

## In Memory and Tribute to Prof. Kenneth E. Salyer – Surgeon Par Excellence: 1936-2020

Dr. Kenneth E Salyer, a world-renowned expert on craniofacial surgery and cleft surgery, passed away on December 30, 2020. Kenneth Everett Salyer was born on August 18, 1936, in Kansas City, Kansas. He was the son of Everett and Laurene Salyer. Prof. Salyer lived in this world for 84 years and passed away after a brief illness following a massive stroke. Even on that fateful day, he was carrying out his daily routine till his wife Luci pointed out the signs. Owing to COVID19 situation, his family rushed him to the hospital where he fought the condition bravely for days but the doctors could not revive him. The information of him passing away took a long time to sink in. He has been my mentor and guide for around 20 years. For every complex craniofacial surgery, I discussed my treatment plan with him and he used to correct me or provide better options – all done remotely through the internet. He also wrote the Foreword for my book “Clinical Cranio-maxillofacial Surgery” in 2015.

Right from his earlier days of surgery, he was in International soft light. The then Neurology resident, young Dr. Ken Salyer on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1963 was entrusted to work to save the bullet hit President John F. Kennedy. The president was the young surgeon’s hero, and following his death, Dr. Salyer vowed to make the most of his life during the time that was given to him. Since then, there was no turning back for this surgeon. Armed with Plastic surgery training in 1969, he assumed the post of Chief of Plastic surgery at the University of Texas Southwestern (UTSW) Medical School in Dallas Texas. These were the earlier days of modern plastic surgery in USA. At that point in time, young Dr. Salyer had to refer patients with complex craniofacial deformity because he felt he could not provide satisfactory results. While searching for a master to

learn, in 1971 he was provided a lifetime opportunity – He had the opportunity to witness Prof. Dr. Paul Tessier’s operating for 13 hours on a Crouzon’s syndrome patient at New York University. Impressed with the skill, planning, and attention to meticulous details, Prof. Salyer was interested in learning more.

Nature gave another opportunity in 1974, for Prof. Ken Salyer to interact with then Peers in the field during the Symposium on Plastic Surgery of the Orbital Region. Doyens of plastic surgery including Drs. Tessier, Joseph Murray, John M. Converse, Milton Edgerton, Donald Wood-smith, and Mutaz Habal attended. At this symposium, Dr. Tessier operated on six cases – all done in the classical style of Dr. Paul Tessier. This master class impressed and provoked Prof. Ken to devote himself more and more to craniofacial surgery. Also, this stimulated him to embark on a lifelong journey of excellence and perfection, terms he became synonymous with in future craniofacial surgery.

Also, this meeting gave birth to another lifelong interaction, that he termed “Band of Brothers”. He interacted and formed an informal international craniofacial club. This allowed them to meet at least once every year. At this meeting, they discussed their most challenging cases, their innovation, discuss and revisit techniques together. This informal collective approach helped them to create new approaches, some of which opened new frontiers in Craniofacial Surgery. This “band of brothers” included Drs. Linton Whitaker, Fernando Ortiz Monasterio, Ian Munro, Ian Jackson, and Daniel Marchac. Together they have trained about 250 craniofacial fellows.

After 10 years as chief of plastic surgery at the UTSW Medical School, Dr. Salyer moved to private practice. He led a team



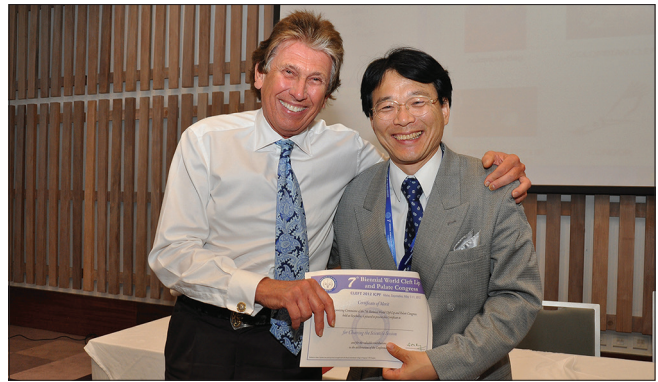
**Figure 1:** Prof. Salyer doing presurgical planning on a 3D reconstruction of a skull at Balaji Dental and Craniofacial Hospital in Chennai, India



**Figure 2:** Band of Brothers of Craniofacial Surgery: Upper Left to Right; Drs. Fernando Ortiz Monasterio, Ian Jackson, Ian Munro, Daniel Marchac. Bottom Left to Right; Drs. Kenneth Salyer and Linton Whitaker



**Figure 3:** Prof Salyer delivering the Presidential oration at the International Cleft Lip and Palate Congress in Moscow in 2015



**Figure 4:** Prof. Salyer, President, ICPF honouring Dr. Nagato Natsume, Secretary, ICPF at the 7<sup>th</sup> Biennial World Cleft Conference, held in Seychelles 2012



**Figure 5:** Prof. Salyer with Prof. S.M. Balaji and Anaesthesiologist Dr. Sharka at the Preconference live surgery workshop conducted at Victoria Hospital at the 7<sup>th</sup> Biennial World Cleft Conference, Seychelles 2012



**Figure 6:** Prof. Salyer with his wife Luci, Prof. S.M. Balaji, Prof. Marie Tolarova and Prof. Nagato Natsume

of eminent experts from pediatric neurosurgery, craniofacial surgery, pediatric anesthesiologist, and radiologist to form a unique, private, multidisciplinary institute dedicated to craniofacial surgery with great administrative support. This was “International Craniofacial Institute Cleft Lip and Palate Treatment Center” – Prof. Ken’s brainchild. This center had patients from more than 75 countries and with reduced charges. To help the afflicted more, Prof. Salyer established the World Craniofacial Foundation in 1989. Through this, he and his team delivered world-class treatment, not only in Dallas, USA but across the world in 11 centers. Acting as a great mentor, he started training and educating the next generation of Craniofacial surgeons. His World CF craniofacial fellowship, begun in 2000, was one of the first ACGME-accredited craniofacial fellowships in the United States.

In 2003, he led a team of about 50 physicians, surgeons, anesthesiologists and nurses, spent 34 hours performing the daring operation to operate on the 2-year-old Egyptian conjoined twins - Mohamed and Ahmed Ibrahim. This success story put the World Craniofacial Foundation in the International limelight and more success stories started to be aired. As the success stories climbed, more patients sought Prof. Ken’s help. More donors began recognizing and

contributing to his foundation and Prof. Ken was able to help all those who sought his help to get rehabilitated. By 2006, he was involved completely in the cause of WCF.

I have been a passionate student of his. I would attend all his lectures at meetings, attend workshops and gradually reach him. At my invitation, he has been to my center to operate on a couple of cases. We together have performed a couple of surgical procedures together – as a part of meetings on behalf of the International Cleft Lip and Palate Foundation, which he led along with Prof. Nagato Natsume. These surgeries were mesmerizing experiences for me. He used to become the task he was performing – His own trance of the “Flow state”. This comes only out of years of passionate practice – a yogic trance or an auto mode. Dr. Salyer and his World CF team, including Drs. Bruce, Raul Barcelo, Diego Steinberg, Joe Michienzi, travelled to perform complex intracranial craniofacial cases in countries such as Libya, Egypt, South Africa, Argentina, Mexico, China, Russia, Uganda, Oman, Laos, India, and Colombia.

His World Craniofacial Foundation recognized Balaji Dental and Craniofacial Hospital as the only Indian Center. This is a rare privilege that he bestowed on his colleagues, friends, and students. To date, WCF has only recognized 11 centers across





**Figure 7:** Egyptian conjoined twin brothers Mohamed and Ahmed before surgery



**Figure 8:** The playful twins with a happy Prof. Salyer after successful separation of their conjoined heads without significant neurological sequelae



**Figure 9:** Prof. Salyer and Dr. S.M. Balaji discussing a complicated case of Craniofacial correction at Balaji Dental and Craniofacial Hospital in Chennai, India

the world. This was the most coveted award that I have earned in my surgical practice.

My last physical meeting and interaction with the legend was in 2019 at Japan for the International Cleft Lip and Palate Foundation annual meeting. His Presidential lecture was well received and I had the pleasure of interacting with him both professionally and socially.

After this physical interaction, we remained virtually in touch for several cases to be operated in my center under the WCF banner. During the first wave of COVID-19, he promised a young child and his parent to rehabilitate sometime in April 2021. Besides that single case, we had been discussing the modalities for more cases. We devised stages of correction virtually and the best treatment plan arrived with a consensus. I was eagerly waiting for the Master to return to his center in April 2021, which could not happen.

In his illustrious 84 years, for 50 + years, he had been operating on thousands of patients. Statistics state that he operated on 5770 craniofacial patients and 5479 cleft lip and palate patients. In between this volume, he published over 200 peer-reviewed articles and book chapters; he authored, co-authored, or edited 11 books. He held the presidency of several internationally acclaimed societies. He was awarded many honorary degrees and awards including the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Friends of the National Institutes of Health. He was also a Honorary Fellow of the International Association of Dental Research (IADR).

Prof. Ken Salyer has left behind a great legacy of a vast number of trained craniofacial Surgeons, 11 centers that will carry on his great work. More than ever, he has entrusted his goal to rehabilitate every child who needs craniofacial treatment. In this regard, current World Craniofacial Foundation led by Mr. Russell Martin, Dr. Diego Steinberg, Dr. Alexander “Sandy” Macnab, Dr. Derek Bruce and others of the team are in regular touch with each centers discussing new cases and arranging surgeries. With their expertise, contacts and WCF center’s contribution, Prof. Kenneth Salyer’s legacy will continue. I am sure that in years to come, he would be the tallest beacon to all who desire to address this goal.

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Doi:10.4103/2231-0746.322266