

# RESTORING SIGHT IN SHANGRI-LA

SHANGRI-LA: A MYTHICAL PLACE OF GREAT BEAUTY WHERE LIFE APPROACHES PERFECTION.

No longer mythical, Shangri-la is a mountainous, beautiful, mostly untouched area located at the northern tip of Yunnan Province of China, and nowhere near perfection for the majority of Tibetans living there. In response to its great need for eye care, Seva began providing services for most people who call Shangri-la home.

Seva now supports over 70% of the eye care provided in the Tibet Autonomous Region and Tibetan areas of Qinghai, Szechuan and Yunnan Provinces. In keeping with Seva's approach, Tibetans from Shangri-La trained in state-of-the-art techniques provide most of the eye care for the community including the poorest and most remote segments of the population, particularly women.

**Community ophthalmology: eye care in the community by the community.**

What is the key to expanding eye care programs? Eye care programs must leave the confines of the hospital.

Eye care programs must be active, not passive. Most of the 39 million people in the world who are blind will not walk into a hospital and request sight-restoring surgery. They are too poor. They don't understand they can be helped. They have no way to get to the hospital. They are frightened. They are women and children and not able to travel freely. The 39 million people in the world who are blind will stay blind until eye care workers bring eye care to their doorstep.

**Tibet eye care planning**

Community ophthalmology was a key



PHOTO CREDIT: MARTY SPENCER

focus of a two day planning meeting organized by Seva and hosted by the Kham Eye Centre in Dartsedo – a primarily Tibetan city in the Province of Szechuan, China.

This meeting was the first of its kind for hospitals caring for Tibetan populations. Ten of Seva's partner institutions



attended (including the Dechen Shangri-la Hospital) as well as representatives from government, Seva and the Aravind Eye Care System in India.

The purpose of the meeting was to bring administrators and medical personnel together to share information and lessons learned, create relationships and to begin the process of creating multi-year plans that would result in more Tibetans receiving eye care. Common to each plan was the



TIBET PLANNING MEETING

drive and motivation to develop strong community outreach programs targeting people with the greatest need.

In the past year alone, over 50,000 Tibetans received eye care from Tibetans— from examinations to antibiotic drops, to glasses, to cataract surgery to corneal transplants. For those 50,000 people, life is a little closer to perfection.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

For information on all events visit  
[www.seva.ca/events.htm](http://www.seva.ca/events.htm)

### 1. Annual General Meeting (AGM) & Donor Reception, Friday November 22, 2013

**Featuring special guest:** Dr. Levi Kandeke, Burundian ophthalmologist (see page 6 for a special interview with Levi)



DR. LEVI KANDEKE

**Date:** Friday, November 22, 2013  
**Time:** 7pm  
**Location:** BMO Great Hall, VanDusen Botanical Garden, 5251 Oak St., Vancouver, BC

Space is limited. Please RSVP at 604-713-6622 or [admin@seva.ca](mailto:admin@seva.ca) or <http://bit.ly/SEVAAGM2013>

**Please note:** Everyone is welcome to attend the AGM, however, to be considered a member of Seva Canada Society and eligible to vote at our Annual General Meeting a person must have donated \$20 between November 1, 2012 and October 31, 2013. Any member may be nominated to the Board of Directors by submitting a letter signed by a nominator and a seconder, both of whom must be members in good standing of the Seva Canada Society. Letters can be sent to the Seva Canada office to the attention of the Chair of the Governance and Nominating Committee. The Governance and Nominating Committee's mandate is to review all nominations and recommend the membership candidates for election who meet the Board's criteria. All nominations must be received by October 14, 2013, a minimum of 30 days prior to the date of the AGM.

### 2. Dine in the Dark, Vancouver, World Sight Day October 10, 2013

Join Seva Canada for World Sight Day and enjoy an evening of discovery at Vancouver's most unique new restaurant, Dark Table. Experience music, food, entertainment and conversation, all without your sense of sight.

The evening will include:

- 3 course meal with two glasses of wine, served in the dark by Dark Table's visually impaired staff
- Musical entertainment
- Inspiring speeches
- Opportunity to bid on items from some of the countries where Seva works in a unique blind auction

- A \$55 tax receipt for every ticket purchased

Every ticket purchased will provide cataract surgery for someone who is needlessly blind in one of the poorest parts of the world.

**Date:** Thursday, October 10, 2013  
**Time:** 6:30pm to 9:30pm  
**Location:** Dark Table Restaurant  
2611 West 4<sup>th</sup> Ave., Vancouver, BC  
**Tickets:** \$125 each.

Purchase tickets at  
<http://bit.ly/darkdining13>  
or call 604-713-6622

### About World Sight Day

World Sight Day is an international day of awareness, held annually on the second Thursday of October, to focus attention on the global issue of avoidable blindness and visual impairment. It is part of Vision 2020, which raises awareness of our goal to end avoidable blindness in the world by the year 2020.

### 3. Geezer Cabaret, Salt Spring Island, October 11, 2013 \*\*New Date\*\*

An evening of comedy and music in support of Seva.

**Featuring:**  
The Geezers Sid Filkow & Arvid Chalmers  
Singer-musicians Valdi and Bil Henderson  
of rock & roll band, Chilliwack  
**Location:** ArtSpring Theatre,  
Salt Spring Island  
**Phone:** 250-537-2102 or 1-866-537-2102  
**Time:** 8:00pm  
**Tickets:** \$25 each



# BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS TO EYE CARE

Seva believes the most important thing we do is to connect blind people, the majority of whom live in remote, rural areas, with the eye care providers and hospitals that can help them.

Connecting people with the services they require is accomplished by overcoming the financial and social barriers that prevent people from accessing care. Every culture has its own barriers which

are analyzed, then eye care staff and community partners use this knowledge to empower poor and marginalized populations to get the help they need.

Breaking down barriers demands innovation and experimentation. Seva's strong support for population-based studies has allowed us to make significant contributions to global knowledge about how to reach populations in need.

More than a decade ago, Seva discovered that 2 out of every 3 blind people in the world were women, most of whom were over 50, and ninety percent lived in poverty. This statistic was true worldwide and for all eye conditions including cataract, glaucoma, and trachoma. This knowledge led Seva to support community interventions that target women. This meant finding and engaging with women and women's networks, often involving unexpected

opportunities such as educating and enlisting microfinance members as eye care advocates.

Breaking down barriers also requires investing in eye care facilities closer to the rural populations in need.

Known as 'vision' or 'primary eye care' centres, they treat minor conditions and sell eyeglasses and refer more serious conditions to the hospital. Usually self-financing within 2 years, they also provide community education and interaction with general health units and schools.

Rather than building hospitals or sending North American doctors to provide services, our donors primarily fund programs that become sustainable through local demand. This demand eventually leads to permanent eye care facilities funded by the community for the community – and no longer require Seva's financial or professional support.





# CYCLING TO GRANDMA'S HOUSE FOR SIGHT

Greetings from Toronto!

To raise funds for Seva Canada, I cycled 200km in two days to London Ontario to visit my 99 year old grandma. I find it really lifts my grandma's spirits when family visits and, to be honest, the feeling is always mutual- my spirits are lifted when I visit her!

To reach my grandma and my goal of fundraising \$2000, I set up a training regime and a Seva Canada Giving Page. To acquire as many donors as possible, I invited people to my Giving Page through personal social networks. Family and friends donated, including new Toronto friends, coworkers and even old friends who came out of the woodwork to support my ride! In the end, I exceeded my goal and raised \$2400 for my 200km adventure.

The ride was challenging, yet rewarding. The most challenging part was the last hours of riding on the day I rode 150km,

when thunder storms were threatening all around (a tornado was spotted outside Waterloo that day!). With such strong headwinds, it was a long push to finish. In spite of the challenges, when I was cycling up those loose gravel-laden hills with the wind and rain in my face, I focused my mind on my end goal of restoring sight to underserved people. Imagining how these people's lives would change after cataract surgery at Seva Canada's partner clinics, and the ripple effect that will have in their families and communities, was very powerful. I just pictured a child being able to go to school or a mom seeing her baby for the first time, all work done by Seva that I've witnessed. It made my grueling work worth it.



LAURA SPENCER AND HER GRANDMA

What surprised me though, was how energized I was at the end of the ride! In fact, I had more energy than I had at the beginning of the ride. Of course my body was exhausted, but I felt an amazing, exhilarating rush.

I wanted to share the experience with everyone.

I encourage everyone to find their own challenge to conquer or experience that gives you meaning and create a Seva Canada Giving Page. Your impact will expand exponentially in having the proceeds have a global impact through Seva's work.

**Laura Spencer**  
Seva Canada Board Member

# G ADVENTURES/ PLANETERRA FOUNDATION AND SEVA CANADA

**A PARTNERSHIP THAT  
RESTORES SIGHT AND  
PREVENTS BLINDNESS**

What do an adventure travel company, a foundation and an international development organization that works to prevent blindness and restore sight have in common? A lot.

All three organizations work with local communities to identify the obstacles they are facing. All three help communities create customized, long-term solutions that get to the root of the problem and restore the community's ability to help themselves. All three believe that the restoration of sight is one of the most cost-effective ways to reduce poverty.

Planeterra Foundation and G Adventures have been funding Seva's eye care programs since 2007. They have funded surgical camps in remote areas of Tibet, eye screening camps in Tanzania and are currently funding the Banteay Meanchey Eye Unit in northwestern Cambodia.

Over the past 6 years, Planeterra and G Adventures together with their donors and travellers have restored the sight of hundreds of people. Hundreds who would still be living in poverty, unable to go to school, work or contribute to their communities.

On behalf of those Tibetans, Tanzanians and Cambodians – our deepest thanks.



Planeterra  
Foundation

g adventures™  
the great adventure people



# WHAT YOU HAVE HELPED ACCOMPLISH

Over the past 6 months Seva donors have achieved a lot. Here are two examples:

## TRAINING

In our spring newsletter, we asked for your support to train eye care professionals and volunteers in the countries where we work. You gave generously, and here is just a small sample of what was accomplished as a result:

- 340 Female Community Health Volunteers in Chitwan, Nepal, were trained to help find people within their communities in need of eye care
- 150 Nepali school teachers were educated on how to help identify eye disease in their classrooms



PHOTO CREDIT: © PAULO PATRUNO  
[WWW.PAULOPATRUNOPHOTO.ORG](http://WWW.PAULOPATRUNOPHOTO.ORG)

- 10 Tibetan doctors were provided with continuing medical education to keep up-to-date with current techniques
- 1 Cambodian nurse was trained in refraction. She can now provide

eyeglasses to people in a remote area in Banteay Meanchey.

Because of this training thousands more will receive the power of sight, now and into the future. Thank you to all who invested in a brighter future.

## PEDIATRIC EYE CARE IN EASTERN AFRICA

In response to a late-spring fundraising letter, Seva donors gave generously to pediatric outreach work in Eastern Africa.

The donations gathered will fund programs in Zambia, Malawi, Tanzania

and Burundi. The funds will first be used to perform a surgical outreach program in Burundi in September 2013.

Dr. Lee Woodward, an American pediatric ophthalmologist, will provide surgeries to Burundian children, and will also train local ophthalmologist Dr. Levi Kandeke in pediatric surgeries.

Because of investment by Seva donors, the growing pediatric program in Burundi has tremendously increased awareness of eye health services, resulting in more parents seeking care for their children. It is anticipated that the September 2013 outreach will screen hundreds of kids, dispense glasses to all in need, and will provide surgeries to restore the vision of approximately 50 children.

This is just one example of what your gifts will do. Thank you to everyone who has given these children the chance to lead happier, healthier lives.

## 1/3 OF TIBETAN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS CAN'T SEE THE BOARD

One in three students in the Tibetan Autonomous Region of China have been found to need eyeglasses. Only one in 25 need glasses in Africa. Imagine a classroom full of students but only two thirds can see what the teacher is writing on the chalkboard. Students like Dolkar fall behind.

Dolkar is a 16-year old girl living in Gyantse, Tibet, in her first year of high school. Dolkar, a good student, was struggling to see the blackboard and take notes during class. Every day she waited until after class to get up close

to the board and take her notes, most of the time staying at school quite late by herself. "I always felt that taking notes afterward was just taking up so much of my time, and I often ended up staying up very late to finish my homework," said Dolkar.

All Dolkar needed was a pair of glasses. She used to have glasses, which she purchased from an optical shop in Shigatse 2 years before, but unfortunately they had been broken for some time.

When asked if she ever thought of getting another pair of glasses, she answered "yes, I thought about it, but my class schedule was tight and getting another pair of glasses meant that I had to take at least 3 days off from my school

to travel to a nearby town to get my vision checked and get a pair of glasses."

Luckily for Dolkar, and many other students just like her, Seva came to her school to conduct eye screenings and

provide glasses. All the students who never had a chance to make the long trip to town could now see with their new glasses, giving them the opportunity to succeed in school and get a better education.



DOLKAR HAVING HER VISION TESTED

With her new glasses,

Dolkar was relieved to be able to take notes during class and use the time after class to do her homework, help her family, have fun with her friends and go to bed earlier. She is confident that her grades will improve this year and she will be a more successful student.



# AN INTERVIEW WITH THIS YEAR'S ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

## SPECIAL GUEST: LEVI KANDEKE

**Q. Where did you grow up and what was it like?**

I was born and raised in Burundi, in a family that from an African perspective was a relatively wealthy family. My parents both had a university education from the USA and Europe which was a rare situation for that time in my country. Thus, I also had the opportunity to go to university in a developed country.

**Q. Where do you live now?**

After my studies in Switzerland I spent some time working in France and am now working in my home country of Burundi.

**Q. You trained to be an ophthalmologist in Geneva and worked in France, why did you decide to move back to Burundi?**

Two factors were vital to my decision, first of all my family insisted that I come home, secondly, an African colleague of mine who worked for the United Nations in Geneva nostalgically told me of the times when he was an ophthalmologist in his native village. His story made a huge impact on me. He told me he had the best time of his life during this period working at home and felt useful to his community. It touched me because it matched my aspirations and this is not what I felt when I was in the West. I decided to return to my country and very soon I realized that I had made the best choice.

**Q. You work closely with Seva's partner in Africa, the Kilimanjaro Centre for**

**Community Ophthalmology (KCCO); can you explain your relationship with them?**

I started to work with KCCO after having taken a course with them on community eye health. I had very good skills to provide medical eye care for the community; we managed with their help to triple the number of people receiving surgery. With the assistance of Seva, the KCCO team is helping us by looking at our vision centre model to find a way to improve upon it and expand it.

**Q. You were the first person to introduce Vision Centres in Africa. Why did you create the Vision Centres and how have they changed eye care in Africa?**



LEVI WITH BURUNDIAN PEDIATRIC CATARACT PATIENT

to do something about it. With my own money I hired ophthalmic clinical officers, found, rented, and refurbished buildings, purchased the necessary equipment and experimented with the idea of having a good quality, private, low-cost vision centre and a sustainable finance model. I can now say it was a success and I hope this eye care model can extend across Africa.

**Q. Why is community outreach so important in providing eye care?**

Community outreach is the surest way to reach the poorest people who are usually

the ones who are still suffering from treatable blinding eye diseases and conditions.

**Q. What do you see as the biggest obstacle/challenge to making eye care accessible to everyone in Burundi?**

The most important barrier is often not money but rather accessibility to health care and lack of information. To bring the services closer is a part of the solution.

**Q. What has been one of your favourite eye care sight stories?**

All stories are wonderful; we do not get used to seeing how the blind people are transformed after they recover their vision when they come at day 7 for follow-up. They have a bright face, and their clothes are better washed, they walk straight and safe, and have a communicative smile. If you ask about their future plans they always have one or two projects in the immediate short period.

The best story is probably this young diabetic of 18 years who had been told by colleagues that diabetes had rendered her permanently and irreversibly blind. One day, due to depression, she decided not to take her insulin and she fell into a coma. She was hospitalized and during her stay I discovered that her blindness was only due to cataracts. The cataract operation was done as soon as her condition allowed. Currently she is completely transformed, she learned to inject herself with insulin, and decided to return to school despite the three years she missed while she stayed home. I have no doubt that she succeeds brilliantly in class.

**Q. What do you do in your spare time?**

My work takes a lot of my time. When I have spare time I enjoy spending it with my family. My favorite sport is tennis but around my country African football remains the star.

**Q. Is there anything interesting or unique about yourself that you would like to share?**

The chance of my life is to be born and raised in one of the poorest countries in the world and go to graduate school in one of the richest and most developed in the world. It creates for me a shortcut to understand the concepts of wealth and sharing that are often inaccessible to most of us.



# THE PURPOSE OF LIFE

By Keith Thomson

Back in 1991 at the age of 31, I had the good fortune to appreciate the transformational impact of philanthropy. With a little hard work and a lot of luck, I had achieved relatively early in my career a reasonable degree of success – that is, success as I defined it to that point in my life.

However, it slowly dawned on me I owed a huge debt of gratitude to those I had never known. I realized if it were not for the wisdom, wealth, and hard work of so many Canadians who came before me I, and millions of my fellow Canadians would not be enjoying the quality of life that makes us today the envy of so many around the world. That is when I decided I needed to contribute in some way and make a difference both today and when I'm gone.

By a simple and easy process of leaving a gift in my Will, not only am I able to redirect my social capital (also known as tax), but I will also be making a

significant impact on those organizations that are meaningful to my family.

Perhaps my philosophy could be best summed up by Leo Rosten in one of my favourite quotes:

"I cannot believe that the purpose of life is to be happy. I think the purpose of life is to be useful, to be honourable, to be compassionate. I think it is above all to matter, to count, to stand for something. To have it make some difference that you live at ...all."

**Keith is the founder and Managing Director of Stonegate Private Counsel and is the National Director of The Donor Motivation Program. He began his career in 1985 as a financial advisor and today has a specialized focus in philanthropy. Keith recently authored "What Was Your Great Grandmother's Name? 50 Thoughts On How Philanthropy Can Transform You, Your Family, And Your Community".**



KEITH THOMSON

## SEVA CANADA HAS BEEN TRULY TRANSFORMED BY THE POWER OF LEGACY GIFTS.

Through the generosity of donors who have left a legacy of sight, our organization has grown, stabilized and ultimately become more effective. Today, more people are receiving life-changing eye care services than ever before as we move closer to our goal: a world where no one is needlessly blind.

Donors who have left gifts in their Wills to Seva have ensured vision services are available to people in the poorest corners of the world. These gifts of all sizes will continue to have a ripple effect for years to come.

As part of our Legacy 20/20 Campaign, we have created a new informative booklet about the difference you can make by creating your own legacy of sight. This resource includes all the information you and your estate planner will need to include Seva Canada in your Will.

To learn more about making a legacy gift to Seva Canada, request a booklet by emailing [admin@seva.ca](mailto:admin@seva.ca) or calling 1-877-460-6622.

# COMPASSION IN ACTION

In May 2013, Seva inaugurated a Primary Eye Care Centre (PECC) in Bajura, the last district in Nepal without access to basic eye care. This new PECC brings the power of sight to one of the poorest, most remote regions. Seva donors Hugh and Gloria Sutcliffe provided co-lead funding for the project with a second couple, which triggered a ripple effect among Seva supporters, ultimately raising \$40,000 to make this 30-year dream a reality.

Gloria and Hugh Sutcliffe sat down with Seva to share their experiences with the project and why they chose Seva.

**Q: What is it about Seva that inspires you to give?**

**Hugh:** We like Seva's focus on sight work, because for a relatively small investment you can have a huge impact. It seems hard to imagine anything that could give you a better return on your donation than preventing someone from going blind or curing their blindness.

With something so simple you can have such a dramatic and immediate impact for the rest of someone's life, and also the lives of their families. It's a great focus.

**Gloria:** I am inspired by the remarkable, thoughtful people at Seva Canada, and the people at Seva Nepal that do the work; the surgeons, technicians and the local partners. Meeting Kandel [Seva Nepal Program Manager] last November was very inspiring. He is such a calm and open-hearted person and to hear of his dream to provide eye care to every region in Nepal seemed like such a wonderful and doable goal at this point after 30 years.

The immediacy of restoring someone's eyesight and the transformation of lives and families is brilliant.



**Q:** What does it mean to you to give the power of sight to someone you will likely never meet?

**Gloria:** It means that their life has been changed and I have had a small part in that transformation. In some ways I have met them through the images that were taken during the eye camp process. These images showed me real people lined up for eye exams, receiving surgery, waiting with their bandages and seeing after their bandages were removed, then smiling with their sunglasses and heading home. I remember their faces and smile deep inside.

**Q:** How does investing overseas fit into your worldview?

**Hugh:** Canada is a rich society. We have the ability to depend on each other. A place like Nepal or the other low-income countries Seva serves need more support and we are glad to provide this help.

**Gloria:** There is a high inequity of resources around the world and I am motivated when Seva shows me the faces of people that we have served in so many countries by preventing blindness and restoring vision. We have so much to offer in places where people have so little.

**Q:** Do you have a philanthropy philosophy?

**Gloria:** Philanthropy and philosophy are big words. I think they can be boiled down to compassion and love. I believe in a universal oneness: when one person suffers in the world, we all suffer. I have the resources to help people and to heal the suffering of many through Seva.

**Q:** Why do you support Nepal specifically and do you have a personal connection to the region?

**Hugh:** Obviously Nepal is a focus of Seva's and one of the first places Seva's work got traction. We have met Kandel who is very sincere in what he does. We also know the program is well established and has demonstrated

30 years of success. It's easy to recognize that it works and the projects are well thought out.

**Q:** Bajura was a major accomplishment for Seva and all of our donors. What did it feel like to be a co-lead funder of this project?

**Gloria:** At first I felt a little awkward to be named as a co-lead funder providing seed funding for the Bajura project.

Hugh and I have been donors for a number of years but seeding a particular project in Nepal stepped our intentions up a notch. I appreciate that we can direct our donation to certain people and countries in high need. The more remote, isolated and unserved areas seem to be where people would receive the most gain.

At first we thought we would like to remain anonymous but after reading the previous Seva newsletter and the wonderful stories of what inspired other Seva donors we realized that our seed funding story might encourage others to take this approach in the future.

It was a great gift to us to see the fruits of Seva's work. In May we received a few stories and pictures from the field of the team's progress with not much delay from real time on the ground. That was exciting and the next best thing to being there in person. The patients in the pictures appear to be the salt of the earth and so grateful for their restored vision. The Seva team looked awesome and elated. They are very touching images.

**Q:** Can you describe the response from the crowd of supporters at Seva's 2012 AGM when your co-lead funding was announced – and others were asked to contribute?

**Gloria:** I was just amazed at how quickly the folks at the AGM responded to making the Bajura project happen. When asked to contribute many people raised their hands spontaneously and celebrated Seva's 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in Nepal with more action. Within just a few months the funding for the project was raised and became a reality last May 2013.

**Q:** What are your future plans with Seva?

**Hugh:** We have become more familiar with Nepal and are encouraged by what we have seen. We are looking forward to continuing to participate in Seva's work in Nepal as we learn more about Seva's priorities there.

**Gloria:** To add to that; we like the notion of seeding and leading a particular project. Bajura was launched and completed in amazing time. We'd like to do something like this again, with others.

In addition, we are really excited about our upcoming trip to Nepal in October this year to visit some of the Seva facilities and see eye camps, primary eye care centres, Geta Eye Hospital and Lumbini Eye Institute. These are all places that we've heard about but haven't seen yet. This is a wonderful

opportunity to travel and to be with other like-minded Seva donors will be a great experience.

**Q:** Is there anything you'd like to share with other Seva supporters or people new to Seva?

**Gloria:** I have a dear friend who is in her late 80s and on a fixed income. She gave me a crisp \$50

bill for someone who needed a cataract surgery in Bajura. It doesn't matter how much we give, only that we give, and are conscious of the needs of others when we have so much to offer.



CATARACT PATIENTS WAITING FOR THE REMOVAL OF THEIR BANDAGES. PHOTO CREDIT: DEANNE BERMAN



PHOTO CREDIT: DEANNE BERMAN



# BAJURA: AN AWAKENING OF THE FIVE SENSES

by Doug O'Neill,  
Executive Editor, Canadian Living

When the world says, "Give up,"  
Hope whispers, "Try it one more time."  
~ Author Unknown

It's early on a brisk weekday morning, May 2013. I'm standing alone outside my tent in the remote mountain village of Bajura, in western Nepal.

Dew glistens on the ground. My cohorts from Seva Canada (executive director Penny Lyons, program director Dr. Ken Bassett, and marketing & communications director Deanne Berman), our ever-reliable team of porters and I, along with a videographer and another member of the media, have all bedded down in a wind-swept weed- and horse-dung-littered field on the edge of the village, next to the eye camp. The Seva team, especially the Nepalese ophthalmologists and other local healthcare professionals, are here to save eyesight... in essence, to save lives. I'm here to chronicle the miracle.

The journey here hasn't been easy, both figuratively and literally. But my bumpy ride (dizzying bus trips that careened within inches of 500-foot precipices without any guard rails, and pot-holed dirt tracks that jar every bone in the body) is nothing compared to the challenges faced – and surmounted – by the Seva eye care specialists and their patients, the poorest of the poor. Bajura is isolated geographically, politically and economically. Yet from the moment of our arrival I felt these are proud people. They're not looking for a handout as much as a leg-up.

It's very quiet at this hour. But my heart is thumping and my senses are fully aroused by what I've witnessed in the first few days of this much-awaited eye camp. Scores of Nepalese have had their vision restored, but their stories are impressed on my memory through all five senses – hearing, touch, smell, taste and, yes, sight.



DOUG O'NEILL AND PENNY LYONS  
PHOTO CREDIT: DEANNE BERMAN

the eye camps he attends throughout Nepal. One of his stories still echoes in my ears.

"One of the saddest things is the lack of money," explains Dr. Pant. "I remember one woman who came to one hospital (not a Seva-supported hospital) in need of

a cataract surgery. While the surgeries are subsidized, the patient has to pay a small sum. She did not have the 500 rupees (roughly \$8) necessary. Sadly, she was turned away. At the end of the long day, another doctor and I were leaving to go to the river crossing, where the manual car ferry would take us across the river so we could go home. A crowd had convened at the edge of the water.

**TO HEAR:** Dr. Bidya Prasad Pant, Director of Geta Eye Hospital, talked softly over the roar of the jeep as it bumped over the switchbacks. Dr. Pant is a humble man, and a hard-working healthcare professional. He regularly performs dozens of cataract surgeries on any given day during

We learned that the woman who was short of 500 rupees had thrown herself overboard. Instead of returning home and continuing to be a burden to her family, she decided in her heart that suicide was the better option."

**TO TOUCH:** Even two months later, the mention of Bajura instantly conjures up for me images of hands, reaching up for me images of hands, reaching out, touching others. I watched closely (under mask and gown) as Dr. Pant's deftly performed four cataract surgeries in less than one hour. I can still remember so clearly the hands of Ram Prasad Kandel, Seva Nepal Program Director, as he stroked the forehead of a frightened orphan boy who nervously awaited his cataract surgery. I recall the hands of Ina, blind for four years, as she felt her way along the wall, exploring this strange setting. In my mind I can still see the hands of that little blind girl with soil smudged on her forehead, reaching, searchingly, for the hand of her mother. And I still see the patients who, after their cataract surgeries, touched their fingers together in Namaste. "Thank-you."

**TO SMELL:** I scrambled down the cliffside path, after the eye camp was finished, sweat soaking my T-shirt, and suddenly found myself adrift in a cloud of fragrance. Rhododendrons. An entire hillside of them. I wanted to stop and

admire them but I somehow felt it was incongruous with what was going on around me: blindness, poverty, hardship. Then I remembered Ina. She was the 50-year-old woman I met three days earlier, one of the lucky ones.

The surgeries restored the eyesight

in both of her eyes – after almost four years of blindness. Before the operation, I had asked her, "What are the first things you want to see once you're able to see again?" She spoke, smiled and the translator broke up laughing. "I am eager to see my granddaughter again. She was pretty when I last saw her, but who knows. Maybe she's no longer pretty." Humour in the face of hardship! Lesson



BAJURA LANDSCAPE. PHOTO CREDIT: DOUG O'NEILL



learned. Yes, dude, you can stop and smell the rhododendrons!

**TO TASTE:** "And now we will stop for dal bhat," announced Kandel late one night after a four-hour trek down a hillside, and another five hours in a crowded van. Meal time in Nepal, especially with people like Kandel, is synonymous with storytelling. I can still taste the dal bhat, just as clearly as I can recall the story Kandel told me as we sat at the roadside stand, eating in the dark. It chilled me to the bone.

Kandel had supervised a clinic in Nepal's Achham province three years earlier. Three young women, about 25 years

old, all mothers, were at the clinic. Two tested positive for HIV. The third tested negative, yet she was the one crying and despondent. Kandel asked her, "Why, my daughter, why are you crying? Don't you realize this is good news? You should be happy." The young woman's reply even shocked Kandel, who has spent his entire career confronting health challenges throughout impoverished Nepal. "They," she said,

nodding to her newly-diagnosed friends. "Now that they've got the HIV they get food and support for their family. I get nothing. My life is worse. I can't feed my children and care for my family."



INA SUNAR, THE 50-YEAR-OLD WOMAN WHO TAUGHT ME ABOUT JOY IN THE MIDST OF MISERY. PHOTO CREDIT: DOUG O'NEILL

**TO SEE:** The most enduring and hopeful image I have from the Bajura eye camp is of Ina Sunar, the 50-year-old woman who taught me about joy in the midst of misery. She had travelled three days – on the back of her son – from the village of Pandusen, accompanied by her granddaughter. When Dr. Pant removed the bandages from her eyes the day after the surgery, she looked up, and smiled. She saw the sky. She saw her son. She saw her granddaughter. Amidst desperate poverty and hardship, Seva's doctors and volunteers had utterly transformed a life. What I saw was the most promising vision for the people in this remote region of Nepal: Hope.

**Canadian Living Executive Editor Doug O'Neill had the honor and privilege of travelling with the Seva Canada team in May 2013. He'll be sharing his experiences in an upcoming issue of Canadian Living.**

## BRING EYE CARE TO THE WORLD'S POOREST AND MOST ISOLATED PEOPLE.

People living in remote or rural areas face unique barriers accessing the eye care they need and deserve. These obstacles come in many forms:

- Difficult terrain and long distances can make travel to a clinic challenging and costly

- Treatment fees may be unaffordable for the very poor
- Cultural traditions may prevent women from travelling alone to a clinic or screening
- People often do not even know that their blindness or eye condition can be treated

As part of our work to reach the underserved, Seva brings eye care knowledge and resources to the village level in the farthest corners of the globe. We work with teachers, train volunteers, and educate health post workers to help them become champions of eye care. They can make their communities better aware of eye diseases and show them how to utilize Seva's eye care services in the area.

We know from over 30 years of experience that working with trusted community members is essential to reaching people who would otherwise remain needlessly blind or visually impaired.

Knowledge is power; allowing people to access treatment at school screenings, eye camps, and vision centres in their own or nearby communities. More complex conditions can be referred to the closest eye hospital, where free transportation for patients is offered.

Breaking down barriers to access is crucial to ensuring eye care for people in remote rural areas. Ensuring eye care is available in the community is the key.



**Please donate today to improve access to eye care for people in the most isolated corners of the globe.**

**To donate please call  
1-877-460-6622 or visit  
<http://bit.ly/sevaoutreach>**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

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I would like to donate \$ \_\_\_\_\_ to give the power of sight to the poor and most isolated people in need.

☐ Visa ☐ MasterCard

☐ Cheque payable to Seva Canada

Credit Card Number \_\_\_\_\_

Expiry Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

**Thank you for your donation. An official tax receipt will be mailed to you.**



# INSPIRING SEVA DONORS



## Matthew Blair and Cameron Martin, the "Summit for Sight" team

- ⇒ Two world travellers and avid climbers who are raising funds for sight through Climb for Change, an online fundraising hub for charity climbs, treks, hikes and adventures worldwide.
- ⇒ In 2012 Matt visited the Atlas Mountains in Morocco and noticed many of the people suffered from preventable or treatable eye conditions yet had little knowledge of basic eye health.
- ⇒ This fall they will be climbing Mt. Kilimanjaro and their goal is to raise one dollar for each of Mt. Kilimanjaro's 5,895 meters.
- ⇒ Cam explained why they selected Seva: "We believe in the goals, appreciate that it is a local organization and relevant to the location that we are visiting. Restoring sight would be one of the most positive life changing events that could be provided to a person anywhere in the world!"
- ⇒ To learn more about their campaign visit [https://www.climbforchange.com/summit\\_for\\_sight](https://www.climbforchange.com/summit_for_sight)

## Elliana Wayne

- ⇒ 10-year-old Ellie learned about Seva through a charity project at school; "It made me realize how hard it must be for some families around the world to decide between eating and seeing. It is not a choice I would ever want to



make so if I can help and get some of my friends and family to help for every \$50 a family would not have to be faced with such a difficult choice."

- ⇒ She asked her friends and family for donations, taking around a folder of information so that she could tell people about Seva's work. In addition to pursuing her goal of raising \$250 to restore sight to 5 people, she also donated \$50 from her own money.
- ⇒ About her work, Ellie says, "It makes me feel like I can really help to change someone's life."



## Barbara Wallace

- ⇒ Longtime Seva supporter, donor and volunteer, Barbara is regularly in the Seva office making thank you calls to our donors and helping with office work. She is behind the lovely British voice that many of you may have heard on your answering machine!
- ⇒ Barbara recently spearheaded the "2 Cents Worth" campaign, collecting pennies in support of Seva through Brock House, Vancouver Croquet Club and UBC Crane Library.
- ⇒ She has raised over \$400 in pennies, enough to provide medicine and supplies to treat eye infections for 200 people.

# GIVING PAGES

CREATE A PAGE,  
RESTORE SIGHT  
AND START  
CHANGING LIVES.

You can run, golf, bike, ask for donations in lieu of birthday or wedding presents or just raise money to fund sight-saving operations, medicines, training and programs for those in need. Create your own Personal Giving Page on Seva's website and start giving the power of sight.

LEARN MORE AT  
SEVA.CA





# BECOME A MONTHLY DONOR

You can help blind people see again every day of the year. Join our Circle of Sharing family of monthly donors by visiting **seva.ca** or by calling 1-877-460-6622 toll-free.

"It makes me feel so good to know that my monthly donation is in the hands of people who care with such devotion, compassion and competence! As well, to know that people who I will never know can see the faces of their loved ones and the world around them because Seva does such a good job in bringing together the teams who can restore sight to those so in need."

– **Arlene McGibbon**  
Monthly donor



# ABOUT SEVA CANADA

## SEVA'S VISION

Seva Canada's vision is a world in which no one is needlessly blind or visually impaired and where those with unavoidable vision loss can achieve their full potential.

## SEVA'S MISSION

Seva Canada's mission is to restore sight and prevent blindness in the developing world.

## SEVA'S GUIDING PRINCIPLES

We are guided by:

- Our belief in equal access to eye care for all
- Our belief that with adequate resources, all people can meet their own needs
- Our commitment to working with international partners to build local, sustainable eye care programs
- Our respect for cultural, ethnic, spiritual and other forms of diversity
- Our commitment to inform and inspire Canadians to join us in achieving our mission

## HONOURABLE PATRONS

The Honourable Lloyd Axworthy  
Patrick Reid, O.C.  
The Honourable Judith Guichon, OBC  
Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia

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