

# ***The Eagle's Nest***

***By Philip J. Lawson, J.D.***

*Philip J. Lawson, J.D. was the founder of the Knoxville law firm of Wimberly & Lawson and retired from active practice on December 31, 2004. Phil has lectured and taught widely on a variety of aspects of labor, employment law, leadership, and personal growth.*



## ***Looking For and Finding the Blessing of "Perfection"***

***Phil and Neville Lawson***

This story is about two young boys, Sashi who lived in New York City, and David who lived most of his life in Jamaica at The Nest Children's Home run by the Salvation Army. Each boy was surrounded by "family" and/or loved ones who loved them dearly. Each "family" questioned, "If God is love, why is their loved one like he is, and if God is perfection, where was their perfection?" Sashi's family and David's loved ones did learn where Sashi and David's "perfection" came from and learned it from the most unusual place.

In the summer of 2003, our family traveled to Kingston, Jamaica with a ministry group to visit with the children at The Nest Children's Home. This is where we met David Smith, then 16 years old. David had been abandoned as an infant by his mother who did not have the means or capabilities to properly care for him and his special needs.

David was born with multiple birth defects; all four of his extremities were affected. His left hip was and remains dislocated. His right hip and leg had many problems. Both hands were diagnosed as club hands. He had no forearm and his right wrist was fused. He was not able to bend his right hand. David was left-handed and was able to bend that wrist. He had no ability to extend his arms. His hands faced each other in front of his body.

During our first visit to The Nest, my wife, Neville, and our children, Annie and Kelly, were greatly



touched by David and felt a strong desire to help him have a future. David had a sparkle in his eye and a beautiful smile. His many, many physical handicaps had not crippled him emotionally. We returned home with a very strong conviction to bring David to the United States for a visit and a medical evaluation.

The process of procuring a birth certificate took approximately six months. After obtaining a certified birth certificate and having it approved by the Jamaican Ministry of Health, we then applied for a visa for David to be able to enter the United States. David was granted a medical visa in April of 2005, and he flew to the United States in May 2005.

In June of 2005, Dr. Cameron Sears, a pediatric orthopedic surgeon with Knoxville Orthopedic Clinic, evaluated David. He was x-rayed from head to toe to determine and evaluate his orthopedic birth defects. Dr. Sears outlined an extensive plan and explained to us and to David his options and possibilities. Dr. Sears estimated a two and a half to three year surgery and recovery period, to be followed by extensive and lengthy physical therapy. David was very excited and willing to undertake the very long road ahead. At the end of this undertaking, the hope was that David would be able to stand in an upright position and walk as we do.

In May of 2008, David's surgeries, six in all, were completed. David is continuing in his physical therapy to regain his muscle strength in both legs. The sciatic nerve in his right leg was damaged during the first surgery and is continuing to heal, but very slowly. He wears a molded plastic brace on his lower right leg to support his ankle. David has a six-inch built-up shoe on his right foot to make up the difference in his leg lengths. He uses a pair of specially designed and molded crutches to assist in walking. The crutches were designed to accommodate his handicapped arms and hands.

From the beginning, we have felt that we have been led in this journey. David had been put with us and into our hearts. It has been by grace that we have been given an unconditional love for David. We love him as much as our own. We adopted David on May 6, 2009. We are still working out immigration-related problems and strongly believe we will be able to keep David in our family.



David in Jamaica 2002



David after adoption in Knoxville, Tennessee 2009

## SASHI

A little boy named Sashi went to a special school in New York City because, intellectually and physically, he couldn't keep up with the other kids.

Sashi's father took him to the park one day. There were a number of kids his age playing in a baseball game. He knew some of the kids. When they went onto the field, Sashi said to his dad, "Dad, think they'll let me play a little today?" The father went, "Oh! No! Who would want Sashi?" He wasn't well coordinated and didn't know the game that well, but he could see in his eyes that Sashi wanted to play. So he said, "Oh well, I'll at least try."

He went to a kid who was the third-base coach for one of the teams and said, "Could Sashi play?" The kid looked at him and said to a friend, "Sashi wants to play." The friend said, "Why not? This is the 8<sup>th</sup> inning and we're six runs behind. What difference does it make?" So they let Sashi play!

Their team was out at the bottom of the 8<sup>th</sup> and this was the 9<sup>th</sup> inning and they put Sashi right out just past the second baseman so he couldn't cause any trouble. And miraculously, for the first time in the whole game they get their opponents out – one, two, three – straight out! Then what happens? Their team gets up to bat, Sashi's team, and they get energized and they're getting hits and they start to score some runs. Finally, the bases are loaded and the winning run is going to come to bat! And it's Sashi's turn to hit. His father said, "Oh no! They'll never let Sashi hit. He can't hit and then he'll feel like a failure and this is stupid. I shouldn't have done this."

But this was the day of remarkable events! They let him hit! Sashi went up to the plate and when the pitcher saw Sashi coming, he moved forward as far as he legally could and underhandedly lobbed the ball toward Sashi. Sashi took a wild swing with his bat and missed the ball. His father said, "Oh no. Even with a soft pitch, he's going to strike out – then they're going to lose and then he's going to think he's a loser. Why did I do this?" But this was a remarkable day because a kid on Sashi's team came and got behind Sashi and put his arms around him and grabbed the bat with Sashi to help him hit. The father said, "Oh no. This is illegal. The other team will stop it and then they'll be out and Sashi will lose."

But this was the day of remarkable events! Nobody said anything! The pitcher moved even closer and closer. He lobbed the ball now to two people who were attempting to hit. They hit it and it

was a slow grounder back to the pitcher, and the father said, "Oh no! It's an easy toss to first base and they're out and they lose. Sashi's a loser."

Oh, but this was the day of remarkable events! The pitcher picked up the ball and, with a high arch, he pitched the ball over the first baseman's head. Sashi's teammates started hollering, "Run, Sashi, run." And the kid is running as fast as he can – as fast as his little legs will carry him. And he didn't know much about baseball so he ran past first base and he's between first and second base and there's the right fielder running with the ball toward the infield and the father says, "Oh no. He's going to throw it to 2<sup>nd</sup> and it will be an easy out and they'll lose."



But this was the day of remarkable events! The right fielder not only threw the ball over the 2<sup>nd</sup> baseman's head; he threw it over the third baseman's head into the bleachers. And now all 18 kids on both teams are hollering, "Run, Sashi, run! Run, Sashi, run!" And as he rounded 2<sup>nd</sup>, they're all yelling, "Run, Sashi, run!" And as he rounded 3<sup>rd</sup> base, they're all yelling, "Score, Sashi, score!" including the kid with the ball in his hands! When Sashi gets across the plate, they all pick him up and they carry him around the field and they're yelling, "Sashi! Sashi! Sashi!" **And his father said in that very moment, he got in touch with Sashi's perfection – it's how other people relate to him.**

It is through the generous help of others that we find our own perfection and the chance to learn and demonstrate more fully the gifts we have been born with and our purpose in life.

We thank the friends of David and Sashi for teaching us where David and Sashi's perfection comes from – **it's how other people relate to them!**

Think on these things!

With sincere best wishes to the members of the Smoky Mountain Paralegal Association,

Philip J. Lawson

(Note: I received a copy of the story of Sashi during a leadership conference in Chicago many years ago. I found it in my Treasure Drawer.)