



Grace's Story: Real-life hero destined for great things

LINDA WHITE
Special to QMI Agency

Her name means 'blessing' and that's exactly what Grace Turnbull is to the many people whose lives have been uplifted by a smile that belies the pain she has endured.

Not long ago, Grace's brittle bone disease prevented her parents from lavishing her with hugs because such a simple act of love would cause their precious girl further pain but, she's getting stronger every day.

"At the beginning we couldn't even hold her because we would fracture her ribs...All we wanted to

"We were given a picture of Grace and absolutely fell in love with her little face."

— Grace's mother, Liz Turnbull

do was cuddle her," says Liz Turnbull. She and her husband, David, adopted Grace from China,

a process that took seven long years and a willingness to accept a child with special physical needs.

"We were given a picture of Grace and absolutely fell in love with her little face," Liz says. They were told she had hip dysplasia and was in a body cast because she had already undergone surgery for the condition. A few days after arriving home with their daughter in November 2010, Liz and David arranged to have Grace's body cast removed at their local hospital in Mississauga.

Grace had been in the



cast for nine months, which had prevented her from thriving physically, and was also malnourished, weighing just 10 pounds. "We moved her around on a pillow. Even changing a diaper was

traumatizing because I knew I could fracture her hip or cause severe damage to her spine," says Liz. X-rays revealed several cracked ribs, compression fractures in her spine and severe scoliosis. After

further assessment, Grace was diagnosed with osteogenesis imperfecta and following her fourth fracture in February 2011, she was referred to The Hospital for Sick Children (SickKids).

Treatment has included surgeries following several severe fractures to have growing rods inserted to support the bones in her legs. Grace goes to SickKids every three months for a three-day intravenous chemical therapy for her bones. "After her first treatment, Grace was a bundle of energy," David says.

"We wondered if that was a side effect but her doctor told us it was probably because it was the first day in her life when she didn't have pain. To think about how happy this little girl had been before that - despite being in such pain - that's a hero."

Behind every "hero child" is a "team of heroes," David maintains. Due to the complicated nature of her condition, Grace has visited several areas

of SickKids, including genetics and physiotherapy. "We've met people who have taken us into their hearts and souls," says Liz. "We were blessed with this child and had no idea how serious her condition was but all the right people have been there for her, right from the beginning."

"I couldn't imagine this world without her in it," says Liz. "I think she's destined for great things, whether it's to help promote the incredible work and people at SickKids or simply to make people smile."

Thanks to the support this real-life hero has received, her physical condition and quality of life have improved dramatically. Now five, Grace weighs 28 pounds, is in senior kindergarten, loves the colour pink and is learning to play the piano. She's also learning to walk with braces that help support her legs. "She's happy, incredibly vivacious and chatty," says Liz. "She also loves hugs."

Did you know?

- Osteogenesis imperfecta (OI) is a genetic bone disorder characterized by fragile bones that break easily. It is also known as "brittle bone disease."
- OI is caused by an error called a mutation on a gene that affects the body's production of the collagen found in bones and other tissues. It's not caused by too little calcium or poor nutrition.
- The Centre for Genetic Medicine at SickKids has the potential to have a significant impact on the health of children, as 90% of chronic diseases have a genetic component and known genetic diseases account for over half of hospital admissions.



HAVING THE POWER TO

"Transcend all the pain and isolation to kick cancer in the butt and still be a kid." - Sitara, Hunter's Mom.

Together we will help more real-life heroes.