



## SCUDDER MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP HONORING DR. MARILYN SCUDDER

The family, friends, and Kodai classmates of Dr. Marilyn Scudder have the privilege of offering this scholarship in memory of a remarkable woman, distinguished ophthalmologist and dear friend. Marilyn’s legacy is one of compassionate care and healing, a life lived in joyful and sacrificial service to others.

Marilyn Scudder was born into a family of renowned medical missionaries. Her great-great grandfather, Dr. John Scudder, founded the first western medical mission in Asia at Panditeripo in Jaffna District, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) in 1819. He served there for nineteen years in the dual capacity of clergyman and physician and was especially successful in the treatment of cholera and yellow fever. Having traveled to India several times during these years, he moved there in 1836. As the first American medical missionary in India, he began more than 1,100 combined years of missionary service in that country by 42 members of 4 generations of the Scudder family. Marilyn’s relatives included Dr. Ida Scudder, granddaughter of Dr. John Scudder Sr., who founded the Christian Medical College and Hospital at Vellore, India. Marilyn’s parents were medical missionaries in Iraq at the time of her birth, moving to Kuwait when she was 10 years old. This was years before oil discoveries made the country wealthy, and Marilyn played in the sandy streets with the children of the town, speaking Arabic from an early age. Her elementary and secondary schooling was at Kodaikanal School in South India, now Kodaikanal International School. In an interview in 1985 she recalled that “Kodai gave me not only a good education but a sense of service”.



Kodai friends and classmates remember Marilyn as an endearing and outgoing friend with a beautiful dimpled smile. She was gentle, very real, and approachable. An outstanding scholar and a fine athlete, she was also a musician with a rich contralto voice. Classmates at Kodai recall that Marilyn was never afraid to ask questions ...especially in science and math. When the teachers said “Any questions?”, Marilyn always probed until she was sure she understood the subject matter. Gifted with great energy and enthusiasm, Marilyn was known as a world-class “mumblety-peg” champion, chastening all challengers. She introduced friends to the joys of deep fried cashew nuts, and was always ready to join in “after lights-out” escapades, pick-up tennis games, and week-end hikes. As a star player and high scorer in all sports, Marilyn’s athletic prowess won her the “K” award for excellence in athletics in her junior year – usually a senior year award. Few can forget the Easter performance of “The Messiah” when she sang the aria **He was despised** with intense and musical purity. Years later, as an eye surgeon with a heavy load of clinical and surgical responsibilities, she found rest and refreshment playing her guitar and singing with friends. The gift for friendship remained with Marilyn throughout her life, and so many friends from diverse cultures and religions remember the long and affectionate relationships they were privileged to have with her.



*Marilyn, front row middle  
in African sunburst dress,  
at a Kodai reunion*

After qualifying for a degree in history with a minor in music at Hope College, Marilyn made the decision to enter the field of medicine. She obtained her M.D. from the University of Michigan in 1965. During her final year of medical school she spent several months in Oman with her uncle Dr. William Wells Thoms, who was the Reformed Church of America Arabian Mission's eye surgery specialist in that country. This formative experience led her to specialize in ophthalmology. She was the first woman



ophthalmology resident at the University of Minnesota. Always intent on bringing the best to her patients, and in upgrading her surgical and clinical skills, she was later awarded a fellowship to study retinal detachment surgery. Marilyn worked at Mvumi Hospital in Tanzania during her final year of residency, and this experience contributed to her decision to return to Africa in 1973. From then on, until her death in 2005, Marilyn dedicated herself to the care and healing of her patients in this part of the world.

From 1973 to 1993, Marilyn was based at the Kilimanjaro Christian Medical Center in Moshi, Tanzania under the auspices of the Christoffel Blinden Mission International (CBM). Besides surgical and clinical ophthalmology, she had administrative responsibilities as department head. With her colleagues, she established training programs for Assistant Medical Officers in Ophthalmology, who continue to do the majority of cataract surgery and eye care in Tanzania. Along with these responsibilities, she established training programs for Ophthalmic Nursing Officers and Ophthalmic Opticians.

In 1994 Marilyn returned to the Eye Department at Mvumi Hospital, sponsored by the CBM, remaining there until her retirement from surgery in 2001. The Mvumi Hospital is the only hospital in the Dodoma Rural District and serves the medical needs of 400,000 people. At Mvumi she continued surgery and clinical care, as well as training programs for Medical Assistants and nurses. How did she find time as well to participate in numerous Eye Safaris? Marilyn's energy and dedication were an inspiration to all around her and her reputation spread far and wide. Marilyn worked ceaselessly, operating for long hours, working her way through mammoth patient lists escaping only periodically to rest with friends or on vacation. Her friend Dr. Judy Bennington, also an ophthalmologist, visiting Marilyn during her years at Mvumi said "In spite of the very full schedule, I never saw her hurry or cut corners. She gave every patient her best effort.



Although someone would bring lunch to the operating theater for her, she often would not even eat it, but preferred to keep operating. After surgery was finally over, she would often go to clinic to see patients who were waiting for her."



Marilyn, an excellent surgeon, pioneered techniques such as using an operating microscope, laser surgery, and IOL's (intraocular lens implantation), new to that part of the world. The primary focus of her innovations was always the needs of her patients, made with

the goal of providing care and treatment which was not just up-to-date but the most appropriate for her

location. In recognition of the excellence of her medical service and work, Marilyn received many accolades including:

- the Distinguished Alumni Award from Hope College in 1987;
- the Outstanding Achievement Award from the Vision Foundation at the University of Minnesota in 1994
- the "Outstanding Humanitarian Service Award" from the American Academy of Ophthalmology in Nov. 2004;
- George Tani Humanitarian Service Award from the Minnesota Academy of Ophthalmology on Dec. 10, 2004

When Marilyn retired in 2001, she went to live and work with the Franciscan Capuchin Sisters at Maua, on the slopes of her beloved Mt. Kilimanjaro. The nuns, close friends who had provided a "home away from home" for her during her time at Moshi, built a small home for her as well as an Eye Clinic at the Emmaus Centre near the village of Sanya Juu where she did outpatient work. As her health began to deteriorate, she returned to the US for medical care in early 2002. She was eventually diagnosed with Primary Amyloidosis. A stem cell transplant at Mayo's improved her breathing for awhile. But the disease returned and she died in Tanzania at the Aga Khan Hospital in Dar es Salaam in May 2005 surrounded by family and dear friends.

The Bhaloo family was close to Marilyn and in their home she found an oasis of rest and serenity. Ms. Ismat Bhaloo wrote of Marilyn: "She helped the poor out of her resources. For her all human beings were equal. She would laugh with all and cherish her patients as well as her friends. She assisted financially poor students to carry on their studies. She has dedicated her life for the poor regardless of religion, colour, or caste."



The family, friends, and Kodai classmates of Dr. Marilyn Scudder look forward to supporting a student at Kodaikanal School who will be inspired by her legacy of unqualified love, joyful living, professional excellence and total commitment to those whom she served.