International Children's Surgical Foundation

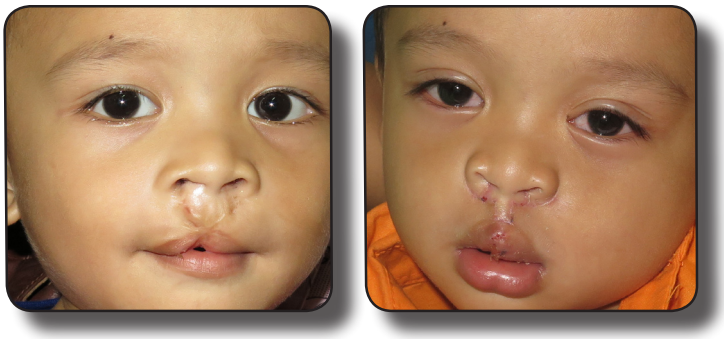
"Everyone Was Born to Smile"

ICSFOUNDATION.ORG VOLUME 9 NO. 1

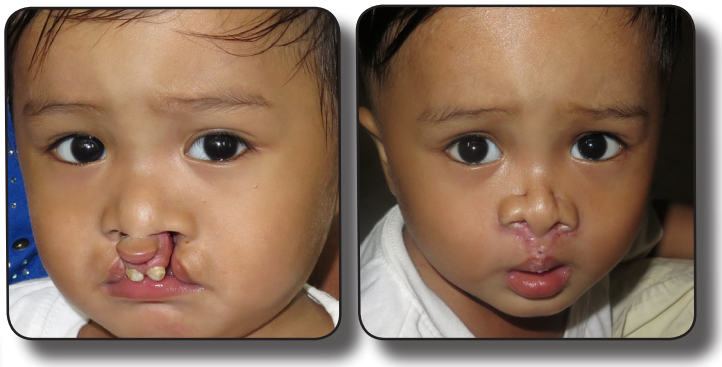
ICSF Serves in All Four Hemispheres—Again

Since its first full year of operation in 2006, ICSF has performed free surgeries and taught local health professionals in all four hemispheres of the world, every year, up to the present. In 2014, all four hemispheres are again on ICSF's slate. "What was once a small fledgling outfit has become a sustainable worldwide organization," says Dr. Geoff Williams, president and founder of ICSF. "The number of poor children and families that we have been able to give the opportunity for a normal life is remarkable.

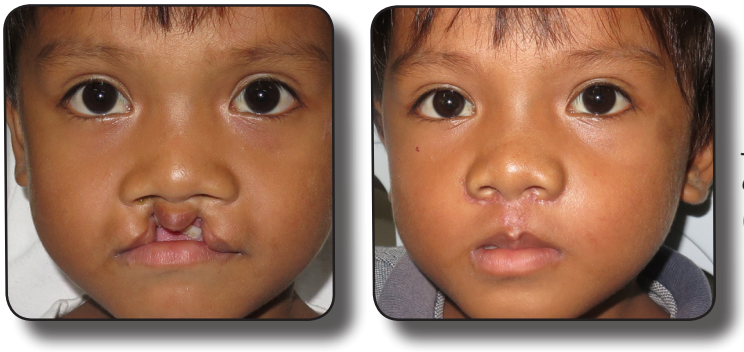
"If we help only one, it means everything in the world to that one—but we now have well over two thousand—all thanks to our generous supporters, many of whom have been with us for a number of years now," he adds.



Erwin, age 4, had surgery by another team but with a poor result (far left).; ICSF performed a four-hour redo operation. After surgery (near left).



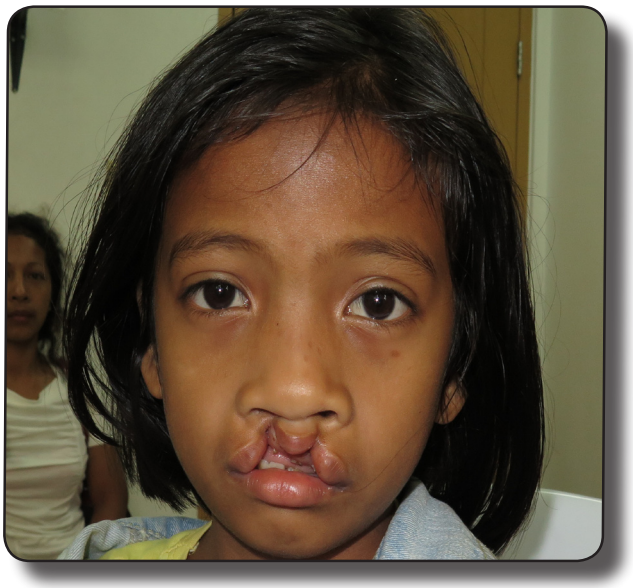
Jonathan, age 2, before surgery (near right) and after a five-hour surgery by ICSF (far right).



Jonel, age 5, before surgery (far left) and after a four-hour operation by ICSF (near left).

Rosemarie Becomes 'Mystery Girl'

None of the kids in Sandangan, Zamboanga Del Norte, Philippines, knew who the mysterious new girl was. She had suddenly appeared as though she belonged there. Then… rumors began to spread that it was Rosemarie Cueresma, although no one really believed it—at first.



Rosemarie before surgery (above), and two weeks after surgery (below).

Rosemarie had been the ugly duckling of Sandangan, teased and picked on everywhere she went, including school, because of her bilateral cleft lip. She had no friends, and no one wanted to be seen with her. Rosemarie's life was as miserable as it could be for a seven-year-old girl. Dr. Geoff Williams commented on his first encounter with Rosemarie: "She was sullen and noncommunicative. She did not make eye contact with anyone—like many of the kids with severe cleft deformities we see in this age group.

"Rosemarie's operation took four and a half hours and was particularly challenging," recalls Dr. Williams. "But it was an overwhelming success. We were able to create every element seen in a beautiful lip."

When Rosemarie failed to come to her follow-up clinic appointment, ICSF nurse Christine Arancillo called and learned that the family did not return to be evaluated because they did not have enough money for the transportation fare. As is ICSF's policy in this situation Ms. Arancillo asked the mother to borrow the money for the return trip and then upon arrival at the clinic, she would be reimbursed the whole round trip cost of the fare—to which the mother agreed. Upon arrival, Rosemarie was found to be healing very well. Then emerged the interesting story of the reaction of the other children in the village after Rosemarie came home from the hospital. The mother reported that the other kids did not recognize her daughter. When they learned that the "new girl" was actually Rosemarie, the kids were in awe. The teasing never did start up again, stated Rosemarie's mother.

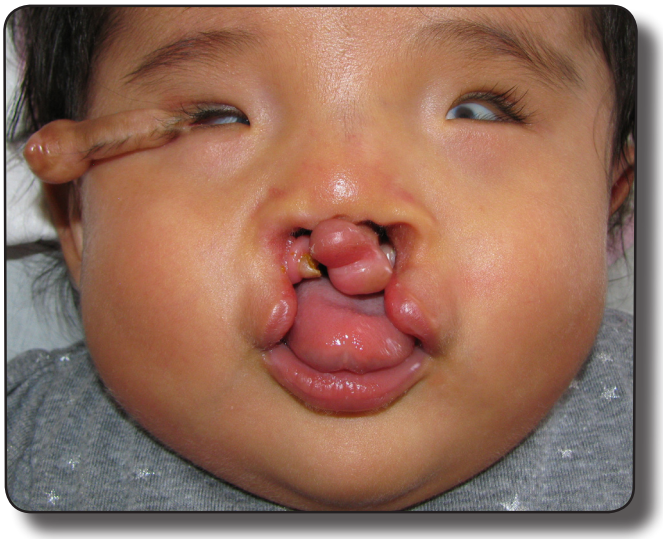
Dr. Williams recalls, "As Rosemarie stood there in the clinic and the flashes of cameras went off, it was reminiscent of a model shoot. It was certainly no ugly duckling standing there before us."

Then, for the first time, Rosemarie smiled in the presence of the doctors and nurses. "It was more than enough pay for me—to see this young girl smile and to know that she would not be teased again", says Dr. Williams.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Fernanda

You are a young mother living in the outskirts of La Paz, Bolivia. Your country is the poorest in South America. You have a new baby—your first, but all is not well. Although you, your young husband, and your mother and father had, with great joy, anticipated the birth of your first child, your hopes were dashed when your daughter was born with a number of birth defects. The two most distressing defects are congenital blindness and a complete bilateral cleft lip and palate. As if this were not enough, your little girl also was born without toes and fingers. Adding to all of this, your beloved little one has a horrific growth emanating from her right upper eyelid, the likes of which none of your doctors had ever seen.



Fernanda before surgery.

Although you had always been a believer, you had wondered, briefly, if God had forgotten you or maybe had punished you for some reason. No, you concluded, God did not do this to punish us—He will find help for us—somewhere, somehow. For eight long months you have waited, every day wondering if this would be the day when help would come.

One day you hear that a small team of doctors is coming to a new clinic in LaPaz. On the appointed day, you travel to the clinic and see many other children with deformities. Two American doctors are there from the International Children's Surgical Foundation.

However, you are reluctant to feel relief because on several previous occasions you thought help had come, only to be told that your daughter's deformities were too complex to be treated on a medical mission. Each of those times you had pretended to understand, although you could not hide the tears from your family.

But this team of two doctors seems different. They take a lot of time with your daughter. They examine her carefully. They listen carefully to her heart and lungs and thoroughly review the laboratory values. (You had gotten the laboratory tests earlier in an effort to prove to the visiting teams that your baby was healthy enough to withstand surgery.)

After an hour of evaluating your daughter, the ICSF doctors look at each other and then at you and say, *"Si,… puedo operar para su hija."* (*Yes, I can operate for your daughter*).

You feel as if new life has come into your soul. You know it was meant to be. On the day of your child's surgery, you are nervous, but you know this small team will take all the time and care to give your daughter the best result. After four hours in surgery the doctors come to you to tell you that all has gone well. You now feel that you are especially blessed by God that you had to wait—to find the doctor(s) that would treat your little girl like a patient and not a number.

The aforementioned event did, in fact, occur—to Martha, a young Bolivian mother and her daughter, Fernanda.

When I first met Martha, I sensed what she had gone through in trying to find treatment for her daughter, Fernanda. Martha impressed me as a very devoted mother, although when

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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

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Fernanda after surgery for eyelid growth and bilateral cleft lip.

we first met, she had a look of desperation due to the previous rejections by other medical teams.

The night after Fernanda's surgery I returned to the small hospital around 10 p.m. to check on the little patient, and having found all to be well, I walked out of the patient room and back into the dimly lit lobby. I saw some people in the corner who immediately began making their way over to me. As they drew near, I recognized Martha but not the other people.

The oldest man of the group hurried up to me and grabbed my left upper arm with both hands. He identified himself as Martha's father. Martha also rushed up and grabbed my right upper arm—with both hands. They both began speaking with passion, and tears began to flow down their cheeks. "*Gracias, doctORRRR, gracias, doctORRR…muchisimas muchisimas…*" They spoke so rapidly that I could not understand all they said…but I didn't need to. Their tight grips on my arms and the tears streaming down their faces told me everything. After a few minutes more, we finally parted, and I left into the night, marveling at what I had just encountered. We had been given the privilege to be what was likely the answer to many heartfelt prayers by Fernanda's family. We, the ICSF medical professionals, have many such experiences.

As I walked in the cool Bolivian night, I thought of our donors—far away—who, although not aware of the event in the small hospital lobby and not able to feel the family's gratitude, were very worthy of being thanked.

I thank you now, in behalf of Fernanda and her mother and family. I thank you for helping ICSF to ensure that Fernanda, her mother, and "everyone was born to smile."

Dr. Geoff Williams

President, ICSF
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Encyclopedia Britannica Taps Dr. Williams to Write Cleft Palate Section

Encyclopedia Britannica contacted Dr. Geoff Williams in December 2013 to request that he rewrite the online encyclopedia's cleft lip and palate section.

Dr. Williams agreed, of course, stating, "I was honored to receive this request and have given Encyclopedia Britannica my second draft of the cleft palate chapter. I am hopeful this will bring more attention to ICSF and our mission of giving Third World children the same level of careful treatment enjoyed by children in developed countries."