

June 13, 2016

Theresa's Remarkable Transformation



[Story by Children First Foundation](#)

It was always going to take more than the power of one to create the miracle that has transformed young Theresa's life.

Theresa was just eight years old when – playing hide and seek at home in the Philippines with her siblings – a kerosene lamp fell and set her ablaze. The terrified youngster suffered life-threatening third degree burns. She was unconscious for six days and in ICU for six months. Despite the best efforts of a burns unit in Manila, Theresa was left with horrific injuries.

When she was discharged in 2006, she still had open wounds on her chest and abdomen.

Both arms were fused to the side of her torso and only her lower arms and hands were free to move. Her jaw and neck were fused to her chest and she was unable to lift her head or close her mouth.

In constant pain and tormented by bullying, Theresa stopped going to school. Almost 10 years after the shocking accident, local doctors would attempt multiple surgeries, but all would fail as

she could not be anaesthetised due to her extensive facial scarring. It was bitterly disappointing for the self-conscious teen.

It was on her fifth unsuccessful attempt at surgery that Theresa met an Australian nurse/charity worker who introduced her to renowned Australian burns surgeon, Associate Professor Peter Haertsch. Professor Haertsch, who works with not-for-profit organisation Interplast Australia and New Zealand, secured the support of Concord Hospital to perform the surgeries. Interplast, in turn, reached out to Children First.

Within weeks, we had mobilised a team of staff and volunteers. Thanks to the support of generous people like you, we had the resources to arrange the necessary visas and passports and to sponsor the family's transport. One of our wonderful donors also agreed to escort Theresa and her mother on their flight from Manila to Sydney.

Since she arrived in mid-2014, Theresa has undergone three life-changing plastic surgeries at Concord Hospital. We currently have two plastic surgeons and a dental surgeon examining x-rays to determine what more they can do for Theresa.

In the meantime, she has been recuperating at our *Miracle sMiles Retreat* at Kilmore where she undergoes physiotherapy under the guidance of the generous team at St Vincent's Private Hospital in Melbourne.

This remarkable Retreat, set in a tranquil rural setting outside Melbourne, provides accommodation for up to twelve children before and after surgeries. A virtual mini-United Nations, where children and volunteers bond and injuries heal, it has become Theresa's second home, and her second family.