

## Nay Hser: Karen eye medic

*They had been seeing each other. Now, they had not seen each other for 35 years. And eventually they could not even see.*

*An elderly Karen ethnic man was led by family members to the remote eye clinic. Similarly an older woman. Neither could see much more than a hand waved in from of their eyes due to cataracts. They heard about the eye medic and hoped to regain a little sight. Long ago, they had been boyfriend-girlfriend but they Burma Army conflict separated them. Their lives took separate paths- each marrying, living hard Karen rural lives and then growing old. The eye medic examined their eyes, diagnosed cataracts and explained the options and cataract surgery. Each had no other hope- so consented. The eye medic prayed for each on a day of two dozen sequential cataract patients, lay on the hard operating table, got numbing medicine behind one eye, a cloth drape over the face. They had to lie very still, but the surgeon comforted them in Karen language. Painlessly, like the delivery of a large baby- the dark brown 10 mm cataract was artfully delivered from their eyes, a crystal clear plastic lens reinserted, and the 7mm incision sutured. Then a patch was placed over the numb eye and they convalesced for the evening.*

*In the next morning they gathered with the score of post-op patients for more prayer and pictures with the eye medic and his team. in the long row, each had the patch removed to bright, colorful light, with better, but still blurry vision so eyedrops were instilled. On the second post-operative day, the vision was already much clearer. The man glanced at other patients, squinting at one. did she look familiar? He asked her- a name- old and familiar- was that her? Yes- she said. "Did she recognize him?" he asked. She peered at him. "yes- were you my boyfriend? Joy and laughter erupted from the other patients witnessing a reunion. They both praised God they could meet again and see each other. Clearly. This was in remote Karen State, Burma, an area of military conflict for over six decades. That eye medic was Nay Hser- thanking god he was able to participate in providing sight for a thousand cataract-blind patients in Karen State yearly.*

Nay Hser was born to a businessman the late The Say Ko and his surviving mother Naw Den Nay in Pa Po- Mutraw District April 17, 1972. His sister died of malaria when he was just 4. He has two younger brothers Saw The Hser (1980) and Pa Bit (1984) and two other younger sisters Law Leh Moo (1987) and Naw Dah (1990).

Nay Hser attended grade 1-4 in Papun, then grade 4-10 in Man Der Play, Head Quarters excelling in science and music. He served as a youth leader in church. He then attended special school in English language- grade 11- in the Mae La Refugee Camp north of MaeSot, Thailand.

From 1995 through 1997, Nay Hser took intense medic training in KweeKler- in the DooPlaYer District about 25 Km west of Bung Klung on the Thai Burma border, but the February 1997 Burma Army offensive forced him to flee to Thailand along with 10,000 other Karen people. He settled in the Thai border village of Kwee Lwer Too for three months helping where he could the myriad of disrupted families being processed as refugees in Thailand.

In June 1997, NayHser moved to MaeLa Camp- a large 50,000 person refugee camp. There, he completed his medic training in May 1988. By May of the next year, Nay Hser's clinic skills were recognized, and he became a medic in the MaeLa Camp hospital- eventually becoming the director.

In 1999, Nay Hser married Poh See and they had their first son, David Htoo. In 2002, David Chan was born. Poh See worked at home in the camp, gifted with weaving and oversaw the academic and Christian training of her two sons.

Frank Green is an outstanding, devoted missionary ophthalmologist from Scotland. When early efforts at providing remote eye care weeks at a time in Karen State were thwarted by oppressive military activity, he was forced to retreat to the Thai Burma border, eventually receiving permission to do eye care and surgery in Dr. Cynthia's MaoTao clinic in MaeSot near the Friendship Bridge over the Moei River with Burma.

Dr. Green would do hundreds of cataracts and other procedures for Burma patients who came across the border to Thailand, but the volume of work was more than he could support. Perhaps if he had an assistant. But there were no medical doctors available for the task. Prayerfully, he broke with western tradition, and sought out someone with less than a medical degree, but young, motivated and skilled. While "Dr. Frank" was doing an outreach clinic in the MaeLot Camp in 2006, he was assisted by Karen ethnic medic Nay Hser. Nay Hser observed keenly and learned quickly in the weeks Frank worked in the camp. After this, he envisioned details of the cataract procedure he had observed Frank performing. He even practiced on pig eyes he could obtain. Noting NayHser's interest and eagerness, Frank invited Nay Hser to obtain papers so he could travel and help in Dr. Cynthia's Clinic. Then, in October 2008, Dr. Frank arranged for his mentor, Australian ophthalmologist John Forrester, to come to MaeSot to offer NayHser intense two-weeks of training specifically in Manual Small Incision Cataract Surgery (MSICS), a technique recently developed in India and Nepal.

From then on, NayHser would assist each time Dr. Frank would come back to MaeSot, performing cataracts, glaucoma, pterygium surgery side by side with adjacent operating microscopes in the eye operating theater in MaeTao clinic.

In December 2007, Dr. Bob Arnold on the first of 16 trips from Alaska to the Karen State initially offering pediatric vision screening in IDP camps, then developing a method for providing reading glasses, ethnic-specific "Burma Bifocals," and remote, custom portable spectacles. During yearly visits, he noted that his medical prescriptions for the many cataract patients to wait for "the cataract surgeon" to come to their remote border location was never fulfilled. Some Burma patients bravely ventured to pass Thai check-points lacking Thai papers to have eye care at local Umphang Hospital, or to travel all the way up to MaeSot for Dr. Cynthia's clinic, but most could not afford the travel or risk to regain their sight.

Dr. Arnold brought a Zeiss OPMI-1 used microscope, a pressure cooker (before the Boston marathon incident), and microsurgical instruments with donated intraocular lenses, and brought them over the Pacific in back packs to be installed in Eliya's Clinic in the Youth Hostel in Bung Klung. Dr. Arnold, a pediatric ophthalmologist had not done adult cataracts since 1988, but performed half-a dozen on the Thai Burma border. He realized that the volume of cataract blindness was far greater than he could address himself. Not realizing about the cataract clinic at Mao Tao Clinic, Dr. Arnold wondered if he could train a medic from Jungle School of Medicine under the leadership of Dr. Mitch Ryan. When the option get a JSMK graduate fell through, Dr. Ryan put Dr. Arnold in touch with Dr. Green.

With prayerful consideration by the Bung Klung church council, the AlaskKaren center was planned with Eliya to oversee.

On March 9, 2013, Dr. Arnold with his daughter Elle and friend Kayla Rowe drove to MaeSot meeting Nay Hser at the 7-Eleven. After introductions and prayer, they drove to Bung Klung to work with Eliya's medics, for Bob to perform some cataracts and to plan.

Burma Vision was an outreach of Faith Christian Community in Anchorage, Alaska to provide vision care in association with Free Burma Rangers in Burma and other remote areas of the world (Africa, Central America, South America). Burma Vision helped provide NayHser with a traveling microscope (steeply discounted by Dr. Frank Green) and surgical instruments.

In November 2014, Nay Hser travelled with Dr. Arnold to the American Academy of Ophthalmology meeting in Chicago where he presented a paper on remote vision screening in a Symposium by Dr. Ken Wright. NayHser obtained some additional surgical instruments and made contacts at the meeting before traveling to Alaska to get additional medical and surgical eye training.

At the invitation of local officials, Nay Hser has traveled to each of Kare State's seven district offering sight-saving surgery to thousands.

In May 2016, the board of Judson University in Elgin Illinois voted to confirm upon NayHser an honorary doctorate of letters. Nay Hser, just of a remote cataract clinic in Bung Klun, and the dedication of the Cross Border Clinic- traveled back to Chicago to receive the honor May 6, 2017.,

Bob Arnold  
May 8, 2017