

## **OUR VISIT TO DR SALEIGH ADAMS, HEAD OF PLASTIC SURGERY, RED CROSS CHILDRENS HOSPITAL, CAPE TOWN**

On 25<sup>th</sup> January, 2012, a miracle happened. Ian and I had made an appointment with Dr Adams to discuss with him the many questions we had regarding the possible plastic surgery on Rebecca. In came this delightful and eminent youngish surgeon and greeted us by name. He went straight to the computer, and said he wanted to explain what he wanted to do with Rebecca on this enormous, humungous wall-screen. (I, typically, was thinking, but I have so many urgent questions to ask you, do we need to hear all of this!) Of course, it turned out to be fundamentally crucial. Dr Adams, had been in Brisbane, Australia, giving a seminar, and had used Rebecca's photograph, where he was explaining the expansion technique they use over here. So he was able to show us too on screen. He is using a method now in his surgery, which involves expanding the good skin and tissue, near the scar tissue, (using silicone) and it grows over the silicone and into a large ball, basically, and he then removes the scarred tissue (they cut now with water – a stunningly brilliant technique apparently which he explained) and folds over the newly expanded skin and tissue. OF COURSE, it is far more complex than this, but I think this is the essence of the matter. This tissue is a living tissue, not just skin, so as it is the person's own tissue it grows, as skin does, with the child, naturally like any other tissue. There are benefits too (pigmentation eg) for it being more than simply a skin graft, (though there is scarring on Rebecca's forehead which would simply have a skin graft.) He explained to us carefully what he would actually be able to do on Rebecca's face. Although the actual time in surgery is comparatively small, time is needed for expansion growth of the person's tissue. So it became immediately obvious to me that, of course, it had to be done right here in South Africa, because all the growth etc needs constant monitoring etc. And also Dr Adams said he would do the operations himself and it would be a privilege. He is a modest man, and a delight. That statement of his is truly moving.

So having been stunned and amazed by everything so far, another breath-taking statement was now made by him. He said, "I have spoken to Opsmile, and if we do this surgery in July, they have a week where all the surgery and all the follow up treatment is free!!" "So although Rebecca is a Zambian, he thinks they will agree to this. WOW of Wows and WONDERS beyond telling!!! He said it in such a low-key way that it took a moment for this to sink in and I do not know how the tears did not jump straight out horizontally from my eyes!! Also the fact that he should have approached them himself is just utterly brilliant. As he admitted, coming from him, it was likely to have a positive outcome. (He had at one time suggested I might approach them for funding and they were on my possible list of things to do!!)

BUT yet another truly amazing development in the situation took place. He explained the big concern, and it has certainly been ours too. He said someone would need to see Rebecca and explain very carefully to her, with translator if

necessary, what could happen to her if she was happy for this to be so, without exaggerating, but just saying how her face could be made so very much better, and all that would be involved. She would have to agree to want this, and we would need to tell her about the time factor too. He then discussed at length the fact that he felt she should have a foster-home here because this might all involve about a year, not more, because there would be about 4 operations and much follow-up etc. He had thought of a place and he told us why he had discarded this thought, and showed us his real concern for this young lass. He then left the room to return with Professor Alistair Millar. Well, he is the head of all the paediatric work at RCCH, (and you can google him to find out what an amazing man he is with UK experience etc. He has won an award of great note internationally, if you look him up.) He asked me a few questions, and then said that he had a suggestion for us. He suggested a place that he felt would be ideal for Rebecca to live in = St Joseph's, run by nuns, as a charity, and therefore free, (?) where children suffering from cancer and the like, can go when their parents have to go back to work etc, and where Rebecca would find playmates and it has good playing facilities, and it has a school; and providing Rebecca speaks English, he feels she would be happy. (We had discussed with Saleigh Adams the language problems) (It has since emerged that Ann Botha's RCCH friend, another professor, had come up with the same suggestion – St Joseph's!) Dr Adams said that sounded excellent, and he is ringing them and talking to them about Rebecca for us, and Ian and I will go and see it, and can say more about it then, but it does truly sound a solution. My thoughts are that we shall have to find someone, yet to be identified from Rebecca's current life, an adult, to be flown down not just initially with her but probably at intervals too? What really touched me so much was that these two eminent and wonderful men should be talking so caringly and naturally about wee Rebecca's care during her surgery life – ie that these guys showed so much heart. Anyway, Ian and I have decided to fly to Zambia in Feb from SA and do what we are led to do, as above.

I tell you God was in that meeting in a big, big way. At every step we felt God's love emanating from each man. It was a highlight of my life right up there with being married and having children. We have called the 25<sup>th</sup> Jan, "Doctor's Day" to be celebrated annually by both of us, and each of us, till we leave this world. To say we are THRILLED is an under-statement. The whole Rebecca journey, initially seemingly nigh impossible, now seems to be starting!! I take this chance of thanking every single one of you who has taken an interest in Rebecca, helped me, given me ideas, listened, sometimes at length, and written to me, and shown us such a caring attitude in all you have said and done and especially for your time, prayers and very real help. I know who you are and I thank you so very much. Ian has just reminded me that both men said it would be a privilege to help Rebecca, and that has affected both of us deeply.