Book Reviews

Second Suns: Two Doctors and Their Amazing Quest to Restore Sight and Save Lives

David Oliver Relin

New York, NY: Random House, Inc, 2013

US \$27.00, 415 pages

Second Suns, a new book about pioneering eye doctors Sanduk Ruit from Nepal and Geoff Tabin of the United States, tells an inspiring story of altruism, compassion, and medical innovation.

Dr Sanduk Ruit, from Olangchungola in Taplejung district, won an open scholarship to study medicine in the prestigious King George Medical College in Lucknow, India. After specializing in ophthalmology, Ruit was mentored by the famous Australian eye surgeon, Fred Hollows, in groundbreaking cataract surgery. This modern technique, which Ruit helped perfect, involves a deft small incision in the cornea, removal of the cataract, and placement of the new lens. Recovery is prompt.

Reams have been written about how exquisitely competent Ruit's hands are in performing cataract surgery even in the most difficult places with lack of resources. This book has nothing new to add to the well-known operating skills of this surgeon. But what is amazing is how effectively Ruit, working closely with his counterpart Dr Geoff Tabin, has been able to propagate his magic technique to the farthest corners of the world, including Nepal, Tibet, Bhutan, Mongolia, and even North Korea. Ruit was driven from the start in trying to provide world-class cataract surgery to the poorest communities on earth. The book describes in some detail how the shared vision of these two innovative doctors helped many thousands of patients worldwide who otherwise would not be able to see. In addition, what this book brings to the fore is how quickly Ruit performs these cataract operations. In villages where hundreds of patients are waiting to have their cataract surgery, speed is of the essence.

But speed has to be accomplished without surgical complications. An important study (referenced in the book) in the *American Journal of Ophthalmology* clearly demonstrated that one of the world's best and fastest eye surgeons, David Chang from the United States, took nearly twice as long to operate on each patient as Ruit had. The study also revealed that 91% of Ruit's cataract patients had normal vision 1 day after surgery compared with Chang's 78%. This is an essential difference for people who have to walk home over difficult terrain soon

after the operation. At 6 months after surgery, 98% of both Chang's and Ruit's patients had excellent eyesight. The article clearly showed that the cataract surgery Ruit was doing in monasteries, schools, and police posts was comparable to the outcome patients could expect in modern American hospitals.

Dr Geoff Tabin is an amazing man driven with the strong sense of altruism. He has many accomplishments. He is Harvard educated, a serious tennis player who captained the Yale tennis team when he went to college there, and a well-known mountain climber who has summited Everest and many other mountains. Despite all these accomplishments he also shows deep humility when he tells the Dalai Lama that in the field of cataract surgery "everything I have achieved, I have achieved with the partnership of Ruit." The book is also well balanced in its pitch as it depicts Ruit's grumpy nature at times with Tabin often appearing to be a hyperactive adolescent.

There is, however, a melancholic presence pervading this book: the author, David Relin, who also co-wrote the bestseller *Three Cups of Tea* with Greg Mortenson, took his own life in 2012. Many events in that book were found to be either fabricated or excessively embellished by Greg Mortenson. Readers of the heartwarming *Second Suns* profiling Sanduk Ruit and Geoff Tabin will find that, contrary to *Three Cups of Tea*, this book rings true.

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The Emerald Mile: The Epic Story of the Fastest Ride in History Through the Heart of the Grand Canyon

Kevin Fedarko

New York: Scribner; 2013

US \$30.00, 415 pages, hardcover

Unlike many of the adventure story genre, this book packs in both thrill and rich, detailed backstory. Adventure narratives are often personal accounts of epic feats or third-person renditions of historical events. *The Emerald Mile*, however, not only documents a riveting, adrenaline-packed speed run down the Colorado River