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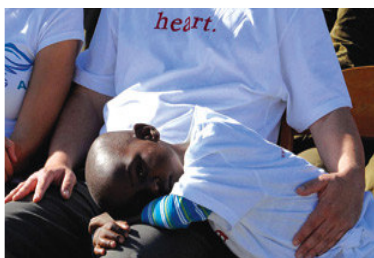


Photo by: Courtesy

Quake survivor, 6, to return to Haiti soon

By JUDY SIEGEL
19/03/2010

Woodlee Elysee is now a "different and healthy child."

Six-year-old Woodlee Elysee has turned into a different child during the past month – from one so sick with a congenital heart condition that lack of oxygen gave his brown skin a deep blue tinge, to a healthy one who runs, jumps, laughs and uses some Hebrew words in addition to his native French.

The big change is thanks to Save a Child's Heart (SACH), the voluntary organization at Wolfson Medical Center in Holon that performed complex surgery and saved him from death.

Woodlee, who was accompanied to Israel by his aunt after leaving his pregnant mother – due to give birth soon to her fifth child – in Haiti, arrived here soon after the horrendous earthquake that hit Port-au-Prince but left his rural village untouched.

Dr. Lior Sasson, SACH's chief surgeon, said the boy and his aunt will be ready to return to Haiti in a week or two after his discharge on Wednesday. It is hard to recognize him after his life was in danger for 14 hours following the surgery to cure his cyanotic heart condition, in which there was an inadequate supply of oxygenated blood to his heart and lungs.

Sasson told *The Jerusalem Post* that Woodlee suffered a rare complication in which his left lung was almost entirely detached from his heart.

"Usually, children with his condition are treated at the age of six months, but he came to us at six years. The lack of oxygen caused the blood vessels to break down and his lung collapsed; he lost a lot of blood. But fortunately, we were able to stop the bleeding by inserting a spring into his lung," he recalled.

Woodlee is taking medication, which he will soon discontinue, and he will be a normal child, even though Haiti doesn't offer much in post-surgical care. His aunt is amazed by the change and says that now she can't keep up with him when he runs, the doctor said.

He has had a wonderful since in the past two weeks, getting spoiled by visitors with toys and sweets and appearing on TV. But he misses his mother in Haiti, said Sasson.

SACH, which has treated 2,300 sick children from around the world – including close-to-home Palestinians, was founded 14 years ago by the Dr. Ami Cohen, an experienced pediatric heart surgeon who died in a freak climbing accident on Mount Kilimanjaro in 2001.

Sasson said that the worldwide attention to the case brought welcome contributions to the voluntary organization, whose medical staffers at Wolfson get no extra payment for their work. Woodlee is now recovering at SACH's hostel in Azor along with more than 20 other youngsters recuperating from surgery.

"Each child is like separate medical text. We learn so much from each case," Sasson said.

Elysee, an intelligent child who has not yet entered school, is a bit small for his age and was never able even to play ball. Had he remained in Haiti, he would probably have died in his teens, as his heart and lungs, with their inadequately oxygenated blood, would have been unable to support him.

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