**An introduction**

Cataracts are Curable the Gambian Project was conceived following the long-time relationship that my husband, Jim Phillips, and I had with the Friends of The Gambia Association working as trustees and sponsorship secretaries for six years.

FoTGA was asked if it would pay for one cataract camp initially. The committee was persuaded that offering free cataract operations to the very poorest Gambians would meet their ‘humanitarian aims’.

As sponsorship secretary largely responsible for sharing student reports with sponsors: it became increasingly obvious to me that young people, in particular the girls, were being kept home from school in order to childmind because an elder who had been responsible for the youngest children, could no longer see. They had become ‘cataract blind’. A term which means they only able to discern light and dark.

A young child’s life in a Gambian village or compound has many more hazards that those found in Britain today. Food is cooked on open fires at ground level. Burns and scalding are often seen. Treatment of such injuries is basic, often falling on the village wise woman. Older children too are expected to guide the blind elders when visiting the mosque or somewhere away from their compound.

Following the first cataract camp, witnessed by several of the then committee, Jim and I were impressed by the huge benefit that such relatively small amounts of money could bring. .

We were lucky enough to be invited to the ‘after camp’, a week or so later.

I clearly remember sitting watching the surgeon speaking many of the languages used in The Gambia and checking the outcomes of the operations. He embarrassed us by telling the patients who were waiting that we had paid for their operations. Of course, ‘we’ had not.

As one of the women moved up to have her eye examined, she shyly put her hand into her pocket and pulled out three tiny, tiny limes. Just about the size of marbles. She offered them to me by way of thanks. I was moved beyond words…….. I took just one of them and thanked her as best I could, given the tears running down my face.

Cataracts are Curable -The Gambian Project has been set up now since 2019. There are three of us, me, Jim and Allie Bailey our daughter. We are registered with the charity commission, have our own payment platform and now even have a VAT number. We are well set. Do please take a look at our website: [www.cataractsarecurable.org](http://www.cataractsarecurable.org)

We have just funded our 252nd eye operation. We are just about to embark on our sixth camp which is being sponsored by a large British charity organisation. The work is very, very heart warming.

Thank you for reading this. Kindest regards to all of you, particularly my sponsorship penfriends.

Violet