



# A True Fighter

Meet an Inspiring Eastside Teen

BY KATY KHAPOUR

**O**n an August day in 1998, a boy was born in Ghana, on Africa's West Coast. His mother, perhaps overwhelmed by his birth defects, is said to have thrown him away in a garbage can. But the baby was rescued and cared for by a local Christian church. Yet there were many orphans and his medical situation was severe. He survived, but did not thrive.

About 3½ years later, Ran and Maryann Galt of Kirkland visited the village and met the orphan boy. "He was a small black boy who was missing a right ear and (had) eyes that looked like they were not set in the right place," Maryann recalls.

Almost 4, the boy who had been abandoned at birth weighed only 20 pounds. "He had bones with skin wrapped around it," Maryann says. "He came like a little lamb. He hugged me. He sat on my lap. He hugged Ran."

## GETTING OUT OF GHANA

"It was his situation," Ran says. "It was more of a heart thing. You think, 'My God, here's this child and he's an orphan. There's no one to help. No one.'"

The health care situation was not good in Ghana. The Galts knew in their hearts that this little boy's future depended on quality medical care that he could get in the United States. At first Maryann was reluctant – it was a big commitment. She wasn't sure, after all. She was in her 50s and Ran was in his 70s. It seemed like a late time in life to take on a little boy.

"He (Ran) looked at me and he said, 'What? You can have this boy's life on your head if we don't take him? You can live with that, Maryann?'" She couldn't.

They named him Gideon, and in 2002 brought him home to Kirkland on a two-year temporary medical visa. Two years has extended to nine. The Galts ended up adopting Gideon, who's now 13.

## HEALING HANDS

Dr. Michael Cunningham, medical director for the Craniofacial Center at Seattle Children's Hospital, says Gideon "has a group of malformations that are very, very unusual." Cunningham volunteers with Smile Train, and has made several trips to Ghana. He adds, "Many of his (Gideon's) malformations could not have been treated there."

Dr. Richard Alan Hopper, the surgical director at the Craniofacial Center in Seattle who also volunteers with Smile Train, has performed several surgeries on Gideon since 2007. "He was a very shy boy," Hopper says. "You could kind of tell that he had been through a lot of things – more than children his age would have otherwise gone through – and there wasn't necessarily a lot of trust in physicians and surgeons at that time."

In Ghana, Gideon had been given a tracheotomy without the benefit of sedatives. The doctors here had a lot of work to do to gain Gideon's trust. And it was imperative – because surgeries would be a big part of his life.

Dr. Marshall Partington, a plastic surgeon in Kirkland, was "the key in getting Gideon past his fears," Maryann said. She recalls their first meeting when Gideon peppered Partington with questions: "We're just going to talk today, right? Are you married? Do you have kids? What kind?"

When Gideon couldn't think of any more questions, the doctor had one for him. "Do you have any medical questions for me?" Partington asked. The boy paused and then said, "Yeah, I want to talk with you about getting an ear. Now, if I get this ear, is it gonna grow with me? Will it stop growing when I stop growing? Now, how are you going to do this?"

The two clearly had a lot to talk about. To help bond with Gideon, the doctor even took him to the zoo and out for pizza. Partington recalls being with the Galt family at Seattle Children's Hospital right before an operation on Gideon's nose. Gideon asked, "Why do I need to do it? I like my nose. My nose is fine. I can breathe. I like my nose."

"It's really hard to convince this little kid who's just got his identity intact despite all this stuff that it is the right thing," Partington says. "Gideon is blessed and unusual, I guess, in one sense, that he has such profound craniofacial issues but without any negative impact on his intellect and on his social mechanisms. But what's so incredible, I think, what's unique about Gideon is not so much his deformity, but his fortitude. He's a throwaway kid who has this bursting intelligence and compassion."

Gideon's future looks bright, thanks to his supportive parents, skillful doctors and a positive attitude. He recently was a junior judge at this year's Kirkland Concours d'Elegance car show and was a guest speaker during the fundraising portion of the event. Some of the proceeds went to Children's Hospital. 📸

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