

## Good reasons to smile

**Hooked on overseas volunteering, anesthesiologist Wayne Barry of Ottawa has devoted vacations to helping children in far-off places, Kate Jaimet writes.**

BY KATE JAIMET, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN    AUGUST 17, 2009



Dr. Wayne Barry got hooked on volunteering overseas after his experiences in Rwanda after the country's civil war.

**Photograph by:** Julie Oliver, the Ottawa Citizen, The Ottawa Citizen

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OTTAWA — Dr. Wayne Barry remembers the day an old beggar and a young child arrived at the Operation Smile clinic in Linyi, China.

The little girl's upper lip was split in two by an ugly fissure from lip to nostrils. The severe cleft in her lip and palate was likely the reason she'd been abandoned by her parents. When the beggar found the baby girl on the street, he took her into his care.

"He brought her to Operation Smile," Barry said. "This was a chance for her to get a new life."

Barry and his colleagues were in China to run a free clinic. Bringing modern drugs and medical equipment, they'd perform some 120 operations to repair cleft lips, cleft palates and other facial deformities.

"In so many of the developing countries, kids with clefts are just hidden away. They don't get education. They aren't allowed to go to school. As a young adult, they probably won't get a job. Socially they look terrible, and the child has great problems with speech if the palate does not get repaired," Barry said from his home in Ottawa.

"One hour (of) surgery will close a cleft lip. Two hours will close a palate. But if there are no surgeons in the country to do that kind of work, it doesn't get done."

Barry, 70, recently retired from practice as an anesthesiologist at The Ottawa Hospital. He began his career as a family doctor in Carleton Place, then specialized in anesthesia, practising at The Ottawa Hospital for 30 years. During that time, he participated in 22 medical missions to developing countries, 17 as a volunteer for Operation Smile.

The cleft surgery changed hundreds of children's lives. "The parents would get very emotional and cry and hug everybody. The kids who were maybe nine or 10 would look in the mirror and sit there and look in the mirror, not believing the change," he reminisced. "I think the rewards are so great from doing this."

"We get far more out of it than we ever put into it."

Barry was first exposed to overseas work when his father, a fisherman in Beaver Harbour, N.B., took part in a project in the 1950s to bring modern fishing techniques

to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). Some 40 years later, in 1994, he volunteered for his first overseas work, as an anesthesiologist in a Rwandan hospital run by Médecins Sans Frontières.

He had specialized in anesthesiology because he was fascinated by the complexities of the monitoring equipment and the pharmacology involved in administering drugs to keep patients unconscious, while guarding against unwanted side-effects and interactions with other medications. But in Rwanda -- and,

a year later, as an MSF volunteer in neighbouring Burundi -- he had only the most basic of drugs. His monitoring equipment was often "a blood-pressure cuff, a stethoscope and my fingers on the pulse."

He arrived in Rwanda after the bloody civil war, when most of the country's doctors and nurses had either fled or been killed.

MSF was trying to get hospitals running and had put out an emergency call for anesthesiologists. Barry volunteered for a six-week stint -- the longest leave he could get from The Ottawa Hospital.

Several times a day, the surgeons operated on landmine victims -- children and adults -- who had lost legs, feet, and sometimes parts of their abdomen.

There were emergency obstetrical surgeries -- mothers who had been in labour for three or four days. In a country where "fathers were not often evident," and the lives of other children depended on a mother's ability to find them food and shelter, the medical teams would do anything to save a mother, even if it demanded surgery in the middle of the night without electricity.

"I learned you can do a caesarean with a flashlight," he recalled. "And it's even better with two flashlights."

Though conditions were difficult, the work challenged and inspired Barry. He was hooked on overseas volunteering.

In 1997, and again in 2000, he participated in a program by the Canadian Anesthesiologists' Society to train residents at the University of Addis Ababa in Ethiopia.

"He gave us a lot while he was with us," recalled Dr. Yemane Ayele, a former student.

"He was sharing his life-time experience, especially anesthesia for operative delivery. He was not just sharing the medical skill. He was so close to us and sharing social life. We learned from him about TGIF (Thanks God It's Friday)."

Starting in 1998, Barry settled into steady volunteerism with Operation Smile. Once or twice a year for the next decade, he'd use his vacation time to participate in overseas clinics.

At an Operation Smile clinic in Addis Ababa, in 2005, Barry met his former student, Ayele, and convinced him to join the organization.

"The same year, he talked with the Op Smile team and a group of people came to Jimma (Ethiopia) where I work," said Ayele.

"A year later, Wayne came to Jimma with small group of Op Smile and he inspired us to go his way. Since then Op Smile is coming every year."

Carrying on the tradition of his mentor, Ayele became a qualified volunteer and will soon participate in his first overseas Operation Smile mission in Russia.

"Thanks to Wayne for his continuous help, I will go all over the world with Op Smile like he did for years," said Ayele. "Wayne is a person who never gets angry with his students and knows how to deliver his message -- and he is a happy man."

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