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# SPIRIT OF SERVICE

NEWSLETTER



## REGAINING SIGHT AND HOPE IN MYANMAR

Above: Mature cataracts clouding the eyes of Daw Ei Zin

### Sixty-five-year-old Daw Ei Zin lost sight in her right eye over a year ago.

**S**he grew very worried as her left eye began to cloud over and lose vision, too. Eventually, both of her eyes became so clouded that she could no longer see.

She lives with her unmarried son, where she used to spend her days sitting alone in the house, fighting depression and waiting for her son to return home at the end of the day. She couldn't do anything for herself or help her son. She lived like this, dejected and without sight, for at least six months before receiving care at Mettashin Charity Eye Hospital, Seva's newest partner, in Taunggyi, Myanmar.

Mettashin, meaning "Loving Kindness," conducted its first

surgical eye camp earlier this year. Still partially under construction, the hospital was able to provide two fully equipped operating theaters to restore sight to 218 patients through surgery! The camp was led by Dr. Bidya Pant, a skilled ophthalmologist from Nepal who was trained with support from Seva. It was the final step in a comprehensive sight restoration process for Daw Ei Zin.

Because of Seva's new partnership with Mettashin, Seva can support many more people like Daw Ei Zin throughout the Taunggyi region in Myanmar. Building new relationships is an exciting venture that Seva undertakes with extreme care and commitment. We establish long-term partnerships built on trust and mutual respect with the aim to create sustainable eye care services that reduce dependence on outside assistance.



**REGAINING SIGHT AND HOPE...**

**How does Seva begin a new partnership?**

The relationship-building process began three years ago. Long-time Seva volunteer ophthalmologist Dr. Dick Litwin made multiple trips to Yangon Eye Hospital to meet with Hospital Director Dr. Tin Win. Together, Dr. Litwin and Dr. Tin Win discussed the large unmet need for comprehensive eye care services and developed a plan with Seva to expand access to these services for the people of Myanmar. The following year, Seva staff and Dr. Pant visited three potential locations to determine their readiness to provide eye care. When they reached Taunggyi and met with officials from Mettashin, they learned a hospital was already under construction with the goal to provide comprehensive eye care services. Thus a new partnership was born.

During the surgical camp held just one year later, Seva Board member and volunteer ophthalmologist Dr. Marty

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Spencer joined Seva staff to evaluate the clinical procedures at Mettashin. Dr. Spencer noted, "There are an enormous number of blind people in Myanmar who could be cured, and an obvious role for Seva to play in teaching and other support. I examined 50 patients the day after their surgery and observed the high quality of their restored sight."



Seva volunteers Dr. Spencer (left) and Dr. Litwin (right) with Dr. Pant (center).

Because Dr. Pant has partnered with Seva for many years in Nepal, he brings Seva's way of providing high-quality critical eye care services to Myanmar. For Daw Ei Zin, this meant she had access to care that would otherwise not be available to her. Accompanied by her family, she had one cataract removed and was scheduled to have surgery on her second eye to fully regain her vision.

**Seva trains local people to provide eye care.** A skillful mentor as well as an accomplished ophthalmologist, Dr. Pant trained seven local young people for a year at his project in Htee Saung, near Mandalay, to become Ophthalmic Aides. He brought them back to Mettashin to be on hand during the surgical camp where they helped patients move through the surgery process with efficiency and comfort. These Ophthalmic Aides will stay at Mettashin as full-time employees to screen for eye care needs in neighboring communities for future surgical eye camps. Dr. Pant is also mentoring local doctors in ophthalmic procedures, one of whom will be trained at a partner hospital in Nepal for one year.

**Seva also helps to establish administrative process and supplies for our new partners.** We now have a relationship with a local medical supply company that can purchase high quality, low-cost surgical supplies from our long-time partner Aurolab, located in India. This helps keep the cost of eye care low so that more people can see again. Over the next few years, additional Nepali ophthalmologists will provide oversight of eye camps every two months until the local doctors complete their training.

After her first surgery, Daw Ei Zin was overjoyed to regain her sight. She most looks forward to cooking, helping her son around the house, earning money again, and being able to care for herself without anyone's help. She and her family were so grateful to the doctors and Ophthalmic Aides for their care, and to Seva and donors like you for making her personal miracle possible. In addition to patients seeking care directly at the hospital, Mettashin will be fully prepared to reach out to the community, screen for eye care needs, and conduct their own surgical eye camps with their own staff, reaching thousands more like Daw Ei Zin who are in need of critical eye care.



Daw Ei Zin is filled with joy after having her sight restored.



Seva board, staff, and guests at our May 2017 Board Meeting.

## Seva Welcomes our New Executive Director, Kate Moynihan

Please join us in welcoming Kate Moynihan to the Seva family. Kate brings two decades of executive-level experience having overseen major humanitarian programs for development organizations in the U.S. and abroad.

A Note From Kate:

As I reflected on this letter for our newsletter, I thought about my daughter - Gabriela - who today is the very age I was when Seva was founded nearly 40 years ago. I contemplated on what I want her to know about why I applied for the Executive Director post and how profoundly humbled I am to join this team at this time. I also wondered what I would tell my 11 year-old self about what would someday be my path. In doing so, I quickly landed on three elements:

- Joyful service
- Hope in times of uncertainty
- Coming Home

Seva has helped to transform nearly four million lives, *perhaps more*, as a result of the efforts, intentions and dedication of a small group of individuals who came together with a desire to do something for someone else.

Last week I enjoyed a meal with Judith and Dick Litwin who - for more than 30 years - have helped to support, guide and love the joyfulness of Seva's mission. In fact, my first email - after board welcome messages - was from Dick. He had found a copy of a letter sent nearly twenty years ago in tribute to Dr. V. It was a faded fax message typed in all CAPS from a partner who could not make the journey home. Dick wanted me to more fully understand the nature of the new community I had joined - a universal fabric of transformation that knows no border, time zone or zip code.

As I read that letter, I began to reflect on how much things have changed over the years. And the knowledge that the one constant we live with is - *uncertainty*. Taking on a new role gives me the opportunity to further explore the nature of leadership in uncertain times and the specific role that hope plays in the process.

Let me leave you with the hopeful message from Ram Dass, who is known for a saying: *we are all just walking each other home*. This is what I told Gabriela and what I would also whisper to my 11 year-old self "*everything is okay - we are going home*". Enjoy the newsletter that follows.

Yours in Service,

Kate



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## FIELD OF VISION: EDINA MBOJE'S STORY

By Joe Raffanti, Seva Staff Member

### The first time I saw Edina Mboje, she had just learned two life-changing facts.

The first was that the cause of her five years of blindness was cataract, the most common cause of blindness worldwide. The second thing she learned was her condition was treatable, and within 48 hours her sight would be restored. There in the doctor's makeshift examination room in a village in rural Tanzania, unable to see her hands in front of her face—let alone me or the ophthalmologist who was telling her the good news—Edina smiled.

Edina first began having trouble with her vision in 2012. She and her husband, Mahona, owned a small restaurant in a village in central Tanzania and also worked in the fields together to support their family.

Initially, it was the bright sunlight that irritated Edina's eyes, rendering her unable to help Mahona work in the fields. Gradually, her vision clouded over and she began having accidents at the family restaurant, tripping, spilling food and dropping tea on the floor. She was just forty years old when the family decided to close the restaurant because she was no longer able to work.

Edina's family members took turns staying home with her to help her eat and walk to the toilet. Her son, Emmanuel, missed days of school to stay by his mother's side. Her husband worked in the fields, took care of the children and cooked for the family. Though still strong in every other way, Edina was crippled by her lack of eyesight.

After years of fruitlessly searching for medicine or treatment for his wife, Mahona received a phone call from the village chairperson; in just a few weeks there would be an eye screening camp at the Igombwe Dispensary, several kilometers from where they lived.

Along with hundreds of other people from nearby communities, Edina traveled to the screening camp to have her vision checked. Like a dozen others who were identified with cataract, Edina was helped into a van and transported to Singida Regional Hospital. There, the local ophthalmologist, Dr. Kuzenza, operated to restore their sight.

The morning after her surgery, Edina's bandages were removed as she sat alongside the other patients who had received surgery for cataract. There were a few minutes of blurry vision as her newly operated eye adjusted to the light. Then the shapes around her

resolved into faces and she was seeing clearly for the first time in years! She began talking and laughing with the other patients, all immersed in the simple joy of being able to see the faces of the people they were speaking with. Then, testing the strength of her vision, she looked further and saw her husband standing across the room, smiling at her.

Through Seva's local partner in Tanzania, the Kilimanjaro Centre for Community Ophthalmology (KCCO), Seva has been supporting Singida Regional Hospital's Eye Department since 2015. Before this partnership, the team was sometimes unable to operate on patients for four or five months at a time because they had no access to the necessary consumables for surgery. But since starting to work with KCCO and Seva, Dr. Kuzenza's team is doing one outreach trip per week and nearly 1,000 cataract surgeries each year in a region where this care would be otherwise nearly impossible to access.

Without the support of Seva through KCCO and the dedication of local eye care professionals like those at Singida Regional Hospital, the surgeries and outreach that allowed Edina and so many others to receive the gift of restored sight would not be possible.

The last time I saw Edina, she was waving goodbye from across a river, accompanied by her husband and son as they traveled home from the Igombwe Dispensary, where the

### Edina Mboje's life, and the lives of those around her, are transformed forever.

hospital's outreach van had dropped them off the day after her surgery. She was full of vitality and moving surely into a brighter future—a future in which Edina is no longer confined to the house, no longer dependent on family members to help her perform the most basic tasks. A future in which her son returns full-time to school, Edina returns to proudly help her husband in the fields and the family reopens their restaurant business. A future in which Edina Mboje's life, and the lives of those around her, are transformed forever.

## MEET DR. NEAL SHORSTEIN

Dr. Neal Shorstein is one of Seva's most dedicated volunteer ophthalmologists. Over the past 10 years, Dr. Shorstein has generously donated his time, traveling abroad regularly to lead surgical trainings in Nepal, Tibet and most recently in Myanmar. It is our pleasure to introduce Dr. Shorstein to you, our supporters, through the Q&A below.



Dr. Neal Shorstein

### Dr. Shorstein, please tell our supporters a bit about your work.

I am an ophthalmologist at Kaiser Permanente in Walnut Creek, California. I've been in practice for 25 years and have done over 7,000 cataract surgeries. I am also Associate Chief of Quality at my medical center and a researcher. My research area is in cataract surgery and I have published ten recent papers in this area.

### What made you decide to get involved in supporting Seva's programs?

I love contributing to Seva! I know that my donation goes directly to providing sight-restoring surgery and preventive care to people who need it the most. Not only is Seva a 4-star organization on Charity Navigator, but I see it in action when I volunteer.

### You volunteer for Seva quite regularly. Tell us a bit about where you've traveled and how your service is helping to restore sight and strengthen our programs.

I have been teaching machine-assisted cataract surgery, called phacoemulsification, with Seva partner eye hospitals for the past ten years. As the eye hospitals grow in size and begin to deliver care to a wider variety of patients, training in

phacoemulsification is requested to allow the local surgeons to expand their offerings to their patients.

My first two trips were to Lumbini, Nepal. How wonderful to be able to work so close to Buddha's birthplace. The high volume of cataract surgeries from the dedicated surgeons, working from early in the morning to late in the evening, was inspiring. Then, I spent the next three teaching trips in Eastern Tibet, developing a close relationship with several of the cataract surgeons over six years.

### Is there a story that sticks out in your mind that you'd like to share?

I've traveled to Kham Eye Hospital in Eastern Tibet three times. One day, I met the incoming bus that brought the patients to the hospital for their surgery. This one older patient, a nun, had traveled for more than three days on the bus. She had dense cataracts, could not see very well at all and walked very tentatively with a stick for support and to guide her way. The next day, when we planned to do her surgery, things ran late as they sometimes do, and she was afraid that we weren't going to be able to do her surgery. When the Nursing Assistant finally brought her down to the operating theatre, she was visibly very relieved but at the same time a little nervous about the surgery. When the surgery was over, about 20 minutes later, she sat up with her patched eye and was obviously perplexed that her vision seemed to have gotten worse and not better after surgery. We reassured her that in the morning when we took off the patch, she would feel (and see) very differently. Sure enough, when we took the patch off the next morning, she let out a tremendous sigh which quickly formed into a beautiful smile. Before our eyes she became a different person, talkative and self-assured, which I imagine was more like herself before she became blind from the cataracts.

### If you could share one thing with Seva's donors about the impact of their donations, what would it be?

Your (and my) dollars go directly to restoring sight to people who desperately need it. The cataracts that these patients have are not the usual cataracts that I see in the United States, but rather are advanced, causing profound vision loss so that even getting around one's house and taking care of basic needs becomes impossible.



Tibetan Nun who traveled 3-days to have her sight restored.



# SING OUT FOR SIGHT



Jackson Browne and Joan Baez perform at Sing Out For Sight

On March 4th, more than twelve hundred Seva supporters joined together at the Maui Arts and Cultural Center in Kahului, HI for Sing Out For Sight. A spectacular benefit concert to honor Seva's beloved co-founder Ram Dass.

Music legends **Jackson Browne** and **Joan Baez** headlined the sold-out event which was hosted by Seva board member and co-founder **Wavy Gravy**. The evening also included a stellar performance by kirtan superstar **Krishna Das**.

An unannounced guest, actor and musician **Kris Kristofferson**, surprised the audience as he graced the stage to support both Joan Baez and Jackson Browne and round out what was an unforgettable event for everyone in attendance.

The crowd was buzzing with love and energy, rising to their feet to provide many heartfelt standing ovations. One of the

most moving parts of the evening was when Ram Dass was adorned with a traditional Hawaiian Lei of flowers as part of a ceremony to acknowledge and honor the important contributions he has made to American culture by bringing the wisdom and traditions of eastern spiritual philosophy and practice to the west. The audience learned how Ram Dass' many years of service to Seva have made it possible for the organization to prevent blindness and restore the eyesight of nearly 4-million people around the world. There were tears of joy shed by many in the room, but there were also clown noses, bubbles, and laughter as Wavy Gravy tactfully delivered the perfect amount of comic relief.

The benefit event was a smashing success, raising more than \$150,000 to support Seva's vital sight-saving programs in more than 20 countries. All of us at Seva are grateful to the musicians who so generously donated their time and talent, the event sponsors, our many dedicated volunteers and to everyone who was able to be in attendance. Proceeds from the event will be put into action right away to prevent blindness and restore sight, transforming the lives of thousands of people in need.



Above: A standing ovation for Ram Dass at the Maui Arts and Cultural Center. Right: Seva co-founder Ram Dass is honored at Sing Out For Sight.



CIRCLE OF SHARING  
DONOR HIGHLIGHT:

## GLENN TUCKER

Seva is proud to have some of the most dedicated donors around. It isn't unusual for us to look back on a donor's record and see that they've been giving for ten, twenty or even more than thirty years! In this issue of the Seva Spirit of Service newsletter, we are excited to profile one of these incredible donors.

Glenn Tucker of Petaluma, California, is a longtime member of Circle of Sharing, Seva's monthly giving program. Circle of Sharing donors support Seva every month, either automatically by credit card or by mailing a check. Since December of 1983, Glenn has generously made a monthly gift to Seva and our blindness prevention programs. That's 388 consecutive months!

"The work of Seva is very focused and clear, and donating to Seva provides a very direct path to helping those in need."

### CIRCLE OF SHARING

RESTORE SIGHT EVERY MONTH!



[www.seva.org/cos](http://www.seva.org/cos)

We spoke with Glenn to find out what drew him to Seva and kept him giving for so long. "I was originally attracted by three things," he explained. "The realization of how relatively little money it takes to bring sight to those who might never have the opportunity to see without Seva's help — it's a big 'bang for the buck'. Ram Dass' compassionate heart and beautiful life example gave me confidence that Seva's mission is pure. Finally, the work of Seva is very focused and clear, and donating to Seva provides a very direct path to helping those in need."

Glenn went on to explain how proud he is to be a part of the Seva community. "I am awed by people like the folks at Seva who give their time and life energy to help others. It feels really good knowing that in a small way I can help support them, and that they in turn support so many."

Seva's Circle of Sharing monthly giving program is particularly important because it allows us to count on donations like Glenn's as we work to expand our programs. Over the years, thanks to Glenn's longtime support, he has helped to transform lives by restoring sight to hundreds of people in need.

On behalf of our staff and those we serve around the globe, it is our pleasure to be able to say thank you to Glenn and all of our dedicated Circle of Sharing monthly donors.

Join Glenn and other Seva supporters by becoming a valued member of Seva's Circle of Sharing today. Your continued support will transform countless lives!

Sign up at [www.seva.org/cos](http://www.seva.org/cos)



Glenn Tucker

DONOR FOR

# 388

CONSECUTIVE  
MONTHS!





# SPIRIT OF SERVICE

2017 VOLUME 1

NEWSLETTER



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## About Seva

Seva is a global nonprofit eye care organization that transforms lives by restoring sight and preventing blindness.

We train local eye care providers and develop self-sustaining eye programs around the world. Seva has helped nearly 4 million people who were blind to regain their sight in more than 20 countries.

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“Seva has given so much help to so many thousands of people for so many years — such a wonderful example of love in action.”

**BONNIE RAITT**  
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