



The Standard

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Visiting Mexican boy still critical after bike accident

By Karena Walter, St. Catharines Standard

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Local News - By KARENA WALTER

Standard Staff

Hermelindo Gutierrez waited a year and a half for a reunion with his wife and children, only to have his patience met with tragedy.

A seasonal worker from Mexico, Gutierrez has been stuck in St. Catharines since his kidneys failed in spring 2005. He must be hooked up to a dialysis machine three times a week.

Visits with his family are rare since it's expensive for his wife Fanny, their 11-month-old baby Sebastian, 13-year-old daughter Sayuri and nine-year-old son Sergio to travel to see their father.

So when they arrived Aug. 29 with the financial help of friends, it was supposed to be a joyful month-long reunion.

"It was great, the time that I had with all of them," Gutierrez said Wednesday in Spanish, translated by an English-speaking friend. "We went to the park. We all played football."

On Saturday, three days after his family arrived from Mexico, Sergio was riding a bicycle when he collided with a minivan on Rykert Street.

Now, the family is keeping vigil in the pediatric intensive care unit at Hamilton Health Sciences McMaster University site.

"We're all taking turns being with him," Gutierrez said, speaking from his room at the Ronald McDonald House in Hamilton. "Sometimes me, sometimes my wife, sometimes my daughter."

Surgeons have removed bone from Sergio's skull to relieve pressure caused by the swelling of his brain.

A friend said the extent of Sergio's brain injury is unknown because he has been kept sedated.

While Gutierrez speaks broken English, he and his family have been assisted by friends in dealing with the language barrier. As well, there's a nurse sometimes on shift who speaks Spanish.

The family is focused on Sergio, but Gutierrez still requires dialysis treatment every Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

He had to come back to St. Catharines Monday for the four-hour treatment at Niagara Health System's Ontario

Street site, but was trying to arrange for treatment in Hamilton Wednesday.

Gutierrez came to Ontario nine years ago to work through the seasonal agricultural workers program run by the Canadian and Mexican governments. He would stay for eight months of the year and then go back home.

For the last several years, he worked at Pioneer Flower Farms on Seventh Street in St. Catharines.

Leaving his family for long periods wasn't easy, but the higher wages in Canada meant he could start building their dream home in Mexico.

He had the walls up and roof put on by March 2005, when he started to experience pain in his feet, which turned out to be a symptom of kidney failure. Since then, he's had to stop working and depend on the dialysis machines.

Gutierrez has claimed refugee status in Canada so he can continue treatment here, afraid he will die if he goes back to Mexico and can't afford to pay for dialysis.

Because he worked in Canada for eight months of the year, paying taxes and employment insurance, he isn't covered by health insurance in Mexico.

Gutierrez told The Standard in December his problems would be solved if he could afford a kidney transplant. Then he could work and travel to Mexico again.

He has 10 siblings willing to be tested to donate their kidneys, but they cannot afford the operation, which would have to be funded privately.

His dialysis is covered by the federal government's interim program for refugee claimants.

It's unknown how his son's medical costs will be paid.

He's still waiting to find out what will happen with his refugee claim, but for now, his priority is his son's recovery.

Police said Sergio was riding a BMX bike on the north side of the street around 5:15 p.m. when he crossed the road in front of a GMC Safari van. The impact threw him forward and knocked him out of his shoes. He was taken to hospital in critical condition. His condition was unchanged Wednesday.

"We had planned to go to Marineland and just to spend time together after so long apart," Gutierrez said.

Gutierrez said his daughter Sayuri made a painting of her brothers and parents on Tuesday. It shows them playing football together like they did at the Ontario Street park before Sergio's accident.

"She wants to hang it up in his hospital room."

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