

Newsday / K. Wiles Stable

Sylvia Castro, in the Ronald McDonald House after her throat surgery.

## 'This Is A Dream, Isn't It?'

When Sylvia Castro, a Guatemalan graphic arts student, awoke from an operation at Schneider's Childrens Hospital, she was able to use her voice for the first time in 4½ years.

"I said, 'This is a dream, isn't it?'" Castro, 21, recalled Tuesday. "I was very excited. I later called my father in Guatemala and when he heard my voice he said, 'How beautiful it is to hear you.'"

The delicate laser surgery performed on Castro's throat Jan. 7 was the second of two procedures coordinated by Dr. Frederick N. Lukash of Manhasset. The surgery was to restore Castro's oral cavity, which was damaged in 1984 when she swallowed a cleaning liquid containing lye.

"The doctors in Guatemala told me I would never speak again," she said. "I was angry with the doctors. I felt frustrated and I felt very sad."

Lukash, 41, son of Dr. Leslie Lukash, the Nassau County medical examiner, met Castro on a trip to Guatemala in March, 1986. He was sent by the volunteer Surgical Aid to Children of the World to perform plastic surgery, mostly cleft, lip and palate operations, on children in the Social Security Hospital in Guatemala City.

"We were making the rounds one day when they asked me to look at a patient. They didn't know what to do with her," Lukash recalled. "She was just languishing there."

The chemical burns had destroyed Castro's esophagus and scar tissue covered her vocal cords. She says she was experiencing emotional problems at the time and doesn't recall swallowing the liquid. With the damage to her throat, she was unable to swallow food, speak, or breathe naturally.

When Lukash met Castro, she was breathing

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tion through a tube into her stomach.

"I knew the operations she needed couldn't be done in Guatemala because they don't have the technology," Lukash said. He returned to Nassau County and persuaded several colleagues, including an anesthesiologist and three other surgeons, to volunteer their services to enable Castro to have the necessary operations.

"It would have been impossible for us to pay for their care," said Castro, whose father is a lawyer in Guatemala City. She said the cost of her initial medical care in Guatemala had left the family financially strapped. Castro and her mother paid for their transportation to the United States and were housed at the Ronald McDonald House at Long Island Jewish Medical Center in New Hyde Park. The hospital is part of the medical center.

The first operation, performed at Schneider's in August,

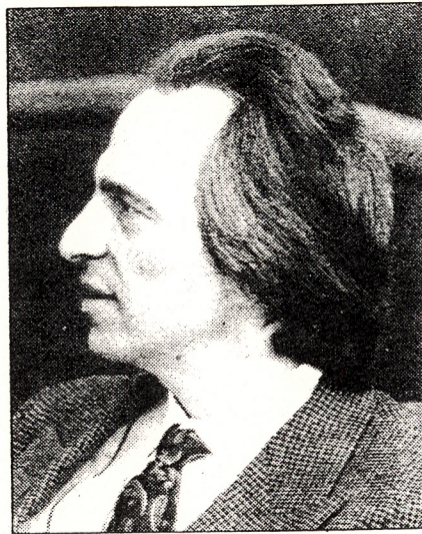
1987, enabled Castro to swallow food. Lukash and two other physicians, Dr. L. Michael Graver, a thoracic surgeon, and Dr. Mark Goldstein, an ear, nose and throat specialist, transplanted a piece of Castro's colon into her chest to replace the destroyed esophagus and act as a canal to enable her to swallow food.

Lukash also persuaded another colleague to donate an electrolarynx, or artificial voice box, which gave Castro a limited ability to communicate.

Castro returned to Guatemala but soon became frustrated with her speech impediment. She says she could speak only in raspy whispers.

Lukash arranged for her to return in December, and in January he and Dr. Mark J. Shikowitz, using a carbon-dioxide laser, removed the scar tissue that covered Castro's vocal cords, enabling her to speak normally.

"This has really changed my life," Castro said. "If it wasn't for them I don't know what would have happened."



Dr. Frederick N. Lukash