

effect:hope

The Leprosy Mission Canada

The Umbrella Girl ***





*Chiang Mai
Thailand*

There is a street in the small town of Chiang Mai, Thailand covered with bursts of red, blue, yellow and green. Everywhere you look there are more colours! It's called the Umbrella Street. There are hundreds of umbrellas all over people's lawns, on their doorsteps and in their gardens. This magical place is where Mali, an eight-year-old girl, lives with her mom, dad, two brothers and three sisters.

The whole family makes umbrellas. Every spare moment – before school, after school and all day on the weekends – is spent making beautiful umbrellas.





Each member of the family has a special job. First, Mali's dad and her brother build a strong wooden frame including a long handle and several spokes sticking out the top; just like a bicycle wheel. Then, Mali's mom and her sister stretch a fancy material called silk across the frame and tie it to the spokes with string. In the next step, Mali's oldest brother and sister paint beautiful flowers and other shapes on the silk. Mali's job comes next. She gets to finish the umbrella by attaching tassels of silk to each point on the umbrella. When the wind blows, the tassels sway back and forth – just like they are dancing!



Mali's Family



*M*ali is good at her job. She is very fast and many times people stop to watch her work. Mali is proud of what she can do – each umbrella makes her happy.

But one day, something very strange happened to Mali.

The paint on some of the newly made umbrellas was dry. She reached for a tassel and began to tie it on – just like she always did. But her fingers wouldn't work properly! She kept dropping the tassels and couldn't tie the knots as she had done before.



When she noticed some red spots on her arms. Dropping everything, she ran to show her mother. Not knowing the cause of these patches, her mother suggested Mali get some sleep and they would keep an eye on the spots.

After another couple of months, Mali noticed the patches had spread up her arms and on her legs! She was so scared! She ran to tell her mother who took her to see the doctor right away.

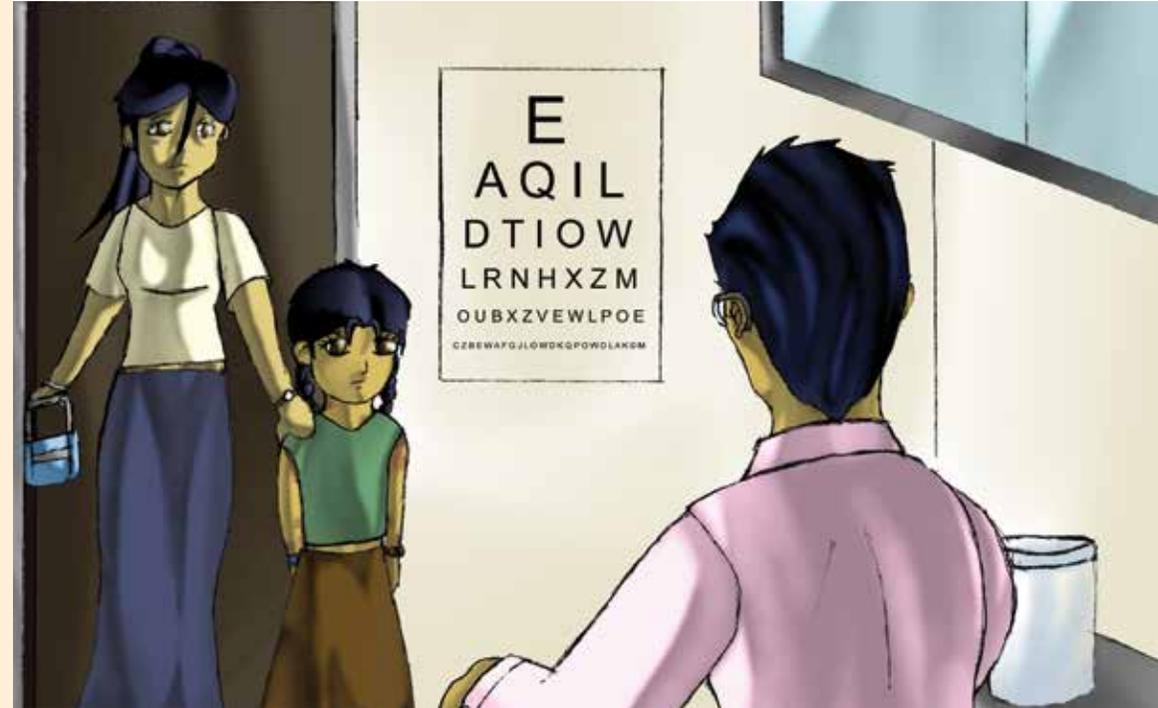


The doctor played a game with Mali. She had to close her eyes tight and the doctor touched her arms and legs in different spots with a cotton ball. Each time she felt the cotton ball, she had to tell him where it was. Mali liked playing the game, but the doctor didn't need long to understand what was wrong with Mali.



The doctor was very nice. He told Mali about leprosy. He told her that she would get better, but she would have to follow his instructions very carefully. The very first thought Mali had was needles! She hated needles! But the doctor told her all she had to do was take some medicine every day called Multi-Drug Therapy. These pills would get rid of the leprosy and make Mali feel much better.

Mali had leprosy.





The doctor said Mali would have to stay with a bunch of other kids her age at a hospital where the doctors and nurses all knew a lot about leprosy. After giving her mother a big hug and kiss good-bye, she left with a nurse named Nutiga.

Nutiga introduced her to lots of other kids who also had leprosy. She also told Mali about the school at the hospital. Mali was surprised she still had to go to school, even though she was sick. Nutiga reminded her that she would miss too many days of school if she waited until she was better before returning.

Mali liked it at the hospital. She made many new friends and the nurses and doctors were all very kind. Mali was careful to exercise her hands every day to keep them strong. The nurses were there whenever she needed extra help.

For many weeks, Mali stayed at the hospital. She felt much better, but missed her family a lot.

One day, a doctor came to Mali and told her about Jesus. He told her how Jesus loved her – no matter what happened. Then the doctor gave Mali the best news yet – she could go home in a week!

“But,” he said, “you must continue to take your medicine every day for a year – just like at the hospital. Or the leprosy will come back and it will be much more difficult to cure.”

She couldn't keep her mind on her schoolwork or her exercises. “Lift your wrist... I'm going home! Straighten your fingers... I'm going home!” It was all she could think about.

When the day finally came, all her new friends gathered around and Nutiga told Mali how much they would miss her. Then they gave her a present. A box wrapped in pretty red paper and tied with a big, beautiful orange bow.

As Mali ripped off the paper, she found a Bible inside! Now she could read about Jesus whenever she needed His help!

Just then, she turned around and saw her mother walking into the hospital. Mali couldn't hold back her excitement. She ran and jumped into her mother's open arms! How she had missed her mom all this time. Mali had never been away from home this long before. Being held by her mother made her feel safe and happy again. She didn't worry about leprosy at all anymore.



Mali was so excited!

*W*hen she returned home, Mali told her brothers and sisters all about the hospital and her new friends. She knew how much she would miss them. But she was so happy to be back at home on the Umbrella Street.

The very next day, right after school, Mali picked up a brightly coloured umbrella. Then she picked up a silky, gold tassel. After one or two tries, Mali's fingers worked just as fast as they always did!

*The
End!*

