

Success Stories

Patients Open Up About Their Vision Loss and the Wills Eye Doctors Who Helped Them See Again

For Jennifer Murphy of Roxborough, a seemingly minor eye injury turned into so much more.



In May 2019, Jen Murphy, 33, was skating with her Philadelphia Roller Derby team, the Passyunk Punks, when another player accidentally struck her left eye. With no pain and no bruising, she didn’t think anything of it — and went right back to her job teaching French and Spanish at Moorestown Friends School in New Jersey.

Within a few days, though, she was having vision problems. She took an Uber one evening to the Wills Eye Emergency Department, where she was diagnosed with a retinal tear and had laser surgery to repair it — usually a permanent fix. But in early June, she noticed she was having problems with her peripheral vision.

“The timing was crazy because here it is, the last day of school, and I’m having trouble seeing. I had earned a summer sabbatical from my school to travel through India, where part of my plan was to hike the Himalayas at 18,000-foot altitudes.” Retina surgeon Allen C. Ho, MD, pinpointed the problem that required further surgery the very next day. Dr. Ho and his Retina colleague, Michael Klufas,



MD, chose to perform scleral buckling with air to reattach the retina. Although more involved and more time-consuming than other options, it was the best procedure for younger patients like Jen. Longer-term, it would help her avoid the development of a cataract; it also would allow her to travel by plane in just a few weeks.

“At Wills, our goal is to perform the best surgery for the patient, and we have the resources and the options to do that,” Dr. Klufas said. After a series of follow-ups, Jen was able to fly to India as planned on July 4.

“I was in India for four weeks and was blessed to be able to see great,” Jen said. “I’m so grateful that back when this all started, I was able to hop in an Uber and, within 15 minutes, be at Wills and have access to the best eye care available in the world.”

James Dellatore was looking for another option. He found it at Wills Eye.



James Dellatore, a retired psychiatric nurse from South Jersey, learned several years ago that he has Fuchs’ dystrophy, a sight-stealing condition in which the cells layering the cornea — known as the endothelium — gradually die off. The diagnosis wasn’t a surprise, since his mother also had the condition. Initially it causes cloudy vision, but left untreated, it leads to blindness. James knew he’d eventually need treatment but was less than thrilled at the idea of a corneal transplant using donor tissue.

“Eventually” turned into “right now” last summer, when he was struggling to read road signs while driving. James made an appointment with corneal specialist Zeba A. Syed, MD, who could offer him a revolutionary alternative to transplant — still considered experimental, but

working well in selected patients. Dr. Syed would remove the damaged cells from the cornea in a procedure called Descemet Stripping Only (DSO) and then have James use a special eye drop ordered overseas for several weeks. The hope was that the healthy remaining cells would repopulate the cornea.

“There is a lot of excitement around this procedure right now, and James was a good candidate because he had limited disease in each cornea,” Dr. Syed said. He also



understood fully that a corneal transplant might still be needed down the road.

James had surgery on one eye — and after a few weeks of scratchiness and light sensitivity, his persistence paid off: “I was in my car, it was dark outside, and I noticed that the dash looked bright and the color came through. It was like I turned the corner and was finally seeing a change.”

At a follow-up visit with Dr. Syed, he was surprised and thrilled to have 20/20 vision in that eye. Since then, he has had a successful surgery on his other eye. “Dr. Syed exudes confidence, she was so thorough, and she has been terrific through the whole process,” he said. “It was pretty revolutionary to have an option besides a transplant.”

Milton Corsey thought he was developing “old man eyes” — until Wills Eye solved the mystery.



A couple of years ago, Milton Corsey of Deptford, New Jersey, was driving his car when he closed his right eye to scratch it. He was shocked to discover he was almost blind in his left eye. “I could only see light, and everything looked pixelated,”

he recalled. His first thought was of his 4-year-old twin grandchildren: “What concerned me most was that I would not be able to watch them grow up.” He also maintains a busy schedule running a consulting practice that provides corporate training for organizations up and down the East Coast.

Milton was afraid because he’d been having vision problems for some time. “I’m in my 50s and I assumed it was age,” he said. “I joked with my daughter that I have ‘old man eyes’ now.” His eye doctor and a retina specialist hadn’t found anything serious, but now he was worried.

He turned to Wills Eye and Sydney Tyson, MD, who had performed cataract surgery on his grandmother. Dr.

“I was fortunate to have a great set of doctors. They were all phenomenal and I have my sight back.”



Tyson immediately suspected an optic nerve problem and referred him to neuro-ophthalmologist Mark Moster, MD. Based on a symptom history and imaging, Dr. Moster quickly identified the cause: a pituitary gland tumor pressing on the optic nerve.

“Sometimes patients have to wait a long time to get an MRI or see a neurosurgeon, but we’re fortunate at Wills to have Jefferson Neurosurgery on speed dial,” said Dr. Moster, who contacted neurosurgeon James Evans, MD. In early 2018, Dr. Evans removed the tumor transnasally, sparing Milton a major incision with higher risks.

“When I woke up, the change in my vision was almost instantaneous,” Milton marveled. “I told Dr. Tyson that if this had happened to my grandfather years ago, he likely would have gone blind. If it had been my father, he’d probably have a major scar.”

“I was fortunate to have a great set of doctors. They were all phenomenal and I have my sight back — and with 20/20 vision, no less.” ■■■

Have a Wills Eye success story idea? Please contact Cathy Moss at cmoss@willseye.org.