitting that they like NASCAR because NASCAR is all about determination and going through the laps," Saad said.

He said NASCAR, unlike a drag race, is an endurance race.

He thinks everyone can learn from the Harris brothers about staying positive and focused.

"They both have really persevered and recovered and I think they're both a testament to perseverance," Saad said of the Harris brothers.

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