



Wow!

Like misfortune, inspiration has a way of coming without warning. A moment of high privilege for those present took place last Thursday evening at the home of Barbara and Fred Clifford on Water Street. The occasion was a small fundraiser for major benefactors of the Children's Well-Being Foundation, founded by Dr. George Whitelaw in 2007.

The inspiration for the CWB Foundation was "a 16-year-old Costa Rican girl with a flesh-eating bacterium. She had had both legs amputated and her mother had been told to prepare for her to die" [Clipper editorial, "A Great Cause, A Fine Party," 8/31/14].

Her name is Paulette Villafranca. We knew she was going to be at the Cliffords, but at first didn't realize that the beautiful young woman shyly circulating around the picture-windowed living room overlooking a gently lapping high tide was the one who had come from Costa Rica to speak to us.

When Ms. Villafranca was introduced she spoke of her mother's being told when her daughter was 14 to "make peace with God;" of meeting Dr. Whitelaw; of being flown to Shiner's Hospital in Cleveland with special permission to overfly Cuba because it was feared she wouldn't survive a longer route; of arriving safely, but then living for two years with constant pain. She described being given the choice of never walking on her own legs, or consenting to amputation and prostheses – and being able to walk.

"There I was," she says. "I was a child alone in a strange country, unable to speak its language, having to make the most important decision of my life. I have never regretted it!"

With incisiveness and humor she describes many skin grafts; her seemingly miraculous recovery from constant pain; and of learning to walk with prostheses. "With my most recent ones I asked them to make me taller. Looking around the room she smiles and says, "You can't do that!" Next time I'm going to have them make me even taller!"

Paulette learned English and completed high school in the United States. But she is now back in Costa Rica. She has been working at Hewlett Packard and on her own time visits companies and universities as a motivational speaker. Wow!

George Whitelaw previously practiced his skills as an orthopedic surgeon in many poor countries, including Costa Rica. His encounter with Paulette in 2006 convinced him that making a permanent presence there was what he needed to do. Thus the CWB Foundation came into being. "I could stop practicing in Boston," he says, "and would immediately be replaced. But if the Foundation stopped operating in Costa Rica thousands of children would be affected."

The Foundation now has a fairly good spread of private contributors. But in Duxbury a total of 500 have contributed 200 people give every year. Perhaps more importantly, CWB's energy and its competent organization sprang from a select group of Duxbury citizens. In that sense this is its hometown.

The beautiful young woman who spoke at the Cliffords has returned to Costa Rica. Her presence among us was walking proof that saving a human life is the greatest *mitzvah*.

—D.A. Mittell, Jr.



L to R, Dr. W. Hardy Hendron of Duxbury; Dr. George Whitelaw of Duxbury; Kim Cunningham, Children's Well-Being Foundation executive director; Paulette Villafranca, former patient of the Children's Well-Being Foundation; Fred & Barbara Clifford of Duxbury; Ron Ramseyer of Duxbury and Chairman of the Children's Well-Being Foundation Board of Directors.