



Changing Sam's World

Healing the Children / Michigan-Ohio

*T*his sweet little two-year-old from Vietnam traveled halfway around the world for the chance to walk. Nghi Le—"Sam" to his friends in the United States—was born with a left leg only three-fourths as long as his right and no ankle or foot, just a small, toe-shaped appendage at the end of that leg. Left like that, he would never have walked.

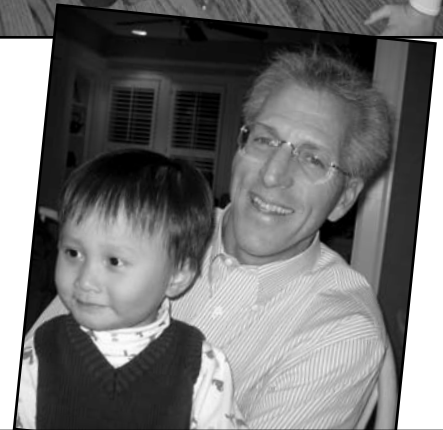
Luckily for Sam, he had a built-in connection with Healing the Children. His father, Quang Vinh, was our translator for another HTC child's family, and when Sam was born, he knew where to go for help. Airline Ambassador escort Chris Henkel brought us Sam's medical information and then returned to Vietnam to get him. (Escort extraordinaire Chris took him home, too.)

Sam's life began to change on the day he boarded the plane for Detroit. There, at St. John's Hospital, Dr. Chris Lee amputated his little toe-like appendage, which made it possible for Sam to use a prosthesis. Our faithful friends at Wright and Filippis came through again, and soon prosthetist Craig Grigsby was able to fit Sam with a lovely new leg to stand on.

And, yes, walk on. Host mom Betsy Bernard says, "The day we brought his new leg home for the first time, we called several neighbors over to see Sam walk! He could do it pretty quickly, just holding our hands. After a few days of getting used to it he really didn't need that, either. It was as if he had always walked. Soon there was no discernible limp." (Without a doubt, Sam's frequent sessions with physical therapist Mary Ann Uznis had a lot to do with his amazing progress.)

Betsy and her family—husband Mike and sons Jack, Rudy, and Mikey—saw Sam as a blessing in their lives. When he first arrived, he was a bit timid, but soon warmed to Betsy and gradually accepted everyone else. He was a big fan of any athletic competition in which one of his brothers was involved, was brave about his surgery, loved his first encounters with snow, and was thrilled with his new shoes decorated with cars that lit up when he walked. Cars were a big hit with Sam, so on his last night in Detroit, the whole family attended the North American Auto Show. What more could a very little boy want?

Just this: to fly back to Vietnam the next day and show his mom and dad his new leg and his new walk. With or without flashing lights, it was the journey of a lifetime.





Changing Collete's World

Healing the Children / Michigan-Ohio

Here's what you can do with an arm that works properly: wash, comb, and style your own hair; use a knife and fork at the table; pick up a book or a toy or even a baby; give hugs; make a snow angel.

All these things were new to Nkeiruka "Collete" Nobis, age 7, of Nigeria. She'd had a paralyzed shoulder since birth and could lift her arm and hand only a little. Her list of can't-dos and hard-to-dos was long. Collete's aunt, Sister Immaculata Obi, who lives in Miami, knew of her troubles and made a wonderful contact for her. She had heard of Dr. Don Condit's orthopedic work in El Salvador and got in touch with him. Dr. Condit called Helen Salan of Healing the Children Michigan/Ohio—and Collete's healing journey was underway. That long journey was made less frightening because she was able to travel with Tajudeen Taiwo, a fellow Nigerian who was an Airline Ambassador. (When the time came, Tajudeen was also able to escort her home.)

At Helen DeVos Children's Hospital in Grand Rapids, Dr. Condit performed shoulder reconstruction surgery for Collete. For almost three months she was in a brace that held her arm in the Statue of Liberty position (later, inspiration for a great Halloween costume), and for several more months she worked with physical therapist Sonia Lyons two or three times a week. Finally, the outcome was a strong and lively new arm for Collete.

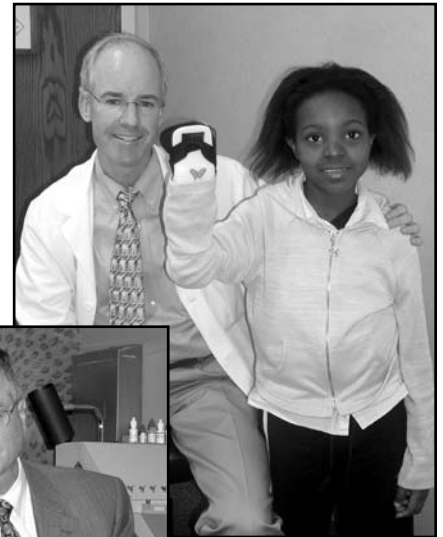
It turned out that Collete also had amblyopia—wandering eye—and Dr. Patrick Droste treated her to correct that condition.

Her host family was John and Cheri Kuiper of Grandville and their children, Kelli, Michael, David, Matthew, and Lily. Cheri says, "Collete was a joy to have in our family for seven months. She was like a daughter to us and a sister to our children—which means she could fight with them one minute and be best buddies the next.

"She was intrigued by turning on the faucet and the dishwasher, using a seatbelt, the vacuum cleaner, a pogo stick, and a squirrel! She found the piano fascinating and wanted lessons.

"Collete was smart and funny and loved being with people. She attended second grade at Grandville Christian School with Lily and learned very quickly. She had a wonderful, infectious laugh—and also a stubborn side. Sometimes she'd decide she wasn't going anywhere or doing anything. Luckily, I discovered that she loved gum, because I occasionally had to use it for motivation. When she had therapy scheduled, I wouldn't give it to her until she was buckled in the car seat and ready to go home."

This scheme had the desired result, and in April the little girl who was always ready for a kiss or a hug or an I-love-you went all the way home to her close family in Nigeria. Hugs and very high-fives all around!



Changing the world, one child at a time