

A grandfather's love

By Shirley Thomas



LABOUR OF LOVE: Councillor Cecil Peters and his recovering granddaughter at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation.

IT WAS almost 18:00 h and beginning to get dark on chilly December 30 last, when three-year old Tasha Felda Peters, of Bamboo Creek, in remote Region Eight (Potaro/Siparuni), was accidentally cut while playing in her parents' yard - the left hand being almost severed.

Faced with a 'do or die' situation, and driven by love and compassion, her 68-year old grandfather, Cecil Peters, an Amerindian Councillor, was determined that his injured granddaughter should lose neither life nor limb.

And so, mustering up courage and applying all the first aid skills he had, the brave old man, with no means of transportation at his disposal, was forced to do it by foot. Cradling the crying and bleeding child in his arms, he set out for the Bamboo Creek Health Centre - the nearest medical facility, about one hour's walk from his home.

But there was more in store for him than he'd bargained for, and it was here that his first aid skills served him in good stead, and helped save the little child who means so much to him and his family.

Peters ended up walking almost the entire night - from his Bamboo Creek home to the Bamboo Creek Health Centre, to the Paramakatoi Hospital and back home, before finally boarding a flight back at Paramakatoi, bound for Georgetown with the injured child. By then, it was about 09:30 h the next day.

Peters recalled that throughout his journey, one thing was foremost in his mind, and it was ensuring he did nothing to cause her to 'pass out'. And so, throughout, he held her in a position which would allow oxygenated blood to keep flowing to her brain, and not let her blood keep draining out of her body by way of the bleeding hand.

He also said that an equally arduous task was to keep the hand in a position that would prevent it from being completely severed. So, he had to be careful not to slip with her as he went up and downhill.

In good weather, the journey from Bamboo Creek to Paramakatoi is a compelling four hour walk at moderate speed, with no stops along the way. Both those villages are located in the Pakaraima mountain range - sparsely populated, and with no shelter along the way.

But on that night, it was wet and slippery; the wind blowing hard, and 'biting cold' on the mountain side, Peters said.

Because it was dark, visibility was considerably reduced. Hence trekking up and down the savannah mountain terrain under such conditions with an injured child in hand, made the journey even more tedious.

What made it even more difficult going up the mountainous terrain, he said, was that the child was fairly heavy, and he had to continue carrying her in one position all the time - without changing hands.

He felt the weight in his chest, in his back but he knew he couldn't give up - it was a labour of love. He said all he heard as he wended his way in the cold and dark night were the sounds of wild animals, owls and crickets.

On arrival at the Bamboo Creek Health Centre around 20:00 h, he waited a while for the Medex to be summoned. When the Medex realised the gravity of the injury, he ordered that the child be taken to the Paramakatoi Health Centre - another three hours walk away from the Bamboo Creek Health Centre.

Knowing the health facility had sterilised gauze, he said he managed to get the cooperation of the Medex to strap the injured hand with no fear of infection stepping in.

The walk from Bamboo Creek to the Paramakatoi Health Centre seemed unending, but luckily he met another Amerindian man who offered to help him carry the child some of the way. It was almost midnight Saturday when they arrived at the Paramakatoi Health Centre - cold, hungry and exhausted.

But the distraught grandfather said he refused to eat anything. At the health centre, the case was treated as emergency and arrangements made for little Tesha to be flown out to Georgetown very early next morning.

However, not being prepared for the trip to the city, the beleaguered grandfather was forced to return home to secure personal effects for himself and the injured child. He left her at the hospital and hastened back home.

He made it in three and a half hours, hurriedly snatched up a few bits of clothing and a bit of cash then, on foot once more, headed back to Paramakatoi where he would join the patient bound for the capital city.

It was 09:00 h on Old Year's Day when he got back to the Paramakatoi Health Centre - half an hour ahead of flight departure time.

He said he will always remember the good nature of a doctor at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC) who, once treatment on the child had commenced, left his office and went outside and sent someone to buy him (Peters) a drink and something to eat.

But he said that by then, he was so filled with gas, he vomited.

Tesha has been in the GPHC since and her condition greatly improved.

She is once more full of verve, and the chatty child she used to be before her injury at Bamboo Creek.

Now that the ordeal is over and the battle won, the faithful grandfather is gratefully counting his blessings.

He is continuing the daily trekking - but for now, it is from the Amerindian Hostel where he is being housed in Georgetown, to the GPHC where Tesha is recovering favourably.