

## A new beginning on Staten Island makes Haitian earthquake victim Sarah smile

By **Kiawana Rich**

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Staten Island Advance/Jan Somma-Hammel

From left, Fabiemme Maurice of Haiti, Waad Borkan, 9, of Iraq, Fabiemme's sister, Sarah, 8, Rusul Noori, 12, of Iraq, and Noori's brother, Sadik Noori, have been given a new lease on life thanks to the Global Medical Relief Fund, based in Mount Manresa Jesu t Retreat House in Fort Wadsworth. (Staten Island Advance/Jan Somma-Hammel)

STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. -- Sarah Maurice is the picture of happiness.

The adorable little 8-year-old with the Cheshire cat smile has boundless energy and seemingly not a care in the world.

Flashback five months: Little Sarah spent two days pinned beneath the rubble of her home during January's devastating Haiti earthquake.

While Sarah survived, her mother, who was trapped with her, did not.

The little girl also lost her right leg, which was crushed in the quake and needed to be amputated.

"But I wasn't scared," Sarah noted, through New Brighton volunteer interpreter Kidert Jean-Mary. "Because my brother was not there, but he came. He was talking to me, but my mother had already died."

Sarah's sunny disposition belied that of someone who had suffered so much loss in her young life.

Now she and two other Haitian girls are among a group of children who will get a second chance at life courtesy of the non-profit organization Global Medical Relief Fund (GMRF). Based in Mount Manresa Jesuit Retreat House in Fort Wadsworth, Global Medical assists children victimized by war and disasters, providing them with surgery, prosthetics and healing.

Its primary miracle worker is Elissa Montanti, Global Medical's executive director. Ms. Montanti, who has traveled to the war-torn areas of Iraq and Bosnia, said Haiti topped her list.

"It was worse than Iraq and worse



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Waad Borkan, 9, of Iraq, who received a leg, an arm and an eye, plays around with Sarah Maurice, 8, of Haiti, who will receive a leg. (Staten Island Advance/Jan Somma-Hammel)

than Bosnia; Haiti was pure devastation," recalled Ms. Montanti, describing crushed cars, ready-to-topple buildings, debris in the streets, crowded makeshift hospitals and people waiting on lines for hours for clean water and food.

Two trips to the devastated region allowed her to bring back Sarah along with Chantal Moril and Margarettte Pierre, both 17.

"I immediately saw them and their eyes said, 'Please help me,'" recalled Ms. Montanti. "How can I not help them?"

"Everything went blank," recalled Ms. Moril, who lost her left arm because she couldn't get medical help for eight days. "But I asked Jesus to wash me white with the blood and heal me. Jesus brought me back."

Of Ms. Montanti, she said, "I felt God had sent me an angel," and now she said she has hope and a future.

"I was so saddened. I cried a lot. I asked God to take my life because I had lost one arm and because I had become handicapped," said Ms. Pierre, who lost her right arm.

But all that changed since she met Ms. Montanti.

"When I met her she convinced me that everything would be all right. She was telling me I would get a prosthesis and then I would be able to do anything that I wanted."

Now Ms. Pierre looks forward to going to college and running her own business. "I am going to be the boss," she said with a smile.

"I am shocked they are so well-adjusted," said interpreter Jean-Mary of the kids' overwhelming progress. An NYPD police officer, Kidert, a native of Haiti, said, "They've seen so much and been through so much you would think they would be very reclusive but they are bright, happy kids."

The girls, accompanied here by either parents or guardians, now eagerly await their new prosthetics courtesy of Shriner's Hospital in Philadelphia.

And the goodness keeps flowing. The children have benefited from a carnival at Resurrection Middle School in Rye, N.Y. which raised \$18,000 for GMRF. The Petrides School in Sunnyside performed a benefit concert. Meanwhile, Christ United Methodist Church, 1890 Forest Ave., Graniteville, will host a fundraiser Sunday and May 23 at 10:30 a.m.

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**Global Medical Relief Fund Helps Hatian Amputees**