



Healthy Habit: PERSISTENCE

WENDY'S STORY "To Find a Smile"

Some of you may have met, seen, or heard about Wendy because of her participation in the Operation Smile Final Mile in March 2010. Though only 5 years old, Wendy now has a new smile and new hope for a better life, because of her parents' persistence, and because of the persistence of students like you who were determined to ensure her happiness.

Wendy Maria Gutiérrez, is a young girl from *Azacualpa*, a small village of approximately 2,000 residents in the mountainous area of southwestern *Honduras*. Wendy and her parents, Lucia and Lorenzo, belong to an indigenous community called Lenca. Her father is a farmer and makes modest living growing rice, beans, and potatoes; and her mother is a housewife.

When Wendy was born, her parents were sad to learn she had a cleft lip. They were worried that because of her facial deformity, she would not have the same opportunities as other children in the village, and they worried for her happiness. Lucia and Lorenzo could not afford the costs of surgery, and were desperately searching for a way to have Wendy's cleft lip repaired so she could attend school, make friends, and lead a happy life.

Last year, when Wendy was 4 ½ years old, her parents learned of an Operation Smile medical mission taking place in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, 119 miles away from their home town. With the hope of Wendy having a new smile, and persistence to make this dream a reality, the Gutierrez family departed from their isolated village for the first time ever and headed to Tegucigalpa. This was not an easy trip for them, since they had no car and very little money. To get to Tegucigalpa, Wendy and her parents had to travel for nearly 8 hours. They traveled by foot for *2 hours*, took an *hour* taxi ride to the bus station, and then rode the bus for *5 hours* to reach the Operation Smile medical mission.



Though Wendy and her parents felt pleased to have arrived safely in Tegucigalpa, they were unsure yet if Wendy would be chosen to receive surgery, since hundreds of other people had arrived in need of surgery too. After much waiting, Lucia and Lorenzo were informed that not only had Wendy been chosen to receive surgery to repair her cleft lip, she had also been chosen to be an honored guest of the Operation Smile Final Mile in Virginia. Her parents were excited to learn that Wendy would be getting surgery, but now had to decide whether or not they would continue the journey to the United States for the Operation Smile Final Mile.

The family decided to continue their journey, and hoped that their experiences could allow them to be a part of helping more children with clefts. To get to the United States, Wendy and her parents traveled from Honduras to Miami, Florida and Miami to Norfolk, Virginia. It was their first time in an airplane, first time in the United States, and everything was new to them. They stayed with a family in Virginia Beach, visited many schools to share Wendy's story and thanked runners for helping Operation Smile. They also met with Dr. Magee, who would perform Wendy's surgery.

Wendy ran in the Operation Smile Final Mile, and afterwards received corrective surgery on her cleft lip. Her surgery was successfully completed, and she has since returned with her parents to her homeland in Honduras to begin a new life with a brand new smile. Though the journey was not easy, and Wendy's parents could have given up many times along the way, their persistence through obstacles and the unknown allowed Wendy to have a better life. Thousands of elementary school runners like you have touched the lives of Wendy, Lucia and Lorenzo. They will forever feel thankful for those who helped raise money for children all over the world to have new smiles, and for the gift they were given – the gift of a smile for Wendy.

Think about how having persistence can help you achieve your goals, and can assist you in supporting others who need your help. Wendy, Lucia, and Lorenzo have a lot of great qualities they needed to ensure Wendy had a happy life. Everyone has great qualities; what are yours?