

A Special Gift

Originally published in Summer of 2008

On a windy January morning, four UMHS interpreters stood in the Mott lobby, each holding 8-10 inch locks of their own hair. Next to them was Amy Jaime, a favorite patient at Interpreter Services and one of Mott's many young heroes. The interpreters were about to give Amy a very special gift.

In 2005, Amy lost her father and two sisters in a house fire that nearly took her life. Her burns forced the amputation of her right leg, and caused severe scarring on her face and body. Thanks to extensive surgeries, therapy and her own indomitable spirit, she has learned to walk, dance, and speak English and Spanish—her mother Maria's native tongue. But though she has a beauty that the fire couldn't touch, her burns claimed much of Amy's hair.

Then last October, Spanish interpreter Gabriela Wilson had an interesting idea. "I was interpreting for Maria Jaime, and she said she wished she could afford a hair replacement for Amy," Gabriela recalls. "I asked her if she would like one made with my hair. She got very excited, and instantly said yes!"

Gabriela soon convinced fellow interpreters Angelica Paz Snyder, Maria Militzer and Ayako Yamasaki to donate their own hair to the cause. Colleagues at Interpreter Services and throughout the UMHS got involved, and Gabriela's simple gift grew into a celebration fit for a princess.

On January 30, the interpreters gathered in Mott lobby and presented Amy with a tiara, balloons and a bag of gifts. They escorted the Jaimes into a waiting limousine, which took them all to Children with Hair Loss, a non-profit in South Rockwood that gives children free wigs made from donated hair. The interpreters watched as Regina Villemure, the organization's CEO, fitted Amy for a wig. Since it would take time to weave their donated hair into the final product, Regina gave Amy a temporary wig to wear home. She even called the local McDonalds to arrange an impromptu lunch party.

When Amy walked into the restaurant with her beautiful new hair, the McDonald's staff joined the interpreters in a standing ovation. "It was a lot of work, but at the end of the day Amy was the happiest girl in the world!" Gabriela says. "The most rewarding part was when Amy and her mom told us that they see the UMHS as their second family. We found out that together we make a great team."