

Persecution, Triumph and Praise to God

Dr. Ming Wang visits Decatur County Senior Center to share his faith and to give others hope

By Pam McGaha

The noted Dr. Ming Xu Wang visited Parsons last Thursday to give a gripping presentation to the crowd gathered at the Decatur County Senior Center.

Today, Dr. Ming Wang is one of the world's foremost cataract and LASIK surgeon, as well as a laser physicist, researcher, inventor, entrepreneur, teacher, writer, champion ballroom dancer, accomplished musician and beloved philanthropists.

But his life was not always so bright.

Dr. Wang's shared stories of the miracles that have been bestowed on him, beginning in his youth and continuing into the present day.

Dr. Wang, whose parents were also doctors, grew up in China, in an atheistic society where Education was god.

In 1966, when Ming was 14 years old, the Cultural Revolution began. Communist rulers had decided that it would be easier to hold control over uneducated people. Dictator Chairman Mao Zedong shut down all of the schools in the nation, and worse, deported all of the educated youths, at least 16 million, who were then displaced to fates worse than death, sentencing them to work as peasants in severe, remote parts of China.

This was his future.

There was only one way to thwart this impending doom.

The Communists had formed propaganda musical youth groups, and those deemed worth to join these ensembles were allowed to remain among the mainstream. Desperate to change the course of his fate, Ming learned to play the er-hu, a two-string Chinese violin capable of producing the same stirring strains as its European counterpart.

He practiced playing his er-hu 15 hours a day in an attempt to avoid being sent away. There was no heater in his home, so during the winter, he practiced in sub-zero temperatures, which caused severe frostbite to his fingers. To him it was worth it, because it allowed him to stay in the country.

One piece that he played resonated deeply in his soul. "Two Springs Reflect the Moon" was written by the famous blind Chinese composer, Blind A-bin. It was a most beautiful piece of music not only because it describes a serene scene at night with two springs merging and reflecting the image of the moon, but since the composer himself was blind, it is also a beautiful scene that he could only imagine. It is a hauntingly enchanting piece, with a touch of melancholy, a deep sense of longing, and unfulfilled desires and dreams.

So at an age when Wang should have been studying and looking forward to a future full of promise like every other young teen, he felt sad and hopeless due to being kept out of school and losing the chance to study. These emotions resonated with those of the elderly composer because, while the blind artist could not physically see, Wang could not mentally see, as far as any possible future for his life.

After a time of playing with the propaganda troupe, the government then discovered that he and other teenagers were playing musical instruments in order to avoid deportation, so they purposely chose not to accept any musicians from the city where Wang lived, which put an end to his er-hu playing. Once again, Ming's parents were terri-



Dr. Ming Xu Wang, founder of Wang Vision Institute in Nashville, led the crowd through a gripping presentation of what his life was like in Communist China, and the part miracles played in his life.

fied their son would soon be sent away!

Ming tried another tactic. Among the troupe were dancers, and so he learned to dance. Again he was accepted, biding a little more time until, for a second time, the government decided that he was dancing, not for the government, but to save his life from a fate worse than death.

Ming again could see no light, and his future looked extremely dim.

Just as Wang and his family were finally about to give up the struggle, and reluctantly accept his inevitable fate of imminent deportation and a lifetime of hard labor, the dictator Mao Zedong died, and so did what Wang refers to as the "Cultural Holocaust."

It was 1976, the Cultural Revolution was over, and China realized what a tragic mistake it had made with the brutal 10-year deportation program, as it had destroyed the future for so many! Schools and universities throughout China were opened for the first time in 10 years.

Anxious to return to his studies, Ming asked his parents which grade he should enroll in. Remember, he had not attended school for ten years! Should he enroll in the 9th grade, he asked? "Higher," replied his parents. 10th grade? Again, the answer was, "Higher." Quivering, he asked, "11th grade?" For the last time, the answer was, "Higher."

"How can I possibly jump three grades and enter as a senior?" Ming asked, terrified. His parents reminded him that the schools could close again as fast as they had opened, and that his only real chance of getting into a university was if he was a senior.

To have even a chance to get into college, Wang had to not only learn the entire high school curriculum that he had missed since his junior high graduation, but he also had to score among the top few percentile of the graduating high school seniors, and he had to accomplish all of this in just two months.

Realizing how seemingly impossible a feat this was, but also acknowledging that it might possibly be their son's only chance in his lifetime to attend college, his parents called on a number of local high school teachers, offering free medical care to them and their family members if they would tutor Wang through all the necessary courses in such a short amount of time.

"I ended up being drilled 15-18 hours-a-day for two months, in order to get through the entire high school curriculum so I

could take part in the college entrance exams," Wang remembers.

Fortunately, the intense studying paid off, as Wang did well on the exam and was admitted into the prestigious Chinese University of Science and Technology (the "MIT of China").

Along the way, Ming Wang began to realize that as he began to complete nearly impossible tasks, that miracles waited around the corner to further his dreams. Another occurred while he was a senior at the university.

At that time he met a visiting American professor, Dr. James McNesby, who was impressed by the youngster's persistence and tenaciousness in asking him a question over and over, yet having no idea what the professor was saying to him in response (since Wang's knowledge of English was very limited). Wang felt in his heart that his only chance to be free and come to America was to impress the visiting American professor, and hopefully get him to help him get into an American college.

Wang's plan worked. McNesby arranged a teaching assistant position for Wang at the University of Maryland.

So on Feb. 3, 1982, Wang arrived at the National Airport in Washington with \$50, a Chinese-English dictionary in his hands, and a "big American dream" in his heart.

He worked very hard, realizing how precious the opportunity to learn is in life, and how close he once was to giving up all hope for studying and for a better life.

Five years later, Dr. Wang graduated with a doctorate degree in laser physics and completed a post-doctoral fellowship at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).

Dr. Wang then went on to receive his second doctorate degree - this time in medicine - from Harvard Medical School and MIT, graduating with an MD (magna cum laude). His graduation thesis received the award as the best thesis of his graduating class from Harvard that year. He then received his training in ophthalmology at three of the nation's top four ophthalmic institutions - Harvard Medical School in Boston, Wills Eye Hospital in Philadelphia (ophthalmology residency), and Bascom Palmer Eye Institute in Miami (corneal fellowship).

Dr. Wang is the only surgeon in the space who performs three state-of-the-art eye surgeries: 3D LASIK, 3D Forever Young Lens surgery, and 3D laser cataract surgery. Dr. Wang has performed well over

70,000 cataract and LASIK procedures, including on over 5,000 doctors, and is known as the "doctors' surgeon." He is also well-known in celebrity circles, having operated on scars such as Dolly Parton, Kenny Chesney, Charlie Daniels, Naomi Judd and Jo Dee Messina, to name just a few. He was chosen as a designated LASIK surgeon by ABC's national hit reality TV show "Extreme Makeover."

Dr. Wang is a researcher, pioneer and inventor. In all, he has performed more than 20 "first of its kind" surgeries, including the world's first laser-assisted artificial cornea implantation; the world's first 3D image-guided high-definition LASIK; and the state's first 3-D cataract surgery. While treating patients from 40 U.S. states and 55 countries, he has restored sight to numerous blind patients, many who come to him after being told for years, or even decades, that they will never be able to see again.

He has published more than 100 peer-reviewed scientific papers and book chapters, including a major paper in the world renowned journal, "Nature." He has published seven major textbooks: *Corneal Topography in the Wavefront Era*, *Irregular Astigmatism*, *Keratoconus and Keratoectasia*, *Corneal Dystrophies and Degenerations*, *Corneal Topography (2nd edition)*, *Aclasis and Clinical Reference Guide for Corneal Topography*, and *LASIK Vision Correction*.

He has also penned a biography, *From Darkness to Sight: A Journey from Hardship to Healing*, chronicling his remarkable life journey.

But it is not just about what Dr. Wang has done, the greater story is about who Dr. Ming Xu Wang is.

First of all, Dr. Wang's curious journey has led him to a great, all-encompassing faith in God that exudes in every move he makes. For example, Dr. Wang believes that God does want us to pursue scientific research to improve our lives, but He wants us to do it in the right way.

When it was discovered that fetal material could be used to bring back sight to older patients, his faith was put to a test. He chose not to use fetal tissue, rather spent 16 long years to discover that amniotic membrane (which surrounds a fetus before birth but is not part of the baby and is discarded after a child is born) could be used in order to restore sight in adult eyes without injuring any part of a baby. "The amniotic membrane is a great example that God has given us to show us how to conduct

scientific research while still maintaining our conscience, faith and moral principles," he says.

Dr. Wang's Christian faith is shown not only in his scientific work, but also in his efforts to bring God's Word to the people of his native country China. He established a 501c(6) non-profit organization, the Wang Foundation for Christian Outreach to China, with a mission to bring a newly translated Bible to China. Dr. Wang said: "This is such an incredible, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to help recruit a quarter of the human race for God's kingdom!"

Several times a year, Wang travels back to the country of his birth to help improve eye care for Chinese citizens. He is a co-owner of the Aier Eye Hospital Group, China's largest private hospital group, which holds 10 % of the country's entire eye care market, and he is also the international president of Shanghai Aier Eye Hospital, here he performed the first bladeless all-laser LASIK in a population of 1.4 billion people. It was on one of these trips to Shanghai that he met his wife, JJ, an artist and businesswoman, with whom he shares his passion for classical ballroom dance.

Dr. Wang said that being involved in dancing also helps him become a better doctor. Ballroom dancing requires connection and communicative human beings, since two people have to move synchronously, and has taught him to feel what a patient feels, enabling a better connection with his patients, and to be more sensitive to their suffering and needs. He explains that ballroom just about music, movement and exercise, but, perhaps more importantly, it is about one's sensitivity and awareness to another human being, and not only about that person's physical condition, but also their emotional position.

Incorporating his love of ballroom dancing into his philanthropic endeavors, Dr. Wang created a unique medical charity gala, the "EyeBall," a black-tie event held each October in Nashville, with all proceeds supporting foundation patients. He came up with the idea for the ball while trying to bring his sight restoration efforts out of the four walls of his medical clinic, and into the forefront of society's awareness.

"The EyeBall is a unique event, merging music and medicine. The breathtaking beauty of classical ballroom dancing reminds us how precious our God-given gift of sight is, and how much we need to help those who have lost that

gift," he says.

Dr. Wang is passionate about helping others, particularly those who do not have sufficient financial means to afford their medical treatments. He shares, "As an immigrant in this country, I am grateful for the opportunity that America has given me to study and learn, so I feel it is my obligation to do what I can to give back to America, particularly to help those who are in need."

"In every field of medicine today, there is always a huge gap between the high cost of the latest and most complex medical treatments and the lack of affordability by the sickest patients, for whom these most advanced treatments are precisely intended. There is no easy solution to this problem, of course, but I feel that if we all do what we can to help, through a collective grass-roots effort, together we will indeed make a difference."

Putting his money where his mouth is, in 2003 Dr. Wang started the Wang Foundation for Sight Restoration, a 501c(3) non-profit charity which provides financial support to patients for whom all conventional surgeries have failed, and who may benefit from new eye reconstructive surgeries but cannot afford them. The foundation consists of a board of directors who are among the leaders in philanthropy in the United States, and also a medical council that includes over 30 leading eye doctors. To date, the foundation doctors have helped patients from over 40 states and 55 countries worldwide, with all sight restoration surgeries performed free-of-charge.

Though he has lived here in America for more than 30 years, Dr. Wang has not forgotten when he was a teenager in China and played the er-hu, not as a hobby, but as a way to survive and to avoid the devastating fate of deportation. However, 30 years later, he picked up the er-hu again and played, but this time, with an entirely different feeling and purpose.

"I learned to play the er-hu as a way to escape poverty," he said. "But now I play it for an entirely different reason. Today I play the er-hu, with its soulful, gentle, beautiful sound, to truly appreciate the music itself, and to appreciate God's blessings, and the opportunities He has given me to learn and to help others."

Dr. Wang says that life is just like music; it has its ups and downs, its happy and sad moments. He has learned many things in life, among them respect for teachers, parents and the elderly, who have suffered and therefore have more wisdom; and also capturing one's opportunities in life and making the most of them. He adds that life, indeed, is often difficult. Sometimes we struggle and doubt if we will ever succeed, and at times we wonder what the purpose of life is. However, Dr. Wang firmly believes that God does have a purpose for each one of us; and it is only through our dedication, hard work and doing our part to the best of our capabilities that we have the opportunity to find out what His plan is for us.

From music to medicine to research to teaching to inventions to dance to philanthropy, Dr. Ming Wang lives life fully, meaningfully and gratefully, and second only to his faith is his deep and abiding love for his beloved United States.

You may contact Dr. Wang's office in Nashville by calling 615.321.8881.