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Thank you, Bermuda, for helping to save my life

By René Hill

On May 24 when many were preparing for the Bermuda Day celebrations, a little boy celebrated his 12th birthday.

One might dare say, "So what?"

But Mihdi Joon Brock wasn't expected to live after being diagnosed with progressive kyphoscoliosis when he was six months old.

To have him reach this milestone is truly a medical feat.

In a surprise visit immediately after the holiday, he and his father Marvin called into *The Royal Gazette* to extend their gratitude through the newspaper to all who have given financial assistance through the Mihdi Joon Fund.

The fund benefits Mihdi and others in Bermuda who rely on Chinese medicine to improve various ailments.

In person, Mihdi was much like any other lively young boy despite having a twisted spine.

Often restricted in his travel, he was having the time of his life while here.

"I can say is that he has been asking, even begging, to return home for years now," said Mr. Brock.

"The treatment schedule, his condition, and finances were the principle reasons for not being able to get back to the Island earlier.

"Mihdi had a very full day on his birthday, [May 24]. First he spent time in worship with other members of the Baha'i Faith, then he visited and had a barbeque with paternal family and friends. I must say he was, and continues to be, very appreciative for the chance to see and spend time with his aunt, uncle and cousins.

"The look on his face when he was with his aunt and uncle was priceless. He got to meet and enjoy time with cousins young and old. I think he will treasure those moments."



Focused on the future: Mihdi Joon Brock made a surprise visit to the Island last month. The young boy celebrated his 12th birthday in Bermuda.

After the Bermuda Day Half Marathon Derby, in which his stepsister, Bermuda's top female boxer Teresa Perozzi ran, they went fishing.

"Fishing has been high on Mihdi's list for years. He was over the moon and just so grateful for the opportunity," said his dad, who is also Mihdi's primary caregiver.

Added Mihdi: "It felt good for me to turn 12 back in my homeland – a real pleasure.

"It was incredible to have people recognise me from the stories about me there. People said they knew me from my picture in the paper.

"I felt like a justice league hero. Thank you, thank you, thank you to Bermuda for helping to save my life. I promise to continue my fight, and I want to be able to help others.

"I'll continue fighting forever."

Bermudians also took a delight in seeing the youngster here, his father said.

"It was very clear that Bermudians from all walks of life – top-ranking banking officials to the average person working in regular jobs or fishing for a living – know Mihdi and are supporting him," said Mr. Brock.

"People mentioned to him, even before we reached the Island, that he was very popular at home. I know he understood this because I caught him asking a youngster if that boy knew who he was. I did have to immediately address this with him and noticed little repeat after that.

"He played with other kids in his sister Teresa's Warwick neighbourhood, and enjoyed a fair amount of time with his nephew Micah. For Mihdi, the most outstanding thing about being back home was being with his family."

When asked what it was like to meet the some of the people who have been his lifeline, the preteen said: "It was a pleasure to meet them, and it felt like family."

The simple furniture the pair sleeps on in the modest two-bedroom apartment they've lived in in Los Angeles since March of 2001, is perfect for his son's treatment, Mr. Brock explained.

"[His doctor, Baolin Wu] prescribed that Mihdi sleep flat on his back on a wooden bed covered simply by a thin sheet.

"I discovered very early on that I had to sleep on a board as well or he would get off his and get into my bed that had a mattress. For years now, we have both been sleeping on a board covered by a thin sheet.

"Now I don't like, or want, to sleep on anything else anymore. My spine and body overall causes me tremendous pain and headaches if I sleep on anything else these days."

The furniture is just one part of everything that has contributed to Mihdi's well being, Mr. Brock stated.

"At birth, he had to overcome fluid on his brain, a blockage at his heart, followed by a heart operation to resolve that condition.

"He has failed to thrive and as a result is four feet tall and weighs 54 pounds at 12 years of age.

"He has survived several bouts of pneumonia and respiratory issues that have been treated with antibiotics, a stroke, and a five- to six-foot fall in January of this year that set him back almost a year in treatment progress.

"Notwithstanding this, he continues to exert a tremendous will to live and to do whatever Dr. Wu prescribes in order to do that. He has expressed a strong desire not to have surgery for his curved spine."

Mr. Brock added: "We have done the Zen of it with Mihdi – come full circle with the best medical minds and facilities in North America.

"British Columbia Children's [Hospital] saved his life following the surprise of our financial and insurance situation. We chose not to allow the doctors there to perform brain surgery on him at six-and-a-half months.

"Soon after, Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center agreed with that decision, and said that his heart surgery went very well, but that he didn't need tubes placed in his head and body to drain the fluid off his brain.

"Boston Children's said it would do harm to treat him for a spine curving at two degrees a month. Shortly after, during his treatment by Dr. Wu, the top surgeon finally dismissed him as it became clear that I wasn't going to consent to the surgical procedure that could result in Mihdi's death, total paralysis, total disability, and/or the disordering of other body functions, etc.

"That procedure would have required additional operations following the initial one over the years; that statement doesn't include the mental fatigue, and other complications that could occur."

Last summer, July 2008, Mihdi and his father attended the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota.

"There the elite of the elite in specialists of Western medicine could still not offer a treatment that could be sure to not endanger Mihdi's life," said Mr. Brock.

"Now, I have the latest report in hand from UCLA, which basically gives us the same information. There is no answer in Western medicine for Mihdi's health problems that might not cause him even greater harm."

It was the finding of Dr. Wu's book by family friend Raven Cloudwalker that saved Mihdi from undergoing surgery and, possibly, a life of discomfort and pain.

"Dr. Wu was born to a family who had been physicians to the Emperor of China for generations," explained Mr. Brock. "He was taken to the Taoist White Cloud Monastery at age four.

According to Mr. Brock, Dr. Wu a physician of Taoist and traditional Chinese medicine, having gained accreditation from Beijing University.

Dr. Wu received a medical degree from Kyoto University as well as a a doctorate in neurophysiology.

For more information on Mihdi's journey visit www.thelotus.com or www.themihdijoonfund.org.

Donations may be made to the Mihdi Joon Fund, Bermuda Charity #547, PO Box HM 1987, Hamilton, HM HX or Bank of Bermuda: 010 500015 011 or Butterfield Bank: 20-006-060-777995-100.