



(Image) Kimball Woodbury and wife, Ok Son Woodbury

# UNBLINDED LOVE

**K**imball Woodbury, an American soldier stationed in Korea, became accustomed to local cuisine and frequented a restaurant where he met Ok Son, a young woman working as a server. Five years after meeting, the couple married at a local US Embassy. Kimball, who served in Vietnam for thirty-two months, retired after giving more than twenty years to his country and returned home to his wife and two children, Anthony and Angela.

The Woodburys lived happily in Las Vegas until 1998 when Kimball was tragically diagnosed with an advanced form of basal cell carcinoma involving his face and eyes. The local VA transferred him to the VA Medical Center of San Diego where his care was supervised by Don O. Kikkawa, M.D. Vice Chair, Professor and Chief of the UC San Diego (UCSD) Division of Oculofacial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery at the Shiley Eye Center.

The first step of Kimball's treatment was to completely excise the cancer to prevent it from spreading to vital structures and save Kimball's life. Unfortunately, the cancer was so advanced, Kimball lost all four eyelids and over half of his face. The next step was to protect Kimball's vision. Dr. Kikkawa succeeded, but was faced with the difficult task of preserving the useful vision in

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**KIMBALL WOODBURY**

Kimball's right eye and then deciding to cover up his left eye, which was more severely damaged by the skin cancer. “We kept Kimball's left eye protected as a ‘spare tire’ in case it was needed later,” Kikkawa remarks about the earlier surgery. Kimball lived with one healthy eye until tragedy struck again fourteen years later and the cancer returned forcing Kimball to lose his functioning good eye to a tumor.

Rendered completely blind for nearly three years and dependent on his wife and son, Anthony, for everything, Kimball had faith that he would someday see. Sadly during this time, Ok Son was diagnosed with breast cancer that spread to her brain and a heart attack. As family misfortune continued to mount, Kimball and Ok Son persevered by finding strength in one another to combat their health battles.

Seeking a solution, Dr. Kikkawa consulted Natalie Afshari, M.D., Professor and Chief of Cornea and Refractive Surgery. Dr. Afshari performed a transformative procedure known as keratoprostheses in which she attached a specialized, handcrafted, custom artificial corneal implant, which would “jump start” the eye. Together Drs. Afshari and Kikkawa reconstructed Kimball's dormant left eye. “The success of this operation would not have been possible if not for Dr. Afshari's expertise and surgical innovation in restoring Kimball's vision,” states Dr. Kikkawa.

“It was an awakening for me to be able to finally see my wife again,” Kimball says. “I am so glad and lucky that Dr. Kikkawa stuck with me through all these years of struggle.” He and Ok Son are extremely grateful for Dr. Kikkawa's longtime dedication to him and his family. Kimball feels that his restoration of vision was nothing short of a miracle and praises Drs. Afshari and Kikkawa.

Today Kimball boasts a big smile as his life has changed dramatically since his first surgery fourteen years ago. He can now see his lovely wife, their children and his grandkids too. Kimball can read his mail, walk unassisted, and even occasionally visits the casinos on his own. “God is on our side!” Kimball says gratefully, also remarking “the Shiley doctors pulled out a great miracle for me!”



*(image)* Kimball Woodbury with the keratoprosthesis.



*(left to right)* Natalie A. Afshari, M.D. and Don O. Kikkawa, M.D. in the surgical suite at the Shiley Eye Center.