



## We wish ...

- ❄ for a video camera, so that we can make videos of our kids, and so that we can record therapy instructions to send home with them. (We do this often for burn kids, so that their parents can learn how to care for them.)
- ❄ for a projector for PowerPoint presentations, so that we can tell our story effectively to large groups.
- ❄ for those little shampoos and soaps you can collect in hotel rooms, so that we can make toiletry kits for our traveling kids.
- ❄ for coloring books and small boxes of crayons, for those same little travelers.
- ❄ for Beanie Babies! Our medical teams use them as packing material and then give them to the kids on-site.
- ❄ for basic first aid supplies like Band-Aids and Bactine that our medical teams can hand out to their patients.
- ❄ and for—BIG WISH!—\$3,000 to bring this little one, Le Vo Vuong Nghi, to Michigan from Vietnam. He was born without a tibia and needs an amputation and a prosthetic leg. We can help him walk if you can help him fly.

*Thank you for making so many dreams come true. Happy holidays!*



**Healing  
the  
Children®**

**MICHIGAN-OHIO CHAPTER**

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# The Healing Heartline

Christmas 2006

*Healing the Children / Michigan-Ohio*

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*You* know you can't resist those eyes. They belong to Devendra Ghamson, age 8 months, whose host mom said, "He had the most beautiful eyes. They would look at you and say exactly what he was thinking: *I love you . . . I hurt . . . I want to be held . . . Rock me.*"

If you've ever looked into the eyes of a hurting, profoundly hurting, child, you haven't forgotten it. That face, those eyes, will never leave you.

All over the world, at this very minute, there are mothers and fathers who would walk miles, climb mountains, offer everything they own, to change the look in their child's eyes. If they're lucky they may have the chance to put their little one on a plane and send him, or her, thousands of miles away to receive room, board, and medical care from perfect strangers.

Could you do that? Of course you could. All it would take is an *I hurt* or a *Help me* in your child's eyes.

Please remember all of that this season. The hurting eyes. The little face in the airplane window. The parents waving goodbye.

And remember what we—you—can do for them through the resources of Healing the Children. With our amazing volunteers and your amazing generosity, we've been turning *I hurt* into joy for almost 22 years.

Thank you, on behalf of so many children and parents who need us so much.





## From Iraq, with Love



*W*e've brought five children from Iraq to Michigan and Ohio for medical treatment this year. Think about it.

If that short sentence balloons into a mass of phone calls and faxes and emails and organizations and contacts—and soldiers—you've got it almost right.

Those are the logistics. Here is the heart.

You probably didn't know that our military supports an organization called the Iraqi Assistance Center in Baghdad, where Iraqi doctors and coalition forces operate a clearinghouse for Iraqi children who need medical treatment that cannot be had in that country, especially now. Children are referred by their own doctors, their families, or American soldiers, who bring them in from all parts of the country.

The IAC arranges for the children to travel from Baghdad to Kuwait City and another organization likely unfamiliar to most of us, the Humanitarian Operations Center. Our military, again, supports this center, as does the Kuwaiti government. The HOC obtains passports and visas, works on travel arrangements with HTC and other charitable groups, and drives the children and their escorts (when children come to us from war-torn countries, we allow a parent or close relative to accompany them) to the Kuwait City Airport to board a plane for the long trip to the U.S.

Then HTC and the volunteering hospitals, medical specialists, and host families take over, and the healing journey continues.

There are many remarkable aspects to this process, but one in particular is worth more than a moment's thought: soldiers of the most powerful army on earth—men and women in the uniform of our country, maybe even someone you know—use their time and resources to bring hurting Iraqi children to the people who can make them well. It's hard to think of a more profound and nearly imponderable gift. Leaving the imponderable aside, we simply offer them our loving thanks.

*Here's our Iraqi guest list:*

*K*awthir, age 7, had life-threatening heart defects. She and her mother, Fatima, traveled to Michigan for treatment at Mott Children's Hospital in Ann Arbor. John and Tami Houle of Grass Lake, their host family, had cared for 13 HTC kids before Kawthir, but this time the language and cultural barriers made them wonder how it would all work. Not to worry. "It was amazing to me how so many people came to assist us," Tami says. "A wonderful Iraqi woman from Farmington Hills and an Arabic translator from U of M Hospital agreed to meet us at the airport and return home with us to help us all become comfortable. Kawthir and Fatima quickly became part of our family; everyone in our house appreciated having another mother around!"

Dr. Richard Ohye, pediatric heart surgeon, did the procedure that gave Kawthir a heart that functions normally; Dr. Caren Goldberg was her cardiologist. All went well, and Kawthir's mother brought a very healthy girl back to Iraq.



*Kawthir and her mom*



*Kawthir, host brother Johnny, and friends*



## Valeria the Miracle Baby



*Valeria with host sister Lisa*

*“V*aleria Macias Silva came to us one late night in July. When they handed her to me, I was extremely overwhelmed. Here was a 13-month-old baby, weighing only ten pounds. Her breathing was labored, and she was as limp as a newborn baby. She was burning up with a fever. As the escort was explaining to us how she had been having seizures the last few days, I wondered how she even survived the travel, let alone the last 13 months of her life.”

That's how Valeria's life-saving visit to Michigan began, in the words of host mom Debbie Craig. Here's the rest of her story, as told by Debbie.

“The doctors at Mott Children's Hospital kept shaking their heads and saying, ‘You know there's a good chance she's not going to pull through this.’ But at the same time they were telling me that, I was seeing a little spark of fight in her shine through, so I kept saying, ‘She's made it this far, and she traveled all the way from El Salvador to get here, so she'll be fine.’”

“She did pull through the ear infection and pneumonia she was diagnosed with that day, and she did pull through her open-heart surgery a week later. She also pulled through her cleft palate and lip repair a month after that. She discovered she loved peanut butter toast, she learned how to sit by herself, and we called her our miracle baby. She went home weighing a whopping 16 pounds.

“Shortly before she left it was also discovered that Valeria was severely hearing impaired. At first I was crushed at the news. How could one little baby have been dealt so much? But as days went by I realized I shouldn't feel sorry for her. She is so smart and so brave and so happy that she will keep on fighting her battles, and she will win!”

Dan and Deborah Craig were Valeria's host family, and their daughter Lisa was a wonderful helper. Her doctors were Dr. Richard Ohye, pediatric cardiac surgeon; Dr. Steve Kasten, plastic surgeon; Dr. Frances Farley, orthopedic surgeon; and Dr. Penny Baumier, pediatrician. All her surgeries took place at Mott Children's Hospital in Ann Arbor.

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*Rowan and Mamou*

### Rowan's Gifts

*I*t's a well-known: fact when someone sees the work of Healing the Children close up, they want to become part of it (see the donation given in Devendra's honor, p.6). Even children are not immune. Rowan Luther, age 9, has proved that point.

Rowan has had up-close and even personal experience with Healing the Children because she is the granddaughter of Helen Salan, Executive Director of HTC/MI-OH. She's had the chance to meet several HTC kids, and she considers Mamou Bagayoko, the severely burned West African girl we profiled in last year's holiday issue as “Mamou the Magnificent,” a good friend.

Many parents of fourth graders would need a short respite to recover their composure if their child said to them, “Mom, Dad, I don't want any presents at my birthday party this year. Let's have people donate to Healing the Children instead.” Well, Rowan did that—twice. (Her parents have recovered.) Last year, donations from her party guests were used to help bring a Vietnamese girl to Michigan for surgery on her cleft lip and palate. This year, Rowan invited her whole fourth-grade class to her party and politely asked for contributions that will enable HTC to treat a Haitian baby who has a severe intestinal disorder.

Happy belated birthday, Rowan! You've shown that you know all about giving, and it's a treat to tell your story in this giving season.





My host mom and dad met me at the airport.

## Devendra with the Beautiful Eyes



Smiling is one of my favorite things.



Life is good!



Dr. Park is nice (he says that if he's having a bad day he just stops by to see me smile)...



... but the hospital is not all fun and games. I've been in this room for three weeks.



It's better when my host mom is here.



And the nurses lo-o-ove me! Sometimes they let me come to the nurses' lounge with them!



Laura thinks I'll be running Guyana, my home country, someday. She says I'm "determined, sweet, and again, determined."



I'm ready to go home with my escort, Patti Gonzalez.



We stopped at the airport in Miami, I batted my eyes at the restroom attendant, and she donated this to HTC on the spot.



Oh, I am so glad to see Mom and Dad! I'm pretty sure they missed me. Love and smiles to everyone in Michigan who changed our lives!

Here's the story behind that wonderful picture on page 1. Devendra Ghamson was born with bladder exstrophy—his bladder was outside his body. You can imagine his misery, or try to. He came to Michigan from Guyana for help when he was only 8 months old. His host parents were Scott and Laura Cassel of Bloomfield Hills.

Dr. John Park is the pediatric urologist who operated on Devendra at Mott Children's Hospital in Ann Arbor—three times. Devendra had two surgeries related to his bladder exstrophy and one for double hernias. Wait, there's more (poor little guy): his condition also required hip surgery, performed by Dr. Frances Farley, also in Ann Arbor.

Hadile, age 7, also had a severe heart defect. She and her mother, Sundus, stayed in Chelsea with host family Charlie and Jill Taylor, and Hadile's surgery was done by Dr. Ohye, with Dr. Sarah Gelehrter as her cardiologist.

Hadile's mother knew when Hadile was less than a year old that she needed medical attention. In Saddam Hussein's Iraq, insurmountable barriers kept her from getting it. Even after Hadile and Sundus received approval for their trip to Michigan, a dangerous, anxiety-filled journey from their home to Kuwait lay between them and the doctors who were waiting to help Hadile. (Because of this, the U of M Save a Heart group raised enough money to send Hadile and Sundus directly to Baghdad on their return trip.)

Fawzi, the U of M translator who assisted the Houles, was equally helpful to the Taylors. "He also became part of our new family, with Hadile and Sundus, and our friend," says Jill. She adds, "In the end, all of us love our children and would go to extremes for them. I feel blessed to have had the opportunity to be included in the life of one more family."

Hadile, healthy and strong, and her mother returned to Iraq this summer.

Salwa was 4 years old when she and her mother, Muntaha, came to Grand Rapids for surgery on a large hole in her heart. The procedure took place at DeVos Children's Hospital and was performed by Dr. Neal Hillman. Her cardiologist was Dr. Ronald Grifka, and her pediatrician was Dr. Richard Switzer.

Salwa's and Muntaha's host family were HTC veterans Al and Ruth DeKock of Grandville. Ruth says, "Salwa's surgery went well, and she was back at our home in two days. While she recovered and waited for clearance to return to Iraq, we were able to make some memories of America. Both Salwa and Muntaha enjoyed sitting on our deck and walking in our neighborhood. A ride to Lake Michigan was also a favorite. We are thankful we had the opportunity to host this family, not only to improve Salwa's quality of life but also to enjoy some Iraqi cooking and learn more about Iraqi culture and life."

Baneen, age 2, suffered with the severe burn scars she received when a fuel tank near where she was playing burst into flame. Accompanied by her aunt, Zainab, she came to the U.S. for treatment at Shriners Burns Hospital in Cincinnati. There, Dr. Richard Kagan prescribed intensive therapies which began in the hospital and which Zainab learned to do so that she can teach the procedures to Baneen's mother.

Saleem and Karii Jeelani of Batavia served as host family for Baneen and Zainab, who returned to Iraq after four months in Ohio.



Hamza



Hadile and her mom with host sister Hanna and Fawzi, their translator



Ruth DeKock with Salwa and her mom



Baneen and her aunt

Hamza, age 5 1/2, and his mother, Bushra, are our current guests. He will be treated for his heart defect at DeVos Children's Hospital. Dr. Neal Hillman is his surgeon, and Dr. Ronald Grifka is his cardiologist. First, though, oral surgeon Dr. Jeffrey Paul Brooks will do extensive dental work on Hamza so that there will be no risk of infection after his heart surgery. Hamza and Bushra are staying with host family Rich and Sue Sanderson of Comstock Park.





Ibague

# Do We Appreciate Our Medical Teams? Oh, Yes, We Do!

We feature a medical team in every newsletter, explain what they did, and show photos of them doing it. And yet, it's just not the whole story. In fact, those words and pictures only show what might be called the fun stuff: meeting, treating, and healing the children. However rugged their working conditions, our teams just love practicing medicine.

It's their pre-trip activities that are not particularly intrinsically rewarding. Arranging to use their personal time or vacation time to travel for HTC. Raising funds to help cover their expenses. Scavenging their workplaces for unused equipment. Making contacts to try to procure donated supplies and equipment. (Have you seen the photos of boxes and boxes and boxes of supplies? Those are *medical* supplies, and you can't just pick them up at Target.) And then packing those . . . blessed . . . supplies so that they can be shipped to wherever the team is going. (And of course, when they arrive, unloading and unpacking those . . . much appreciated . . . supplies.)

As we said, too, the conditions on-site can be challenging (very challenging), and the hours are long.

It's a good thing that there's nothing in the world more rewarding than making a child whole.

Thanks, everyone.



Ibague



Team Indy



Bucaramanga



Honduras



Honduras



Pedi-Uro



Project Shunt



Project Shunt



Pedi-Uro



Pedi-Uro



Project Shunt



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Yamaranguila, Honduras  
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**Pedi-Uro 2006**  
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Team Indy