



November 2010

It was a very special reunion.

Twenty years ago, when Denise Johnston last 'saw' Dr Justin Playfair at the Sydney Eye Hospital, she didn't see him at all. She had been blind for almost two years before her surgery in 1990 – and she didn't regain partial sight until two months following the surgery after she'd returned to her home in New Zealand.

Denise and her husband Dale recently holidayed in Sydney, and it was here at the Sydney Eye Hospital where Denise met up again with Dr Playfair. Thanks to Dr Playfair's sight-restoring surgery 20 years ago, Denise not only got to see her ophthalmologist, she enjoyed her first real encounter with Sydney's sights.

"It's always seemed a bit strange that I spent one month in Sydney in 1990 but didn't get to see any of it due to my blindness at the time," she explains.

Denise's loss of vision was due to diabetic retinopathy: a complication of diabetes which damages the retina. "I was blind when I arrived in Sydney and was blind when I left, so revisiting this city now that I have partial sight is very special."

Dr Playfair performed two vitrectomy operations on each of Denise's eyes and some two months after her return to Christchurch, she regained partial sight in her right eye which has remained stable for the past 20 years. In 2004 she had her left eye removed due to pain caused by the cornea.

Despite her challenges, Denise is eternally grateful to Dr Playfair for restoring some sight.

"When I last saw my eye specialist in Christchurch, he told me I was 'a walking miracle'. I am very aware of how lucky I am to have some sight."

Denise has vivid memories of those strange and exciting days following her surgery.

"When I first regained partial sight, I remember I had to learn how to use it after being without sight for almost two years. It seemed like my brain didn't recognise what I was seeing straight away. For example, at first it was easier to walk around the block with my eyes shut and use my cane than to use the new sight I had. And I'd do the dishes with my eyes shut. Even now I'm aware there are some things I do without looking. However I'm now able to make good use of the vision I've regained."

The year she regained some of her sight, Denise also gained employment in the Department of Social Welfare (now Child Youth & Family - a service of the Ministry of Social Development).

"The sight I've regained has allowed me to enjoy a pretty normal life other than not being able to drive," Denise says.

The Sydney Eye Hospital has been saving and restoring sight since 1882. This internationally-recognised hospital performs more than half of the more complex public eye surgery in NSW and offers the largest program in the nation for training ophthalmologists.

There have been some extraordinary advances in technology and treatments in ophthalmology since Denise had her operation 20 years ago. And much of that is thanks to the generosity of people just like you.

Your support for the Sydney Eye Hospital Foundation helps to fund sight-saving equipment as well as critical research into the prevention of blindness. The projects you support today could one day save or restore the sight of someone you know and love.

Please donate to this Christmas Appeal, so that our dedicated surgeons can give people like Denise the gift of sight.

Best wishes for the festive season.



Kevin Gardner
Chief Executive Officer
Sydney Eye Hospital Foundation

P.S: The enclosed gift labels are a token of our appreciation for your wonderful support. I look forward to updating you in the New Year about additional exciting projects at the Sydney Eye Hospital Foundation.

