Ethiopian girl, 4, with rare facial deformity flown to N.Y. for first of three free surgeries

BY CHRISTINA BOYLE

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A beautiful Ethiopian girl is days away from a stunning smile.

Samirawit "Sami" Hallemarian, 4, was born in a remote African village several days' walk from the nearest hospital with a rare facial disfigurement.

She's expected to go under the knife Monday in Manhattan's Roosevelt Hospital for the first of three pro bono surgeries to transform her life.

"This is the best chance she has that this won't come back again," said Dr. Alejandro Berenstein, co-director of the pioneering Vascular Birthmark Institute of New York at Roosevelt Hospital.

"She is an adorable, brilliant kid. "If she gets the opportunity, she could really become something."
A series of uncanny coincidences came together to give Samirawit a new start in life. First, she was discovered in her far-flung village with no electricity and no running water by a not-for-profit group helping African children. Then a hospital in Tel Aviv successfully arranged for her to travel to Israel for treatment. While she was there, the Israeli physicians got a visit from Berenstein, the New York doctor who had taught them everything they knew about treating her rare problem - known as venous malformation. Treatment has advanced in the United States, and Berenstein said he could perform an improved technique in New York. "Obviously, there were tremendous logistical challenges," explained Berenstein. "We had found a kid in the Middle East who lived in Africa, and whom we wanted to treat in the United States. "But we persevered."

Samirawit moved in with foster mom Beverly Brandwine in Cherry Hill, N.J., two months ago and will remain with her until she is healthy enough to return home. Monday, Wednesday and Thursday, Berenstein will team up with Dr. Milton Waner, co-director of Roosevelt Hospital's Vascular Birthmark Institute, to cut the blood supply to the growth and remove it. Each surgery will last several hours. "She covers her face walking down the street," Brandwine said. "Take her to the playground, and she stands and looks at kids because that's what they do to her - they stand and stare. "This will change everything."
Angry Independent
8:36:29 AM  I hope for the best for this little girl. Well said ana63!!
Aug 22, 2011

SpecialOpsMike
9:14:06 AM  de opresso liber! Way to go, NYC!! Godspeed.
Aug 22, 2011

urbanlemur
9:43:43 AM  God bless you little one!!! May these surgeries give you the chance one day to walk down the streets with your head held high!!!
Aug 22, 2011

rhmccabe
10:13:40 AM  I need free surgery too.
Aug 22, 2011

rhmccabe
10:18:44 AM  I need free surgery too.
Aug 22, 2011

Kahn
10:57:18 AM  Came to the US huh? Why not Canada or England where the great socialized medicine system is in place?
Aug 22, 2011

allnadayzwork
11:34:57 AM  Awww, poor baby. I hope all turns out well. She's a cute!!!
Aug 22, 2011

crimson68
1:48:15 PM  Why a debate? This little cutie is here to get better - nuff said. I wish her all the luck in the world.
Aug 22, 2011

integrityr
1:50:51 PM  The difference is that people in Africa have no chance and US citizens do. Unlike Africa, Americans have the means to provide universal health care for its people, but the people don't want it.
Aug 22, 2011

rar113
3:30:15 PM  @Kahn -- "Came to the US huh? Why not Canada or England where the great socialized medicine system is in place?" Actually, if you'd read the article, you'd see that she was first taken to Israel, which does have a more-or-less socialized system. It's just that the Jewish doctor who's the world's leading expert in this area and was giving his knowledge to others so they can also help, happened to be there and was able to give her better care here. Now not only will this little girl get her life back, but lots of Israeli AND PALESTINIAN kids will too. Even kids from Gaza if Hamas will let them out.
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