



Esther in Kenya holds out some coffee beans she picked on her own. She is thrilled to be working around the house again after years of blindness. *Photo: Lister Barasa Masika / Operation Eyesight*

Seeing the sun again: Vision restored at age 85

Ten years ago, Esther – who lives in the village of Sitet, in Nandi County, Kenya – was chopping firewood when a log bounced and hit her left eye. The pain was sharp and immediate.

A week later, she went to the nearest hospital, where she received medication to manage the worsening pain and a referral to an eye hospital. But by then, her resources were spent. Out of money, she went home. The vision in her left eye never recovered.

She managed with her one good eye until three years ago, when she noticed the vision in her right eye was blurring. Soon, everyday tasks like picking coffee beans, cooking and walking to church became impossible.

“I felt like a burden to my daughter,” she says. “She had to leave her home to stay with me and help.

At some point, I just wanted to die... I didn’t want to hold her back from her life.”

But one day, hope arrived in the form of a young man named Simon who knocked on Esther’s door. As a community health promoter we’d trained in primary eye care, Simon encouraged Esther to visit an upcoming eye screening camp we were organizing along with Meteitei Sub-County Hospital.

At the camp, doctors said that unfortunately her left eye was permanently damaged, but they could restore vision in her right eye. At 85 years old, Esther was scared of getting surgery due to her age, but she was determined to reclaim her life. Thanks to support from Johnson & Johnson, her operation was provided free of charge.

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The day after her surgery, Esther experienced a moment she'll never forget.

"They removed the bandage... and I could see!" she recalls. "I was so happy! I couldn't believe it. I saw my daughter's face again. I saw the sun. I saw my home."

Now she's back to her daily life – picking coffee, going to market and attending church.

Her message is clear: "Please go. Don't be afraid. The surgery is not painful. You will see again, just like me. I thank the doctors. I thank the donors and Operation Eyesight, and I thank God."

Your support helps us provide more sight-restoring surgeries for people like Esther!

Mark your calendars for World Sight Day, October 9

As always, we are gearing up for a variety of World Sight Day events, including eye screenings, awareness marches and more. The global celebration is an opportunity to spread awareness about the importance of eye health. It's also a chance for us to stand with our partners to call on policy makers all over the globe to make eye care accessible and affordable for everyone by providing universal health care that includes eye care.

This year, get your youngest family members involved by participating in our World Sight Day Wellness Bingo, an activity that challenges kids to take care of their eyes. Download your copy at: operationeyesight.com/free-resources-for-parents



DID YOU KNOW?

In November 2024, the federal government passed the National Strategy for Eye Health Act. As a member of the Canadian Eye Health Coalition, we

are proud to chair this network of organizations and individuals working together to inform the national framework for eye care and advocate for improved vision health for all Canadians.



Candy Siadibbi joined our Zambia team in 2022, first working in the Lusaka area before relocating to Mkushi, in Central Province. She has a bachelor's degree in psychology and public administration from the University of Zambia. Before joining Operation Eyesight, she worked as a research assistant, freelancing with various nonprofit organizations.

NOTES FROM THE FIELD:

An end to isolation for a young mother

by Candy Siadibbi, Project Officer, Zambia

When I first met Mary, she told me how she had been blind since 2012. She had started losing her vision young – when she was a new bride and expecting her first child. Living in a rural area, far from any hospitals, she went to a traditional healer for help but continued to lose her sight. People whispered that she must have been doing witchcraft that backfired on her... asking what else could explain blindness in someone so young. Believing the witchcraft rumours, Mary's husband left her before the baby was born. Her family abandoned her too. The only person who helped Mary was her niece who has been supporting her and her child all this time.

When the niece heard that Operation Eyesight was offering free eye exams, she brought Mary to a surgical camp we were hosting. After all her years of alienation, Mary had little confidence in getting her sight restored, but she agreed to a checkup in hopes that it would reduce the eye pain she was experiencing. The team diagnosed her with bilateral cataracts and recommended surgery, which she agreed to.

I went to check on her in hospital shortly after her bandages came off. I was initially disappointed because she kept saying, "No, I can't see you. I can't see anything." Worried something had gone wrong with the operation, I called her over to see the doctor, when she finally said, "Actually... I can see you, but I've been blind for so long, I thought I was imagining you! I've been able to see you the whole time."

She erupted into laughter, then tears. Her niece joined in.

We escorted her home by public bus, and the whole time she was pointing and smiling at things she saw rushing by through the window. She said her greatest excitement was seeing the face of her daughter – now 12 years-old – as soon as she got home.

Thank you to our donors for making stories like this possible!

**Name has been changed to protect the patient's privacy.*



Erin Lawrie (left) and Monica Gonzales Bruch (right) from our Advancement team pose at our booth in the House of Friendship at the Rotary International Convention in Calgary in June.

Making global connections at the Rotary International Convention

When we heard Rotary International’s annual convention would take place in our home base of Calgary this year, we knew we needed to be part of the event. After all, 474 Rotary clubs from around the world have contributed more than \$3.88M to our projects since our founding in 1963 – supporting surgeries, training programs, water projects and more.

Throughout the five-day convention, our staff were on hand to greet old friends and make new connections. More than 200 people from clubs around the world left us their contact information, eager to learn more about our projects or find out how their clubs can partner with us. **Thank you, Rotary, for your many years of dedicated support!**

Learn more or book a presentation for your local club: operationeyesight.com/rotary



Thinking about the holidays?

Make a donation in the name of a friend or loved one and select from a variety of greeting cards or eCards to notify them of the gift. Watch for your Gift of Sight order form, landing in mailboxes in late October.

Looking for your charity of choice for this year’s holiday party or dinner? Our new online donation tool makes it easier than ever to collect donations from friends, family and coworkers. Create your fundraiser today at operationeyesight.com/fundraise



Harprasad (centre) poses with family in front of his home in Faluda, Uttar Pradesh, India. His big smile shows his relief at being able to work again.

A farmer's fight for sight

Plowing the fields, checking on his crops and just walking around the farm all became difficult – and even hazardous – for Harprasad when his eyesight started to fade. For the 69-year-old farmer in India, the idea of quitting work and sitting at home all day was unbearable. His pride was in maintaining the family's land, alongside his wife, daughter and three sons.

Harprasad discussed his failing vision with his family, but they didn't know where to send him to get eye treatment.

Happily, the family's village was included in one of our outreach projects. A community health worker showed up on their doorstep and examined Harprasad's eyes, concluding that he had cataracts, a diagnosis that was confirmed after he was sent to the nearby Nehtaur Vision Centre.

Initially, Harprasad's diagnosis caused him even more anxiety, as he worried about how he'd pay for the recommended cataract surgery. But the community health worker explained that he qualified for a free operation and that his

transportation, meals and hospital stay would also be taken care of, thanks to the support of generous donors like you.

Harprasad underwent bilateral cataract surgery at our partner hospital, the C.L. Gupta Eye Institute in Moradabad. When the bandages came off, he was amazed by his clear vision. Now he's confidently working on his farm once again.

Get in touch

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