



Valya Andreeva is walking again and flies home to Russia today to start the next chapter of her life.

Andreeva, who grew up as an orphan in Russia, was in danger of losing her right leg when two relief organizations brought her to the Modesto area in February. In August 2006, she suffered a compound fracture when a motorcycle struck her in a rural area of Russia.

She didn't receive prompt treatment, which prevented the infected broken bones from mending, and Russian doctors said they would have to amputate.

The Sonora-based Russian Orphan Rescue Inc. and the Medical Relief Foundation of Modesto arranged for her to have surgery at Doctors Medical Center. A team led by Dr. John Casey, a Modesto orthopedic surgeon, performed the surgery in April, successfully fusing the broken bones.

Andreeva, 19, stopped using crutches 3½ weeks ago and is walking with a slight limp. She was all smiles Monday when she returned to DMC to thank the hospital staff and say goodbye.

"I am really happy for what you did," she said. "I think about how God helped me through Dr. Casey and everyone."

Andreeva arrived in February with a metal contraption around her right leg and her face etched with pain. She stayed at the home of Patrick and Barbara Day of Sonora. Day runs Russian Orphan Rescue, which works in Russia and Ukraine to improve conditions for children who were abandoned or have lost their parents.

Doctors removed the Russian-made device, which had rods sticking through the leg and was supposed to help the bones grow together. They put a splint on Andreeva's leg and gave her crutches to use until the main surgery in April.

During the 4½-hour operation, the surgical team reinforced the fibula and tibia with bone grafts and packed the wound with growth protein to promote healing. Casey also drove a stainless steel rod through the tibia to give her support.

All of the services were donated, including the hospitalization, radiology, supplies and follow-up visits.

About the only complication after surgery was her appetite. Andreeva didn't eat for three or four days, until members of a Russian church came to visit and brought her Russian food. Also, the hospital had its three Russian-speaking nurses tend to the teenager.

In the four months after the surgery, Andreeva had follow-up appointments with Casey to monitor the healing and physical therapy in Sonora. A few weeks ago, Casey determined the leg bones were bearing enough weight for her to walk.

During her stay, Andreeva improved her English by taking language classes in Tuolumne County, where she also learned some Spanish and Chinese from classmates. She made friends with other Russian immigrants in the area and people at the Sierra Bible Church, where the Days attend. And she went on trips to Yosemite and Sequoia national parks.

"She can now say 'hamburger' in four languages," Day said Monday.

Day said Andreeva was facing a bleak future in Russia if she had lost the leg. Orphans in Russia are treated as second-class citizens and have high rates of homelessness, drug addiction, incarceration and suicide, he said.

The nonprofit Medical Relief Foundation, which works to enhance medical care in developing nations, including Russia, told her story to government officials there. They offered her a full scholarship to a medical school in Vladivostok, as long as she keeps her grades up.

Andreeva will return to a girls home operated by Russian Orphan Rescue in the city of Ryazan. She has a year of school to finish before continuing her education.

"I will miss America," she said. "I have family that loves me here. I had a very good time."

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