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

BY CHRISTINA BOYLE

Monday, August 22nd 2011, 4:00 AM

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Jeanne Noonan for News

Samirawit "Sami" Hallemerian, 4, was flown from Ethiopia to have facial reconstruction surgery.

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

Samirawit Hallemerian, 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."

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Doctors Alex Berenstein and Milton Waner chase after their charming new patient at Roosevelt Hospital.

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."

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Angry Independent

8:36:29 AM I hope for the best for this little girl. Well said ana63!
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SpecialOpsMike

9:14:06 AM de oppresso liber! Way to go, NYC!! Godspeed.
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urbanlemur

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

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rhmcabbe

10:13:40 AM I need free surgery too.
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10:18:44 AM I need free surgery too.
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10:57:18 AM Came to the US huh? Why not Canada or England where the great
Aug 22, 2011 socialized medicine system is in place?

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allnadayzwork

11:34:57 AM Awww, poor baby. I hope all turns out well. She's a cutie!!!
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crimson68

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

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integrityr

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

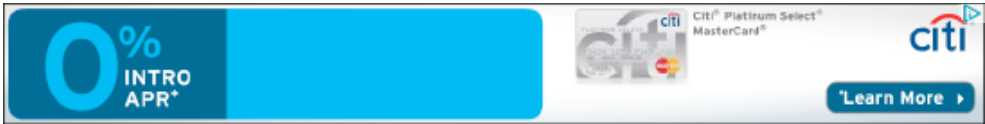
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rar113

3:20:15 PM @Khahn -- "Came to the US huh? Why not Canada or England where
Aug 22, 2011 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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