

Miracles happen when people care

Story by Iris Aboytes

Carol Eiffert (3600) saw the picture of Ada, a 3-year-old girl. "At first, I didn't know if we would be the best family for her," says Carol. "I cried when I saw the photo. I was a little apprehensive; Ada looked like she'd suffered so much. Would we be the right family for her?"

Ada had been burned all over her body when she was 18 months old and had spent more than a year in the hospital.

Through Healing the Children, Ada was scheduled to come to the United States from Guatemala for medical care if a sponsor family could be found to take her.

Healing the Children brings children to the US from countries where needed medical treatment is not available, sends medical teams to Latin America, and helps local children in need. The international children are housed, fed, and comforted by volunteer host families. The children are seen and treated at no cost by volunteer doctors.



ADA WAS 3 YEARS OLD when she became a member of Carol's family. (Photo courtesy of Carol Eiffert)

Carol and her family had been a host family on several occasions before, but this was the first time they would host a burn victim. Due to a horrible accident, Ada's home burned with Ada inside.

"Esta muerta (She is dead)," the firefighters said of Ada. But she wasn't dead. Her grandmother begged the firemen to take her to the hospital, where she remained for a year.

Medical teams in Guatemala recommended that Ada be brought to the US for more surgeries.

"Ada cried one entire day when she first got here," says Carol. "It was tough, but she was worth it. She had the cutest personality, and we immediately loved her."

During the initial visit, surgeries were done to release some of the worst burn scars on her hands and wrists. Making her hands functional was a priority.

"As I slept in the chair by her bed after her surgeries there was no question she was my daughter," says Carol. "She calls me mama or mamita de los Estados Unidos (mommy from the United States). She is a part of our family."

Ada came back for more surgeries when she was 6 years old and again when she was 11 years old. More burn scar releases and grafts were done.

"It was wonderful seeing her again," adds Carol. "With every visit, our hearts bond even deeper."

"Ada has been here since May. We've had such a wonderful time. Two local surgeons, Dr. William Loutfy and Dr. Tess Balcomb have operated on her to improve the scars on her face and release her fingers. It has been her dream. We are grateful to the surgeons and Albuquerque Surgical Center who are making this possible by donating their expertise."

The surgeons have also cared for her during Healing the Children trips to Guatemala on medical missions.

Ada bonded with Carol's children, David and Holly, who were age 13 and 15 when Ada came the first time. She calls them hermano (brother) and hermana (sister). Today Ada is 19 years old and enjoys staying with her hermana, Holly, Holly's husband, A. J. Wehr (8944), and their son, Evan, while she receives more treatment.

"Me gusta mucho estar aqui," says Ada. "Me gusta ir al parque con el hijo de mi hermana. (I like being here. I like to go to the park with my sister's son.)"

One of the reasons Ada loves to come here is to practice her English, she says. The Eiffert family says she has



FAMILY TIES — Ada on left, with her US family on an outing. Carol is on the right, holding the family dog. (Photo courtesy of Carol Eiffert)

gotten quite good. They teach her English and she teaches them Spanish. Together they have become a bilingual family that gets along marvelously.

"We laugh a lot and enjoy our time together," says Carol. "Ada enjoys listening to the Spanish translation at Believer's Center with us. The people love her."

Ada, with the Eiffert family, has enjoyed the State Fair, visits to grandparents in Colorado, and the Balloon Fiesta. She has developed a love for corn on the cob and ice cream sandwiches. She does not like chile. She says it is too hot.

When Ada returns to Guatemala, she hopes to enroll at Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala and study to become an accountant. Her family and friends are anxiously awaiting her return.

Carol and her family were introduced to Healing the Children through a friend and neighbor. Carol's neighbor told her about a little girl named Heidi who would die if she did not come to the US to have emergency neuro-surgery. Carol and her family offered to become her foster family. "Through her family's trust in us," says Carol, "Heidi, the little girl from the mountains of Guatemala, recovered and returned home safely."

Carol says God has blessed her with a wonderful family. "Ada has taught us more about love and compassion than we could have ever realized without her," says Carol. "The joyful and gentle young woman that she has become shines through her so you almost don't notice her scars. We will be sad when she goes home, but we are thankful for the surgeries that have improved her precious life. We will always be her family."

"Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, author of Don Quixote wrote 'One man scorned and covered with scars still strove with his last ounce of courage to reach

the unreachable stars; and the world will be better for this....' says Carol. "Our family's world is better because of Ada and we'll look forward to being together again."

For more information about Healing the Children, you may contact Carol at caeiffe@sandia.gov

2011 EMPLOYEE CARING PROGRAM

Book FAIR

October 18, 19, 20
Thunderbird Cafe - 10 am - 4 pm

October 24, 25, 26
Steve Schiff Lobby - 10 am - 2 pm

November 1, 2, 3
IPOC 2nd Floor Break Room
10 am - 2 pm

give.sandia.gov

United Way Sandia National Laboratories

One-time giving made easy

Now it is possible for one-timers to go to the website and just click away if you want to donate the same amount. Less time is involved.

give.sandia.gov