

THE GIFT OF SIGHT

Mark Buxton, 26, doesn't remember the accident that left him without the vision in his right eye. But, throughout his life he has suffered from the pain and disfigurement of his injury. When he was only two, Mark's nine year-old uncle accidentally shot him with a BB gun, leaving behind a badly damaged eye that doctors said could not be repaired.

Mark's mother, Doloris Buxton of Independence, remembers the doctor's dim prognosis very well. "We were told there was nothing that could be done. We were devastated. You just can't believe you're hearing this about you own child.

Without corrective surgery, Mark's eye had no pupil and developed severe corneal scarring. To protect itself, the eye formed a "traumatic cataract," a clouding over of the eye's outer surface.

Since childhood, Mark's vision has been limited only to dim light and shadows seen through the corner of his eye. Wearing a clear contact was the only help to ease the constant pain caused by the eye's abrasive surface.

"Growing up I just had to adjust to not having my sight. Maybe it was easier being a kid because I've been able to do most things. But, it made learning to play baseball and driving very difficult," said Mark. "I've gone from doctor to doctor trying to save my eye. The last one I saw told me my eye would have to be removed."

But now, Mark has a chance to see again, thanks to a recent corneal transplant performed by Steven Silverstein, MD, a board certified ophthalmologist and corneal specialist. The outpatient operation took three and one-half hours.

After being accepted as a transplant candidate, Mark was placed on a waiting list. Five weeks later, compatible tissue was retrieved. Dr. Silverstein's transplant team and staff quickly prepared for Mark's eye-saving surgery.

Dr. Silverstein has performed hundreds of similar procedures. Using a ophthalmological microscope and specialized eye surgery instrumentation, he removed the damage cornea, created a new pupil and sewed the donated human cornea and an artificial lens into the wall of Mark's eye.

It's still too early to tell how much vision Mark will regain. His recovery will take about a year according to Dr. Silverstein. Had Mark's accident happened in adulthood, he would be looking at a chance for 100 percent recovery. Sadly though, his visual system was not mature at the time of his injury, making it difficult to predict the outcome.

"Under normal circumstances, a cataract removal and lens implant takes only about six weeks to heal. But Mark's eye was so severely scarred that it had to be completely reconstructed. It will be a wait and see situation," explained Dr. Silverstein. "However, the eye tissue he received was from a young donor, it was harvested quickly and was of excellent quality. He will definitely be more comfortable. And cosmetically, the eye's appearance will be greatly improved.