



Cornea Research Foundation of America

Luis Almeida's Story

While on a break from a construction site one sunny afternoon in Quito, Ecuador, a young stone mason shared his story of vision impairment with two brothers, and as a result his life has been changed forever.

Through a collaboration of good will, the Cornea Research Foundation of America, in partnership with the Indiana Lions Eye and Tissue Transplant Bank, Quito Barrio Outreach, an organization that supports poor communities in Quito, Ecuador and several generous church groups in Illinois, Luis Almeida has regained the gift of sight.

While on a church mission trip to construct a second story on an adult education center in the Rancho Alto barrio outside Quito, Ecuador, brothers Jim and Jack Herrmann, along with other members of the church mission, befriended an Ecuadorian stone mason named Luis Almeida. Working alongside Luis and other locals, they would all enjoy a beer together after they finished for the day. Although Jim and Jack did not speak Spanish, they immediately bonded with the Spanish-speaking man, his wife Veronica and his two young children, Kevin and Camilla.

While on a break one afternoon, Luis pointed to his eyes—trying to communicate that there was a problem. Another man on the mission team, Lupe Alvarez, had helped translate before when they could not get past the language barrier. As Lupe translated, they learned that Luis was almost blind in one eye and could not see well out of the other. The brothers were concerned for Luis and the future of his young family. They soon learned that a Lion's group had identified that he had a problem with his cornea, the clear window on the front of the eye. Luis shared his worries that his wife and young son would soon become responsible for supporting the family after Luis, only 31 years old, could no longer work due to his debilitating vision loss.

While on the plane home, Jim and Jack could not stop thinking about Luis and his family. What would happen to them if they did not try to help? Unlike the United States, Ecuador does not have the supply of donated corneas to conduct transplants in a reasonable time frame. The more the brothers thought about it, the more they were inspired to help Luis regain his sight. As they had witnessed, he was a good family man; a hard worker whose quality of life was bound to be dramatically altered once he lost his sight completely. "It was heart-breaking to think this man would soon be blind and unable to support his children" Jim Herrmann commented, "and at the same time knowing that just a few hours away in the United States, we were blessed with the doctors and organizations we knew could help him...we just could not walk away" he added.

Once they arrived back home in Illinois, they went searching for information. They went online and conducted a search for "Quito + Cornea" and the Cornea Research Foundation of America (CRFA) was one of the results. Once they visited www.cornea.org and realized that CRFA was located in an adjacent state, they called Marianne Price, PhD, the executive director and the collaboration to help Luis began.

The Indiana Lions Eye and Tissue Transplant Bank agreed to provide the cornea, eye surgeon Dr. Francis W. Price, Jr. of Price Vision Group and the Central Indiana Surgery Center agreed to waive their fees. Jim and Jack were so happy that their plans to help Luis were coming to fruition. Now, all that was left was raising donations to cover the cost of travel and lodging in Indianapolis during the surgery and obtaining a visa to travel from Ecuador. Jack Herrmann noted "Once CRFA and Price Vision came aboard, everything else fell into place. We are so grateful to everyone at the Lions, CRFA, and Price Vision for their compassion, professionalism and willingness to help – it has been incredible". He added, "Luis will be going home to a grateful family, with renewed hope for his children's future. The entire Almeida family believes that a true miracle is happening to them. They cannot believe that so many people so far away that do not even know them would spend the time and money to help Luis regain his sight."

Thanks to generous individuals in their community who contributed to pay the travel expenses and Father Don and Father Paddy from Quito Barrio Outreach who helped Luis through the visa process, Luis made it to Indianapolis to

receive his cornea transplant surgery and treatment. "We were happy to coordinate this effort to help Luis regain his sight. It is especially heart warming to see all of the individuals and organizations who stepped up to help Luis," says Marianne Price of CRFA.

Luis has himself reflected upon his experience with the medical staff, commenting shortly after the procedure, "My wife Veronica and I cannot express our thankfulness enough. My children also understand that I would have surely lost my sight in Ecuador. This will allow me to continue to work to support our family. The medical staff has been extremely attentive and friendly, unlike anything I have experienced in Ecuador. May God bless all of them, all of those that have helped and all of their families for this wonderful gift!"

About the Foundation

The Cornea Research Foundation of America is a 501 (c) (3) not-for-profit educational organization that depends on donations, grants, and planned gifts to conduct research and publish findings. The organization was founded by Dr. Francis Price, Jr., M.D., in 1988 with a mission to establish a world center for corneal research and medical education specializing in corneal disease, corneal transplantation and intraocular lens surgery. The Foundation houses the largest data base of corneal transplant information in the Western hemisphere.

Since its inception, the Foundation has been led by Dr. Price and his passion for innovation and lifelong learning. To date, CRFA has participated in over 80 clinical and investigational studies and published more than 100 papers and manuscripts. The Foundation hosts medical education seminars regularly for physicians and publishes a newsletter for patients to share developments in ophthalmology.

For more information:

www.cornea.org

www.quitobarriooutreach.org

www.indianalionseyebank.org