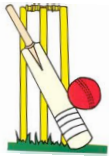


GLAUCOMA WATCH

“Cricket saved me”



Ganesh Singh was your typical student.

At his high school in Georgetown, Guyana, he was popular among his peers, the heart throb of teenage girls and he had an insatiable appetite for the game of cricket and maths.

Overall, life was good, but things took a dramatic turn when at the age of thirteen (13), on a visit to the United States, he was diagnosed with Glaucoma.

“I was basically seeing objects, I could define them although I could only see shadows”

Ganesh was not sure what to think of his condition, but he soldiered on and in August 2000 he sat his high school examinations from the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC).



Shortly after his final exams, he visited his specialist who delivered a blow to what little hope there was. And so, four years after being diagnosed, Ganesh lost his sight. He was 17 years old.

“That’s when I got the really really sad news, I was told that 99% of my

nerves were damaged. I think that’s one of the most difficult stages to get blind or to acquire any form of disability, at 16,17, you are in your prime teenage years. How could I get blind at that stage? My life stopped”

Overtaken by depression, Ganesh literally locked himself away from the world for five years.



continued on page 3



GUYANA : Hazlin Bagot getting her eyes checked at the Eye Clinic at the Georgetown Public Hospital



ST LUCIA : Patient being examined at the Eye Clinic located at St Lucia Blind Welfare Association .



JAMAICA : Joyce Williams - a Glaucoma patient visiting the Eye Clinic at the Mandeville Regional Hospital .



A JOURNEY OF FAITH

She has climbed the famous

Pitons in her homeland of St Lucia , she loves a good game of cricket and is proud of her accomplishments - all done since losing her sight over twenty years ago.

"I wasn't always blind, I lost my sight at the age of ten, it was to Glaucoma".

Hyacinth Daniel is now 39 and lives in the village of Debreuil, in Choiseul, located on the southwestern side of the island.

She vividly recalls what she says was the most difficult period in her life

"You know I remember my struggles, I took so much medication, the doctors tries to help me. I did three operations. Everything was so very very painful" she said.

The pain that is sometimes associated with Glaucoma also affected Hyacinth.

"My eyes used to hurt real bad, as though I had stones in them, the memories are painful, the good thing is that I still remember somethings from when I could see , like colours. My sight went very very slowly, sometimes i could see a line, then i would see shadows and eventually nothing at all"

While her vision loss did not come as a surprise, Hyacinth now had to learn to readjust to her blindness.

"I eventually got used to it with the help of the Blind Welfare (St Lucia Blind Welfare Association) and of course my friends. I gradually started to feel more comfortable with my situation and now, years later , after losing my sight, I am just fine"

In adjusting to blindness, Hyacinth learnt the wonder of using her hands to make a living.

"I used to work in pottery, I did this for three to four years and then turned to straw craft. Straw craft is what I really really love"

At home, Hyacinth is kept busy, in addition to taking care of her son and helping her mother around the house, she finds time for her straw

craft which includes making baskets, place mats and other items . She now dreams of opening her own store.

"I have done so much with my sight, I actually climbed the Pitons while blind, yes I was blind, I've been to the forest and there is also blind cricket. I'm a good batter and I've played in a blind cricket tournament in Barbados. Now I have other dreams, I would love to open my own craft store because I want to be independent . I also want to get married one day"

Having Glaucoma was not the end of the world for Hyacinth who continues to hold onto her faith.

"Put your trust in God and be around people with disabilities and you will get encouragement, all is not lost, you can do a lot with your disability."



* Hyacinth and her son showing some of her straw craft

* The PITONS - St Lucia's most famous land mark. Located near the town of Soufriere, they top 2,000 ft



In Sickness and in Health



Years

ago when
George
and
Sylvia
Blythe
promised

to be with each other in "sickness and in health", little did they know the reality of their wedding vows. The couple, both in their 70s have lost their vision due to Glaucoma.

For years George, 72, fought long and hard hoping to conquer recurring eye problems.

"My grandfather was blind, so was my father and now it's my turn... it's not easy but there is nothing else to do"

George who describes himself as a jack of all trades, said that in his younger years he had countless jobs, from being a mason, a baker, a gardener and participating in the farm work programme in the United States. While overseas an injury forced him to return to Jamaica.

He recalls that problems with his eyes became evident shortly after he returned home.

"One night, years ago, my eyes suddenly got foggy and started to run water, this had never happened. My friend who was with me said something had to be wrong. I went to the doctor who gave me a letter to see a specialist who told me it looked like Glaucoma. I went to another Doctor and when they checked it they didn't tell me what was wrong. They gave me pills and eye drops and told me to come back every three months.

This went on for seven years. Sometimes there were no doctors at the hospital, I had to go to private doctors and that cost a lot of money.

One day seven doctors examined my eyes. One of them told me that no matter what happened they could not save my vision. One day the vision in my left eye went suddenly and a few years later, I went blind in the other"

Through his ordeal, his wife, Sylvia, 74, stood by his side, not knowing that she would suffer the same fate 13 years later.

"I woke up one morning and when I opened my eyes, I could only see out of one. I was looking to go blind though, because people told me that I would go

blind. But they didn't tell me that I would go to bed and just wake up and couldn't see"

Glaucoma - "the thief of sight" robbed her of her vision. Their daughter who is now their care-giver, believes her mother's sight could have been saved if she only listened to the Doctors.

Sylvia disagrees.

"The Doctor said the pressure in the eye was high high, I got drops, but after they told me I had to do an operation because I had cataract and Glaucoma. After hearing that I didn't go back - what was the use?"

"I don't worry about it, my husband told me what would happen. We cheer up each other." Sylvia said.

Video

"In Sickness & In Health"
George & Sylvia Blythe - blind couple

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPKmcB6NoBg>

GLAUCOMA PATIENTS : THEIR STORIES



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vufv-rQsPdM>

Collin Mullings, 59, was diagnosed with Glaucoma following cataract surgery at the Mandeville Regional Hospital in Jamaica



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=McfOu9Q4XM>

87 year old Sylvia King, used to declare that no man would ever touch her eyes. After being diagnosed with Glaucoma, she encourages every one to get their eyes checked before its too late.

"I stayed at home, listened to a lot of music, went to a few places with my cousin, where no one really knew me. I lost my high schools friends, I blanked them out, from that we lost contact. I had a few friends close to where I live and they stuck around. It was hard, I was never educated about my condition, although I had Glaucoma, I wasn't aware of the consequences, I thought something could be done to save by sight, I had such a false sense of security"

BLIND CRICKET

Believing that all his dreams were shattered, Ganesh even contemplated suicide, but one day, the long awaited wake up call came when he heard about blind cricket.

"You can't believe how excited I was! Cricket was always my passion and now I was being told that although I could not see I could still play? For me that was the turning point of my life, although it came five years after going blind"

Everything took off from then on. Ganesh regained his confidence, attended workshops and met others who could relate to his situation.

"When I started in blind cricket, I then got involved in other things, such as workshops. The sport of cricket you meet other blind persons and it rubs off on you and helps to build your confidence"

As his confidence soared but there was one major obstacle - learning to use the "white cane" in order to get around. But learning to use the cane was one problem. the other was pride. Not wanting anyone to know that he was blind.

As fate would have it, Ganesh soon met Nicole Forde, an Adjustment to Blindness Specialist from the **Caribbean Council for the Blind (CCB)**, Guyana Office.

"When I started Blind Cricket, Nicole worked with me in cane training, it has been a great help having persons like Nicole to guide you in the process. I was one of the persons who was the most difficult, for anyone to get me to use the cane it was a difficult task. I have only started using it for a few months. Now I'm pretty okay with it, I don't see it as something that really labels me."

Today Ganesh is unstoppable, he plays an integral role with the Guyana Council for Disabilities, Young Voices Guyana - a Youth Disability Group, he sits on the board of Guyana Blind Cricket Association and is also a Director of the West Indies Blind Cricket Council.

Ganesh has come a long way and is proud of what he has achieved so far. He continues to enjoy cricket but he has all but given up on his dream of becoming an accountant.

"A part of me will always be dead if I don't get to do accounting. Who would want to employ me? That's almost impossible - or rather highly improbable. Therefore, I don't want to waste my energies and focus on that - but who knows maybe one day"

Having faced his own struggles with blindness, Ganesh has a message for those battling Glaucoma.

"I would say that if you have some sight now, try to care it. Don't live in any false security because with Glaucoma you can go blind at some point in your life. I am here to tell you that there is life after blindness"

For Ganesh and hundreds of others across the Caribbean, losing his vision was life changing experience that was initially hard to accept. He is now fighting another battle - that of acceptance

"My fight everyday is on those who offer pity and charity. we are equal human beings, give us an even playing field. But there are those who make persons think that when you're blind or visually impaired you want sympathy, I don't want your sympathy"

"For the persons who like attention, it doesn't last forever, persons will get fed up. so at some point in time you need to be strong enough to have the courage to be independent."

Ganesh has been faced with his fair share of challenges but he has triumphed.

"The future is bright, I am all over the place, there is no time to be bored and the best is yet to come"



Ganesh preparing for a game of cricket

(photo : VSO/Simon Rawles)

Glaucoma myths & facts



**Dr Marlene Smith -Day
Consultant Ophthalmologist
Mandeville Regional Hospital,
Jamaica**

...

suffering from **Glaucoma** which is called Juvenile **Glaucoma**. People who inherit **Glaucoma** generally develop it in their early forties. Incidences of **Glaucoma** increases further with advancing age.

MYTH: I have great vision, I don't wear glasses, so i couldn't have **Glaucoma**.

FACT: Most forms of **Glaucoma** have no symptoms or cause no change in vision until late in the course of the disease.

SEE YOUR DOCTOR IMMEDIATELY IF

- You suffer from recurring blurry vision
- You believe your peripheral (side) vision is decreasing
- You see rainbow-hued halos around lights at night
- You experience pain around the eyes after watching tv or leaving a dark room.

MYTH: Smoking Marijuana will cure **Glaucoma**

FACT: Smoking "ganja" will not help those who do not use the prescribed eye drops. They will still go blind. Other problems could develop such as stomach ulcers and lung cancer.

MYTH: If there's no pain, there's no problem.

FACT: The most common form of **Glaucoma** - Open Angle **Glaucoma** initially has no symptoms. The pressure in the eye builds gradually. Without treatment, blindness will occur.

MYTH: Only the elderly get **Glaucoma**

FACT: **Glaucoma** can affect any age group from the new-born to the elderly, though increase in life expectancy is one of the high-risk factors..

It is not uncommon to find children between the ages of four and ten



Dr Smith-Day examines a patient

MYTH : If you have lost your vision due to **Glaucoma** , there's no need for medication.

FACT: You must continue to use the prescribed medication. This will control the pressure within the eye and prevent further damage .

MYTH: **Glaucoma** always leads to blindness

FACT: Nearly 90 per cent of all **Glaucoma**-related blindness can be prevented with proper treatment. The key is timely diagnosis.



Patients at
the Eye
Clinic
located at
the
Mandeville
Regional
Hospital -
Jamaica

What is Glaucoma



Glaucoma is a group of eye diseases that gradually steal sight without warning. In the early stages of the disease, there may be no symptoms. Experts estimate that half of the people affected by Glaucoma may not know they have it.

Vision loss is caused by damage to the optic nerve. This nerve acts like an electric cable with over a million

wires. It is responsible for carrying images from the eye to the brain.

There is no cure for glaucoma—yet. However, medication or surgery can slow or prevent further vision loss. The appropriate treatment depends upon the type of Glaucoma among other factors. Early detection is vital to stopping the progress of the disease.

It was once thought that high pressure within the eye, also known as intraocular pressure or IOP, is the main cause of this optic nerve damage. Although IOP is clearly a risk factor, it is believed that even people with “normal” levels of pressure can experience vision loss from Glaucoma.

(The Glaucoma Research Foundation)

Main causes of Blindness in the Caribbean

1. Non Operated Cataracts
2. Uncorrected Refractive Error
3. Low Vision
4. Diabetic Retinopathy
5. Childhood Blindness
6. Glaucoma

OUR MISSION, OUR PURPOSE, OUR GOAL....

Our purpose is preventing blindness and visual impairment while restoring sight and creating opportunities for persons whose sight cannot be restored.

How can you help?

Please donate to CCB Eye Care Caribbean.

Donations may be made via our website
www.eyecarecaribbean.com

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