

*'I don't feel like I've really done that much, and yet his life is really getting ready to change.'*

Eric Haymes, on his efforts to help Nelson Castillo



Photographs by MYUNO J. CHUN Los Angeles Times

**A NEW SON:** Nelson Castillo, cradling his newborn son, was born with a deformity caused by dilated capillaries beneath the skin. An Encino entrepreneur has sought out doctors to correct the disfigurement. At left is Castillo's wife, Virginia Perez.

# Facial Birth Defect to Be Fixed

[Face, from Page B1] or he lacked the means to pay. In the year since that meeting, the cable man from Guatemala and the entrepreneur from the house with the smashing view of Los Angeles have fashioned a relationship that straddles what usually are distinct worlds in Los Angeles.

After months of searching, Haymes found a pair of Beverly Hills doctors who agreed to discount their fees. Haymes' church, Bel Air Presbyterian, has agreed to pay Castillo's medical bills. Doctors David Amron and Paul Nassif are to begin a series of surgeries on Castillo's face early next year.

Castillo could not have walked into the home of anyone more likely to help him. Haymes has a sort of Renaissance man-meets-Middle America quality. His interests become obsessions and deeply held values grow into charitable missions.

A native of Tulsa, Okla., he is lanky with spiky blond hair and boyishly rumpled clothes of indistinct color. He looks like a rocker and talks like a Boy Scout. Haymes took pictures of Castillo to doctors in Los Angeles and Orange County, searching for one who had both the expertise and equipment to perform the procedures. Sometimes Castillo went with him. Their first long ride was filled with awkward silence. Over time, though they never chatted much, their silences became companionable. After eight months of looking, Haymes found Amron and Nassif.

Castillo's malady is caused by dilated capillaries beneath the skin's surface, Nassif explained. The growths, called hemangiomas, are tufts of extra capillaries.

Both probably can be corrected, he added, but might require multiple surgeries over several years.

"There isn't a set protocol to follow, and each surgery will reveal whether another needs to be done," Nassif said. "In my mind, I thought, 'Inside of 60 days we'd have him done.'" Haymes said.

"I don't feel like I've really done that much, and yet his life is really getting ready to change. It makes me wonder who else is out there in your own backyard."



Photographs by MYUNO J. CHUN Los Angeles Times

**FAMILY BOND:** With his wife, Virginia Perez, watching, Nelson Castillo snaps a picture of the couple's newborn son with friend Eric Haymes.



**THEN:** Castillo was born with growths called hemangiomas. The condition is prominent in photograph taken when he was about 5.



**NOW:** Though the stain and growths remain, 2004 has been "the best year of my life," says Castillo, shown with his wife.

# Encounter Changes 2 Lives

Eric Haymes saw Nelson Castillo's disfigured face and decided to act. Their unlikely friendship bridges a diverse city's separate worlds.

By LISA RICHARDSON  
Times Staff Writer

The moment he opened his door and saw the cable installer on his Encino doorstep, Eric Haymes began pondering how he could bring up the subject of the man's face.

A raspberry-red port wine stain grasped Nelson Castillo's slim left cheek, nose and brow; two bulbous growths disfigured his nose and chin.

The dilemma was whether to pretend not to see it or to ask questions that well-mannered people stifle. So Haymes stewed, and Castillo worked.

To Castillo, it was just another job in a posh home where he was invisible.

By the time Castillo had tended to the seven televisions Haymes and his roommates share in the hillside home, Haymes' heart was pounding in his ears.

"I knew I would regret it my entire life if I didn't say something," he said. "Finally I just sucked it up and said, 'Hey,



**A QUERY:** Haymes asked about Castillo's deformity while Castillo was installing cable TV at his house. Haymes' church agreed to pay Castillo's medical bills.

what's the deal with your face?"

It's congenital, Castillo explained.

"I don't want to offend you, but does it bother you?"

"No," he told Haymes politely.

But it did. Castillo, a 23-year-old native of Guatemala who lives in North Hollywood with his wife, brothers,

mother and stepfather, has been tormented his entire life. Adults stare. Children do worse. He does not go to restaurants if he can help it, or to any place where children are likely to gather.

He has asked doctors if they could help, but either they were unable to do so

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claves but mixes little outside his own culture. "Basically all of our friends, almost everybody we associate with, are from Guatemala," he said, sitting with his wife and family in their North Hollywood apartment.

While Castillo speaks, his mother, Zoila Ruiz, brings out picture after picture of him as a beaming baby.

"The first time I saw him, when he was born, I didn't even see it," she said of the stain, vivid even then. "All I saw was that he was a perfect, beautiful baby. He had all his fingers and toes and everything."

The first time his future wife, Virginia Perez, saw Nelson, she saw "a man who, no, wasn't pretty, but who is one in a million. He has so much courage and is always pushing ahead, always striving to be better."

They worry just a little about the upcoming surgeries, but not much. And though the stain and growths remain, 2004 has been "the best year of my life," Castillo said.

Haymes, he added, is the "best person I have ever met in my whole life."

Only three adults have ever asked, point-blank, what was wrong with his face, he said. Only Eric Haymes ever helped.

On Monday, it was Virginia Perez who went to a hospital. After about six hours of labor, she gave birth to a son. The couple named him Eric.

and I find it threatening because I don't know how to enter it — and I don't want to barge on in," he said. "Unless I'm invited into that world, I don't go. I kind of wait for the invitation, then the second I sense an opening, I'll go in."

He finds community at church.

The mostly white congregation at Bel Air Presbyterian, high above the city on Mulholland Drive, makes a strong effort not only to help the poor, the sick and the needy, but also to reach out to ethnic groups throughout the city. Haymes turned to its urban outreach ministry for help.

He brought Castillo. The face convinced Mary Erickson, director of the program. It was so earnest, hopeful, she said.

She meant Haymes.

"He is one of those kind, quiet servants that doesn't make a lot of commotion, but he needed us to stand up and be counted," she said. "Then, of course, I met Nelson, and I could not believe this man had to go through life like this. It's going to be long haul, but we are committed to seeing this through to the end financially."

Like Haymes, Castillo travels through Los Angeles' myriad en-

anybody. We're so disconnected as a community."

Haymes, 40, is single and runs five businesses, the primary one trading jets. He works at home, alone. His family is sprinkled in several states.

Since moving to Los Angeles 4½ years ago, he has reveled in the city's diversity. Yet, he's been stymied about gaining entry into these separate worlds in a way that is meaningful. Often, he settles for food, tasting dishes he never heard of while growing up in Tulsa.

"I've always had the greatest respect for Latin culture but, at the same time, it's foreign to me,

It is this last thought that contains Castillo's subtle gift to Haymes: a reconsideration of isolation, ethnicity, economic class and boundaries.

"The guy that comes to clean my pool? He lets himself in the back gate and I hear him leaving," Haymes said.

"The three years he's cleaned my pool I've never said 'hi' to him. It's kind of awkward on both sides."

"I finally met the guy who does the lawn — but it's not even just a socioeconomic issue. The people in my block, they come out and you pull out of your garage and don't have to talk to