



December 31, 2011

Marley's Ghost to Ebenezer Scrooge:
"Business? Mankind was my business."
Charles Dickens, 1843

As one year closes and another opens, it is my pleasure and practice to make seasonal donations in honour of clients, colleagues and friends. In past years I made several selections but this year I decided to focus on one initiative that reflects my longstanding, personal interest in eye care.

I chose to support the NOOR program of the International Assistance Mission, the longest continually serving NGO in Afghanistan. NOOR stands for National Organization for Ophthalmic Rehabilitation and means "light" in Persian. Since 1996, this program has provided eye care to around 5 million Afghans without discriminating on the basis of race, creed or social standing. It has Eye Hospitals in Kabul, Herat, Mazar and Kandahar, and provides primary eye care to areas without access to eye care facilities.

A newspaper article in the fall of 2011 brought NOOR to my attention. For over thirty years, optometrist Tom Little and his wife Libby lived in Afghanistan, raised a family there and provided eye care. Dr. Little ran the NOOR eye care program. The Little's stayed in Afghanistan through the Russian invasion, the subsequent civil unrest, the coming of the Taliban and the American invasion post 9/11. Of their time in the country Libby was quoted as saying, "We felt like we were able to come alongside Afghans and their suffering. That (until then) we had ...no concept of what suffering was compared to them."

On August 5, 2010, Dr. Little and nine other members of an Eye Camp team were returning from Nuristan where they had been providing eye care, maternal health care and dentistry. They were ambushed and killed by unknown gunmen. This was a setback for NOOR and a tragedy for Dr. Little's family but both have demonstrated a resilience that left a deep impression on me. Dr. Little's widow Libby told a reporter, "Yes, all these precious lives were taken, but the need is still there in Afghanistan. This will still go on because the Afghans have owned it, and that's what I saw when I went back."

There are less than 100 ophthalmologists in Afghanistan which has an estimated population in excess of 28 million people. Life expectancy is 46 years. For more information on NOOR visit <http://www.iam-afghanistan.org/what-we-do/eye-care/noor-eye-care> .

This note will reach you early in the New Year. It comes with appreciation for your part in making this choice possible, and with all my best wishes for 2012.

Sincerely,