



# FOCUS

**WORLD CATARACT FOUNDATION**  
helping the world to see

**NEWSLETTER OF THE WORLD CATARACT FOUNDATION**  
Working To Eliminate Cataract Blindness Worldwide

Fall 2003

[www.worldcataract.org](http://www.worldcataract.org)

## The Xi'an Connection

The ancient city of Xi'an is best known as the site of the world famous terra-cotta warriors, and as the home of China's first Emperor. It's also the home of ophthalmologist, Dr. Meng Yongan and his wife Liu Yang Sheng, whom the World Cataract Foundation welcomed back to Memphis in July for a week's visit.

Dr. Meng first came to Memphis in 1986 for six months of training in the World Cataract Foundation's Medical Personnel Exchange Program. His main purpose was to learn extracapsular cataract surgery.

After returning to China Dr. Meng performed the first lens implant surgery in Xi'an. His hospital continued with the surgeries, but only at the rate of two or three a day. Dr. Meng came back to Memphis for more training in 1990, this time for eight months. He mastered the phacoemulsification technique (pulverizing and dissolving the diseased lens as it is removed from the eye). He also learned how to improve his efficiency and increase the number of surgeries that could be done in one day.

On advice from Dr. Jerre Freeman, founder of the World Cataract Foundation, Dr. Meng asked his hospital administration in Xi'an if they could begin charging for the surgeries. When the answer was no, Dr. Meng left the hospital and opened his own clinic, the Xi'an Ancient City Eye Hospital, on October 18, 1992. It was the first fee-for-cataract-surgery center in China.

Dr. Meng has since trained more than twenty ophthalmologists and performed more than 10,000 cataract surgeries during his career. He also helped start six satellite facilities in the countryside around Xi'an. Ophthalmologists from other parts of China travel to these centers to attend to the blind poor.

During his recent visit to Memphis Dr. Meng and his wife were guests of honor on July 12th at a reception hosted by World Cataract Foundation Board member, Pat Beech.



From left: Dr. Peter Netland, Dr. Meng Yongan, Dr. Jerre Freeman, Vicky Vasquez, Walker Wellford, Dr. Liu Yang Sheng, and Dr. Thomas Gettelfinger

## Letter from the Founder

### Starting in China

The World Cataract Foundation has such a long and rich history with China, continuing to this day, that we really need to divide it into chapters. I will start here with what we might call Chapter One.

It began in 1976, a very important year in China's history. Three significant events occurred. Early in the spring Chou En-lai, Chairman Mao's right-hand person, died. In June, China experienced one of its most devastating earthquakes, resulting in the deaths of many thousands of people. Later that year, in October, Chairman Mao Tse-tung himself died. The country went into official and deep mourning.

Mrs. Betty Goff Cartwright was scheduled to lead a delegation of twenty Memphians, including my wife Anne and me, into China in November, 1976. It was only the third group the Chinese authorities had approved from the US-China Friendship Association. Because of Chairman Mao's death we did not know if we would be allowed in, but circumstances changed in such a way that the permission was given.

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The guides assigned to us were top-notch, spoke fluent English, and had had experience with top officials visiting China from other countries. In each city they inquired what we would like to see. I knew the others would certainly ask for the more important historical and picturesque sites, so I concentrated on ophthalmology. I wanted to meet cataract surgeons who were doing phacoemulsification. I also wanted to meet those who were implanting intraocular lenses. No information about these techniques had been coming out of China, isolated as it was behind what we then called the Bamboo Curtain. But I felt someone somewhere in the country must have been quietly working on them.

I had no luck in Guangzhou or Nanjing, but in both Shanghai and Beijing we hit pay dirt. At the Xin-Hua Hospital in Shanghai I was privileged to meet Dr. Lu Dao-Yan, probably the most famous cataract surgeon in all of China. After reading articles in some American journals which had been smuggled in, he had built his own phacoemulsifier with the help of boyhood friends who had gone on to become engineers of various types. He had also developed modern lasers for eye surgery.

Dr. Lu Dao-Yan was a wealth of ancient Chinese ophthalmic wisdom. He showed how a dried chrysanthemum blossom wrapped in silk makes an excellent eye patch, just the size and shape and with the softness and resilience an eye patch requires. I shared with him the concept of the punctum plug for dry eyes, and my own experience with intraocular lens implantation.

Dr. Lu and I bonded on that trip, and communicated regularly. After we formed the World Cataract Foundation in 1978 (then the World Lens Project) Dr. Lu and I expanded our exchanges and our relationship regularly until his death in the 1990's. He was the person who initiated our medical exchange program with China.

Next time: Chapter Two

—Jerre Minor Freeman, M.D.



**FOCUS** is edited by WCF Board Member  
Dr. Gerard Vanderhaar and produced by Lori  
Hudson, Program Director

## World Cataract Foundation Missions

### **Papua New Guinea**

August 29-September 12, 2003

For the fourth year in a row a WCF ophthalmologist was part of a medical team that traveled down the Sepik River to the village of Huana to treat many different illnesses including eyes. The Sandhill Group Foundation provided a grant to the WCF to help sponsor ophthalmologists Dr. Lane Ulrich of August, Georgia and his assistant, Meredith Whitlock, C.O.T. of Chattanooga, TN. The medical expedition was led by Dr. Louis Carter and his wife Anne, also from Chattanooga.

### **Ometepec**

November 16-25, 2003

A team of 22-25 World Cataract Foundation ophthalmologists and support staff will treat cataracts and other eye diseases in the Mexican village of Ometepec for the 33rd straight year. Dr. Alexander Hatsis from Nassau University in New York is joining the team once again, as are Dr. Alfredo Amigo and his wife Mercedes Frances from Tenerife, Spain. (Look for the complete list of participants in the next newsletter.)

### **Philippines**

November 4-14, 2003

The World Cataract Foundation is again helping sponsor ophthalmologist, Dr. John Van Dyck and his wife Dr. Lily Van Dyck as part of the Memphis Mission of Mercy to the rural town of Victorias, several hundred miles south of Manila. The medical group, led by Renato Zalamea, CRNA, is treating hundreds of patients for a variety of ailments. Dr. John Van Dyck will extract cataracts and attend to the many patients with vision problems. The next Mission of Mercy to the Philippines is in June, 2004. Interested ophthalmologists can contact Renato Zalamea at 901-386-8950 or Lori Hudson (WCF) at 901-379-0405.

### **Guerrero, Mexico**

2000-2010

The WCF has signed agreements with officials of the state of Guerrero in Mexico toward the goal of eliminating cataract blindness in the state during this decade. The project, "Guerrero:Let There Be Light," is being coordinated by World Cataract Foundation Mexico, A.C., using donated equipment and government aided clinics. Its goal is 5,000 cataract surgeries a year.

**World Cataract Foundation Contributors—April 1-August 31, 2003 Thank you for your help in eliminating cataract blindness worldwide through your generous contributions.**

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Thanks to employees of Kele & Associates for collecting glasses for our mission trip to Mexico in November!

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**Thunderstorms—Memphis and China**

In 1980 Dr. Lu Dao-Yan came to Memphis to study with us and we with him. He stayed with Anne and me in our home on Peabody, sleeping in our study on the first floor. During a typical Memphis thunderstorm one night we came down to check on him. Dr. Lu was sitting up, wide-awake and looking glum. He said, “This is no good. In China, we have many people sleeping in one room like this, so we are not scared to be alone in a storm.” —JMF

**Meet the WCF Board**



*Walker L. Wellford, III*

*As a long-time friend of Dr. Jerre Freeman, Walker has been familiar with the work of the World Cataract Foundation for many years. A native of Memphis and a graduate of Rhodes College, he is a career agent with the Mass Mutual Financial Group. In 1986 Walker received his CLU designation, and is a Life Member of the Million Dollar Roundtable. During his business career he has served voluntarily in leadership roles with many organizations, including the Memphis Red Cross, Sales and Marketing Executives, Society of Financial Services Professionals, and the Kiwannis Club. In September he was named “Kiwannian of the Year.” Walker was recently elected President of the World Cataract Foundation Board.*

## HOW YOU CAN HELP

The World Cataract Foundation is happy to accept any gift, large, or small. If you would like your contribution to be in honor of a friend or as a memorial, please include their names and addresses with your donation. Each person you honor will receive a note acknowledging your gift.

The WCF now offers a convenient way to make donations. We have partnered with Enterprise National Bank to accept contributions through automatic deductions. If you are interested in becoming a regular contributor to WCF's mission of helping the blind poor regain their sight, the process is simple. First, call or write us to receive a form. Complete the form and mail it back. Automatic electronic withdrawals will be made from your checking or savings account according to your specifications about how often and when.

Together we can make a difference in helping cure cataract blindness worldwide.

## MISSION TRIP NEEDS

The World Cataract Foundation currently borrows most of the equipment needed for its mission trips to other parts of the world. Gifts of equipment are always welcome. Right now we need:

Portable Used Phaco	\$20,000.00
Portable Microscopes (\$ 6,750.00x2)	\$13,000.00
Statim Autoclaves (\$5,000.00 x 2)	\$10,000.00
Indirect Ophthalmoscope	\$ 1,555.66
Autorefractor	\$ 4,500.00

We will accept slightly used equipment. It must be in great condition, because we want to provide the best possible care for the people that we serve. If you are interested in helping the world to see by providing funds for these equipment needs, please contact Lori Hudson, Program Director at 901-379-0405.

***As a nonprofit, charitable 501 (c) (3) organization the WCF is supported solely by those who believe in restoring sight to the cataract blind. Gifts to the WCF are tax deductible. Please send your gift to World Cataract Foundation, 6463 Poplar, #101, Memphis, TN 38119 or call 901-379-0405 for more information.***



### WORLD CATARACT FOUNDATION

helping the world to see

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