



June 22, 2009

Dear Supporters of Medical Aid for Children of Latin America,

On a blistering hot Sunday morning in February, the narrow 500 year old street in front of the century old hospital in the Colonial Zone is packed with a crowd of over 1,000 Dominicans. Young Peace Corps volunteers are shouting loud commands in Spanish and passing out numbered cards to possible patients creating some order to this potential chaos.

Inside the ancient stucco and stone hospital MACLA medical volunteers and Dominican hospital personnel are unpacking equipment and supplies, setting up the five operating tables and rooms for the next two weeks where several hundred operations will occur. Other groups are triaging potential patients in the hospital lobby, opening exam rooms for the final consultations and scheduling patients in the grand lecture hall. Some volunteers are readying recovery rooms and two large hospital wards where our patients will stay.

Anxious patients and family members nervously wait all day to see if an operation will help them relieve some of their physical and emotional stresses. So begins MACLA's first day on its 25<sup>th</sup> year in the Dominican Republic offering free reconstructive plastic surgery and medical care for those who have had little hope. At the Padre Billini hospital in Santo Domingo we broke new records in seeing over 1500 new consults and operating on over 220 patients. There were so many patients seen that accurate counts are impossible. With the world's unprecedented economic freefall, our patients who are all poor need us more than ever. You have all responded generously.

Maria Teresa Vannuz, mentioned in our letter last year, was the patient with the horrific acid burns on her face, neck, breasts and body caused by an evil neighbor throwing acid on her. She needed further release of her burns. The burns of her mouth, neck and shoulder were released and she is coping as best she can. After she was seen and operated on last year, a television news story reported her plight and her four children's poverty. Now she is receiving government and private aid and is much more stable, even a bit fat. Some hope for the future has returned to her life. The evil neighbor was convicted and is spending ten years in prison which is not enough time behind bars.

Jasmine Gutierrez, a cute 1 year old with a unilateral cleft lip and palate, was turned away by several facilities for the inability to pay and the surgical lists were full. Many patients are kept on a list at the public hospitals for decades never receiving their needed surgery. We were fortunate to be able to take care of her. She is pictured on our photo page. Her parents literally were dancing with joy in our postoperative clinic. Generally, we have no idea of the strife and hardships that our patients have suffered.

This year my daughter, Kellie, and my sister, Patty, went on their first MACLA medical mission as lay volunteers. Many of our volunteers have traveled with MACLA groups for over 20 years and we take a lot of the daily rigor for granted. Seeing our clinic and operating rooms and the daily hubbub through new fresh eyes was enlightening. Kellie is a darn good photographer and took over 1,500 photos. She created a 9 minute video available on our new MACLA website, [www.macla.org](http://www.macla.org), which is now 95% complete. We're proud of it and would appreciate your comments.

We'll be back in September for our fourth ear reconstruction surgical mission and will be ready to return next February for general reconstructive work. This summer's trip to Bolivia is delayed. There is too much political strife and concern plus, Evo Morales, the Bolivian president has kicked our U.S. ambassador and his team out of the country. After tempered time we'll return.

We remain thankful and impressed with your consistent generosity. Kudos for all the gifts, equipment, monies, time and aid that you have freely given. Of course, we want more for there is a never ending list of needy patients. A safe and blessed summer to all of you.

Sincerely,

Thomas E. Geraghty M.D.