

## NEW FUTURE FOR LEBANESE CHILDREN



*Houssam Haikal*

**T**welve-year-old Rodina Habre can wear shorts on a hot summer day in her native Beirut, Lebanon without feeling self-conscious. Houssam Haikal, also from Beirut, can run and jump all day long like other normal two-year-olds. That's because the Forum's Children Foundation arranged for these Lebanese children to have life-altering surgery that was unavailable in their native country.

Rodina journeyed to New York City with her father, Badith Habre, for special reconstructive surgery to repair thick scars she had sustained during a devastating fire in her home in 1998 when she was only nine years old. Rodina was badly burned, leaving 60% of the skin on her legs covered with horrific scars. Rodina had undergone a half-dozen operations in her native Lebanon, but none of them were successful in reversing the results of the third-degree burns. Self-conscious of her physical appearance, she would never wear clothing that exposed her legs, even during scorching Lebanon summers. That has all changed now.

Earlier this year, surgeons at Staten Island University Hospital repaired Rodina's scars with reconstructive surgery. After a 10-day recuperation period, the girl returned to Lebanon, anxious to wear shorts and show off her "new" legs. While the most disfiguring scars were removed, Rodina may require additional minor cosmetic surgery as she grows.

"Besides harming her self-image, the scars had been a constant reminder of the fire and the terrible pain and misery that it caused. It is gratifying knowing that we have made a difference in this child's life," said Forum's Children Foundation Chairman William Denis Fugazy.

Rodina was offered the chance at reconstructive surgery when Dr. Nicolas Zouain, a medical resident at Staten Island University Hospital, learned of the girl's plight from his sister, a physician in their native Lebanon. Dr. Zouain presented the case to Dr. Vincent Calamia and Dr. Eugene Holuka, both who are affiliated with Staten Island University Hospital and also serve on the Forum's Children Foundation Board of Directors.

Having secured Rodina's surgery, Dr. Zouain's work was not yet done. He brought to the attention of Forum's Children Foundation's officials the condition of another Lebanese child — two-year-old Houssam, who was born with a potentially fatal circulatory condition called arteriovenous malformation, which causes blood to accumulate in the leg and prevents the heart from functioning normally. Doctors in Beirut did not have the expertise or technology to perform the delicate surgery. Without corrective surgery, the child would die at a very young age, Dr. Zouain told Foundation officials.

The Foundation agreed to fly Houssam and his mother, Leila Haikal, to New York for the life-saving surgery. The boy was first treated at the pediatric unit of Kings County Hospital Center, where he underwent an angiogram and other procedures. He was then transferred to Staten Island University Hospital, where treatment continued before life-saving surgery was successfully performed. Houssam is also back in his native Lebanon recuperating and being monitored by local physicians.

The Forum's Children Foundation is extremely thankful to the doctors at Staten Island University Hospital, who performed the surgeries at no cost to the families of the two children. Two airlines also transported the families round-trip to New York at no cost. The Foundation assumed the expenses of the families during their stay in New York.



(l. to r.) Brian Morris, Director/Hospital and Community Relations, Staten Island University Hospital; Badith Habre, father of Rodina Habre; Rodina Habre; Two-year-old Houssam Haikal held by William Fugazy Chairman, The Forum's Children Foundation; Larissa Van Duzer, Executive Director, Forum's Children Foundation; Dr. Nicholas Zouain, Lebanese medical resident at Staten Island University Hospital