

Gift of Life



Rotary District 7980
Gift of Life Foundation



RONNIE

Age: 10 years - Updated February 2011
Home: Navarette, Dominican Republic
Diagnosis: Tricuspid Atresia ♥

Procedure: July 2007 - Blalock-Taussig Shunt (B-T Shunt) ♥
July 2008 – Bidirectional

Glenn Operation ♥

Ronnie is a wonderful 10 year old boy with dark brown hair and beautiful big, deep brown expressive eyes. He's the youngest of five children and the only child with a congenital heart defect. He lives with his Grandmother in the small town of Navarette, famous for it's cigar factories.

Prior to the first surgical procedure in July 2007, Ronnie's Mom, Diomary, described how her beautiful little boy's lips, fingers and toes were always a bit blue, and with the least amount of physical activity would turn a deep blue, almost black from the severe lack of oxygen, commonly referred to as the "blue baby syndrome." His little hands and feet were "clubbed" as a result of his body being continuously oxygen deprived.



Ronnie was first seen by a Cardiologist when he was a baby. Diomary, recalls the feelings of total despair and grief, when the doctor told her nothing could be done for her son. So, for seven years she and her family cared for and loved this little boy who was unable to walk, talk or eat a normal amount of food to sustain normal physical growth. Little did she know

all was about to change when she took Ronnie to see Rotarian Dr. Juan Ramirez, the Pediatric Cardiologist at Hospital Infantil Regional Universitario Dr. Arturo Grullon in Santiago. Then she heard those magic words which she had stopped dreaming about years before, Ronnie was a candidate for corrective cardiac surgery.

Rotarian Dr. Humberto Rodriguez, a pediatric cardiac surgeon from Monterrey, Mexico came to Santiago in July 2007 as a volunteer surgeon with the International Children's Heart Foundation's (ICHF) mission team. During this two week mission trip, Dr. Rodriguez performed a B-T Shunt procedure as the first step in giving our little Ronnie the **Gift of Life**.

The **B-T Shunt** uses a piece of Gortex graft material shaped like a tube, one end is connected to the artery going to the right arm and the other end to the pulmonary artery which goes to the right lung. The B-T shunt increases the chances for the development of collateral circulation around the area of the shunt, thereby increasing the amount of oxygen delivered to the body.

July 26 – August 9, 2008 - Bidirectional Glenn Operation

It's been 12 months since Dr. Rodriguez has visited Hospital Infantil Regional Universitario Dr. Arturo Grullon in Santiago. During this two-week cardiac mission he has come back as the lead surgeon and ICHF's team leader.



On the morning of Thursday July 31st, Ronnie was scheduled to be examined by our team of cardiologists who together with Dr. Rodriguez determine if he was a candidate for the second, more complex open heart surgical procedure, a **Bidirectional Glenn Operation**.

Dr. Rodriguez and I left the operating room suite to join the Cardiologist team, before we reach the examination room, in the hallway we were greeted by Ronnie and his Mom, both with bright smiling faces. Ronnie's big, dark brown eyes were dancing as he walked, with a fair amount of effort towards Dr. Rodriguez, who opened his arms wide waiting to embrace this beautiful child.

Immediately following the B-T Shunt performed in 2007, Ronnie's quality of life immediately began to improve and continued. His appetite had increased some, he grew a bit, but to see him take those steps was so exciting until his mom told us he was now talking non-stop like a little parrot.

The four of us entered the examination room to find waiting for little Ronnie was Drs. Juan Ramirez, (Rotarian, Santiago, DR) and Manuel Yanez Sanchez (Monterrey, Mexico) Pediatric Cardiologists; Drs. Manuel Ochoa (Rotarian, Panama) Ysaac Heredia, (Santago, DR) Pediatric CV Surgeons and Jennifer Liedel, Intensive and Neonatologist. These physicians are here for only one reason, to provide the best possible cardiac care with an amazing amount of skill and love for this little boy and the 21 other kids, who during this two-week mission got their broken hearts fixed.

Drs. Ramirez and Yanez examine Ronnie first with their stethoscopes followed by an echocardiogram, so far all is good. Ronnie was then scheduled for a cardiac catheterization to confirm his pulmonary pressures and the size of the pulmonary artery. Ronnie passed the final hurdle, chatting to his doctors all the way. He was scheduled for a Bidirectional Glenn procedure the next morning.

Before surgery, Dr. Rodriguez sat down and spoke with Diomary, explaining to her the surgery Ronnie needed was a very difficult, complex procedure. Diomary understood; she knew this was the only chance Ronnie had to live. She kissed her son and watched him as he was wheeled away from her. Then the wait began, seconds seem like minutes and minutes like hours. Finally, Dr. Rodriguez came through the doors of the waiting area with a wide smile on his face and she knew little Ronnie was granted a second chance for life.

Now with the second surgery behind him, Ronnie and his Mom can make all those seemingly simple dreams come true. Watching her son for the first time playing with the other kids.

25 February 2010 - Follow up Visit

Ronnie and his Mom arrived at the Hospital Infantil Regional Universitario Dr. Arturo Grullon to visit with a few members of the visiting mission team, in particular Drs. Humberto, Ramirez, Liedel and Ochoa.

It has been a year since I've seen Ronnie... wow our little boy is growing up. A child whose Mom was told there was no hope for her beautiful little boy with a complex congenital heart defect, is now full of hope

and encouragement. Ronnie is now attending elementary school, while he has a lot of catching up to do, he's up for the challenge. To the amazement of the "his" medical team.... Ronnie walks a half miles each way to school, is riding a bicycle and playing with other kids.



17 February 2011

Ronnie is being followed by his local Pediatrician in Navarette, approximately one hour drive from the Hospital Infantil Regional Universitario Dr. Arturo Grullon in Santiago, as well as being examined on a regular basis by Dr. Juan Ramirez and his team. His family usually brings him to Santiago when our mission team visits.... more of us than him. Unfortunately, it wasn't possible this time. So I decided to travel to Navarette to visit him with his Mom and Marcos a young Dominican physician and our driver Raphael.

Navarette lies between two mountain ranges: the Cordillera Septentrional to the north and the Cordillera Central to the south, in the Cibao Valley along the North Yaque river. Tobacco has been cultivated by local farmers in this region for generations and is one of the primary sources of tobacco in the Dominican Republic. The ProCigar consortiums has been very generous in their support of our program, giving their kids a second chance to live.

Upon arriving in Navarette we drove into the neighborhood where Ronnie is living with his Grandmother. We were greeted by Ronnie's uncle Toto and his two cousins, riding on one motor cycle. Raphael followed him to the nearby school, where Toto's wife (Ronnie's aunt) is his teacher.



Navarete, is an extremely poor area with a small 4 room school. This little school has no running water and minimal electricity, with the bathroom in a separate small building. Sadly, 120 students divided into two sessions share this space with very little school supplies.



While he still has one more complex surgical procedure to undergo, the more time which passes, and he continues to grow and gains strength, the the chances for a very successful outcome can be expected.



As we approached the school building we were greeted by Ronnie's classmates who were so excited to have visitors. Ronnie's Mom entered the building to get Ronnie. They came out and Ronnie greeted me with a big hug.

Wow... he's grown a taller over the past year, still a bit fragile but he looks good and seems happy to be able to attend school and have the ability to play with his amigos.



Our multi-national team will be there when he needs us!