

OP **Walk** TALK

A PUBLICATION FOR THE FRIENDS OF OPERATION WALK DENVER

NOVEMBER 2010 PANAMA TRIP



by Todd M. Miner,
M.D., *Board Chairman,*
Operation Walk Denver

As we begin a new year, many of us will look back on 2010 as one with considerable financial and unemployment challenges. Many in the United States have faced hardships that have not been encountered here in decades. Yet, I submit that we are blessed. We are blessed that most here have comfortable housing, an abundance of food and easy access to transportation to purchase the things we need. When you reside in a privileged country it is easy to feel short-changed when hard times force you to stick to a tighter budget, and to forego some indulgences. Providing care for less fortunate people in developing countries is a wonderful reality check.

Operation Walk Denver completed a very successful mission trip to Panama City, Panama from November 11–17 and performed 75 joint replacement procedures in four days. In addition, team members celebrated the five-year anniversary of this incredible mission work in Panama. A special ceremony was hosted by the First Lady of Panama, Ms. Marta Martinelli in Balboa Park, Panama City. The event was attended by hundreds of former patients who had received the gift of walking through joint replacement performed by the Operation Walk Denver team



members. A traditional ceremonial dance was performed by a professional Panamanian dance troupe and many of our former joint replacement patients brought Operation Walk Denver team members on to the dance floor to celebrate! It was truly a heart-grabbing and spectacular moment as we all came together, not as providers and patients, but as old good friends. Many hugs and smiles were exchanged, and stories of how our Panamanian friends' lives had been so positively impacted by their joint replacements were shared.

What were we celebrating? I think we were celebrating opportunity, kindness and humanity. Let me share with you the story of Maria.

Maria is a 22-year-old Panamanian woman unfortunately stricken with a severe form of Juvenile Rheumatoid Arthritis, which has left her wheelchair-bound and unable to walk for approximately 11 years. Due to the destruction her arthritis had caused, her hips were



nearly fused, leaving her bent over at the waist. Maria nearly missed being treated by the Operation Walk team as she did not have transportation to the screening clinic or a reliable way to receive communication that Operation Walk Denver was in Panama. After the surgical schedule for the trip had been set, Mr. Alfredo Maduro arranged to bring Maria to meet the team members. Recognizing her desperate situation, we made a place for her in the surgery schedule to undergo bilateral hip replacement surgery. Replacing both hips simultaneously is rarely done in the U.S., however, if we had replaced only one of her hips on this trip she would have remained unable to walk.

Continued on page 2



Prior to her surgery, a team member asked Maria what she desired to do if her hips were replaced. "I want to play basketball and dance" was her reply. Maria underwent bilateral hip replacement surgery and the next morning took several steps with the physical therapy team members of Operation Walk Denver, her first steps in over 11 years. After her first post-operative day, Maria had a question ... "How long will I be able to keep my new hips before I have to give them back?" There was not a dry eye on the hospital floor that day. I repeat, we are blessed. To think that this remarkable young woman was willing to undergo major surgery to have the opportunity to walk, in her mind only temporarily, really puts everything in perspective. What are we really sacrificing in our lives and what are we thankful for in this new year? I am thankful to have met Maria.

Panama's Highest Humanitarian Award to Operation Walk Leaders



On November 14, 2010, Douglas A. Dennis, MD, and James Boyle, PA-C, were awarded Panama's highest civilian honor for their humanitarian work in that country. The Orden de Manuel Amador Guerrero medals were presented by Panama's First Lady, Marta Martinelli. President Ricardo Martinelli and the first lady also recognized the entire volunteer medical team for performing more than 450 total joint replacements for the impoverished citizens of Panama.

Dr. Dennis said the honor meant a great deal to him, but it "truly belongs to the entire team of

volunteers" who worked so hard over five years to change the lives of so many people in Panama. Sixty-five healthcare volunteers traveled to Panama City, Panama, in November, performing 76 total knee and hip replacements on that medical mission trip alone.

Dr. Dennis serves as executive director of Operation Walk Denver, and Boyle is the organization's medical coordinator. More information about Operation Walk Denver is available at www.opwalkdenver.org.



Left to Right: Ricardo Martinelli Berrocal— President of the Republic of Panama, Dr. Douglas Dennis, Marta Linares de Martinelli—First Lady of the Republic of Panama, Jim Boyle, FACHE, Franklin J. Vergara—Panama's Minister of Health



Going to Panama with Operation Walk Denver was an experience I will never forget. I cannot begin to explain how impressed I was with Dr. Dennis and his team. I was amazed how quickly after arrival they started seeing patients, scheduling surgeries and operating. It is definitely a well-oiled machine Dr. Dennis has put together. Everyone worked diligently to care for as many patients as possible.

The patients, their stories and their gratitude for this opportunity to have surgery was inspiring. Teolinda, an elderly lady, said she had been praying for three years that she would be selected, and finally God answered her prayers. There was a gentleman who was nearly wheelchair-bound because his knees were too painful to stand on. Dr. Miner replaced both knees and the family was planning to hire a band for his next birthday so he could dance. They told me he used to love to dance, but hadn't been able to in years. There are many similar stories that could be shared.

I came back from Panama feeling even more confident in the mission of Operation Walk Denver. I'm excited to be raising money for such a worthwhile cause. Thank you for your financial contributions which help us continue this successful program. Your gifts make miracles happen.

Ed Ammon
Porter Hospital Foundation Director

2010 Walk of Dreams

On Saturday, September 18, 2010, the Marriott Denver City Center transformed into a South Pacific tropical paradise for the fifth annual Walk of Dreams Gala. A warm community of support was apparent as 238 honored guests came wearing their favorite cocktail beach attire to support Operation Walk Denver.

After the cocktail hour, Randy Haffner, Porter Adventist Hospital CEO, kicked off an enjoyable and informative evening. Dr. Doug Dennis, executive director and founder of Operation Walk Denver, shared his vision and passion for “restoring the joy of walking” to men and women around the world afflicted with debilitating arthritis and joint pain. A video, produced by Barry Bortnick, gave us a glimpse of how each surgery impacts an individual, a family, a community and a country.

Auctioneer Gary Corbett infused humor and fun into the live auction, which featured a MIG jet ride with High Speed Missions and a lobster dinner for ten at the home of Dr. Doug and Debbie Dennis. In keeping with tradition, a 2011 trip to either Panama or Guatemala was auctioned as an opportunity to join the Operation Walk team and experience first-hand their amazing work.

The evening entertainment was provided by Dr. Kevin Fitzgerald, comedian, T.V. personality and doctor of veterinary medicine. Our guests also enjoyed the sounds of Hawaii from John “Keoni” Coelho and his performers from Hawaii Way Entertainment. The only thing missing was the sand at your feet and the waves of the ocean.

We express our sincere appreciation to all our event sponsors, donors and attendees who together raised almost \$91,000 to help fund the 2011 mission trips planned for Panama and Guatemala. It is only through this generosity that our dedicated Operation Walk Denver team is able to continue their significant work.

Mark your calendar and plan to attend the 2011 Walk of Dreams Gala on Saturday, September 17 at the Hyatt Regency Denver Convention Center.



Teolinda's Answered Prayer

Teolinda's quest for a knee replacement began three years ago. It began with prayer. We initially met Teolinda in the pre-operative screening clinic held on the first day of our most recent visit to Panama City, Panama. The conversation started by her sharing a Bible verse with us...Jeremiah 29:11, "For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord. They are plans for good and not evil, a future and a hope."

Teolinda's desire to rid herself of the constant pain of advanced arthritis in her knees does not end with the hope for relief. She plans to teach the native Indian tribes of Panama to read and write. She is fortunate to know three languages, English, Spanish and French. To accomplish this goal she would need to be able to walk to reach the tribes.

She truly believed that God would answer her prayers. She was placed on Operation Walk Denver's waiting list by a receptionist at Santo Tomas Hospital. It seemed the answer to her prayers was getting closer.

As the time for our mission trip drew near, she was instructed to obtain some blood work, an echocardiogram and to be examined by a cardiologist.

Without the preliminary examination and evaluation, her hopes would be dashed. It is difficult for a person of limited means to obtain these tests. Eventually she was able to obtain the required tests by paying out of pocket \$175, which is over half her monthly income. Even after obtaining the tests, the results needed to be reviewed by our medical team. Some of her paperwork she had brought to the hospital had been misplaced causing her faith to again be tested.

Our team of volunteers, working along with Santo Tomas Hospital, was able to obtain the necessary work-up and provide Teolinda with a new knee replacement—the first steps toward accomplishing her goal. Now her prayers are for us—that we will return soon.



Operation Walk Denver is a not-for-profit volunteer organization and relies heavily on contributions to fulfill its mission of restoring the joy of walking to people in developing countries. Because it is a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization as defined in Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, gifts made qualify as charitable contributions for income tax purposes. Gifts in any amount are most appreciated.

To make a gift or to learn more about Operation Walk Denver, please contact the Foundation at 303-715-7600 or visit our website at www.opwalkdenver.org.

Thank you for your support!



Welcome Aileen!

Aileen Paez, our newest Operation Walk Denver Development Board member, is certainly not new to the organization. She has participated in more than ten mission trips since her first trip in 2003. Her passion for serving others is shown by her dedication and comprehensive work in many areas of the program.

Aileen was born and raised in New York City and has one younger brother. Her mother is one of twelve siblings and her father is one of seven siblings, which has given her a grand total of 44 first cousins. Aileen received her Masters degree in Physical Therapy from Nova Southeastern University in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida and is currently employed at Presbyterian St. Luke's Hospital in Denver.

She met her husband, David, on the very first Operation Walk Denver trip in November 2003 to Nicaragua. At the time she was working in Miami. Her colleagues, who were interested in starting a Miami Operation Walk chapter, joined the Denver team to see what it was all about. She described the experience as love at first sight—with David and with Operation Walk. Aileen and David were married in October 2005 and have two sons, Nicolas and Lucas, ages four and two.

Aileen explained that healthcare professionals have a passion to help others. It's what they do every day. The team effort and hard work displayed on the mission trips benefit everyone. As a physical therapist, Aileen gets to witness the first steps a patient takes after their life-changing surgery.

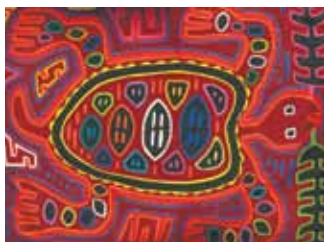
In Aileen's words, "As often as I hear patients thank us, I can't thank them enough. The work we do through Operation Walk Denver fulfills our basic need that God gave each of us to help people."



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