



REAL LIFE

SMILING AGAIN

After many years of surgery and treatment, life is looking up for Theresa.

THIS COURAGEOUS FILIPINO TEEN HAS BEATEN THE ODDS

BRAVE BURNS VICTIM

'I'm so happy to be alive'

Poor Theresa had so much scar tissue that her chin was fused to her breast bone for years, until surgeons could operate.

Theresa Rosales is the bravest of young women, an 18-year-old whose extraordinary determination to overcome the odds inspires all those she meets.

As she says, with a gorgeous grin: 'I feel so happy now.'

But there was a time when Theresa wanted to hide away from the world. Critically injured at the age of eight in a fire at her home in the Philippines, Theresa was left with horrific scars and skin contractures that rendered her unable to raise her arms and head or even close her mouth.

'I was playing hide and seek at the time with my brother and sister at home in Manila,' Theresa says. 'We didn't have electricity, so we had a kerosene lamp on top of a cupboard. I must have bumped into it and the lamp fell on top of me.'

Set ablaze, Theresa was rushed unconscious to a local

hospital where she remained in a coma for six days, while her distraught parents were told to prepare for the worst.

'The doctors said it was a miracle when I woke up, and then I was in hospital for a year,' Theresa says.

Returning home, in constant pain, she was shunned by her peers. Hiding her face behind her hair, Theresa eventually stopped going to school.

Hope came, however, many years later when not-for-profit organisation Interplast Australia & New Zealand referred Theresa to Australia's Children First Foundation.

'That changed my life and I am very grateful,' Theresa says. 'Before that, in the Philippines, no-one could do much to help me, and my mum had to do almost everything for me.'

In June 2014, the Children First

Foundation brought the then-16-year-old and her mother Elna to Australia. Here, Theresa underwent several life-changing plastic surgery operations at Sydney's Concord Hospital, before travelling to rural Victoria to recuperate at the Foundation's Miracle sMiles Retreat and begin intensive physiotherapy under the guidance of St Vincent's Private Hospital Melbourne.

And as senior retreat manager Pat Weldon says, Theresa's physical and emotional transformation has been simply remarkable.

'When we first met Theresa, she found it very hard to talk,'

Pat says. 'Once she had the operations and physio began, her personality started to come out.'

While Theresa still faces further surgery in Australia over the next year, she is looking forward to returning to Manila in the near future. And she couldn't be more excited about the next chapter in her life.

'I love drawing and I really want to be an architect one day,' she says. 'I'd love to design incredible houses that are unique with amazing technology.'

By Jackie Brygel NT

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