Don Wong -

Pioneer, Innovator, Teacher, Friend.

by

Csaba L. Mártonyi, FOPS, COPRA

"When you give a fish to a man, you feed him for a day... when you teach him how to fish, you feed him for life"

Chinese Proverb

Don Wong’s legacy to ophthalmic photography is a vivid example of this philosophy at work; the sharing of knowledge for the betterment of the individual, the profession, and the Society.

Interwoven throughout the rich tapestry of Don’s professional life are the sparkling, multi-hued threads of countless individuals influenced by his generosity of spirit and indomitable sense of purpose. From this wellspring of energy there continues to flow a veritable river of gentle encouragement, motivational support, and a wealth of knowledge, simply there for the taking. Don gives of himself freely. One need only to appear interested. Soon the neophyte is in the fold, lost in the magic of the moment, of acceptance into the "family." Such is Don’s ability to draw one in, to make one feel "at home."

Thus were launched untold numbers of careers in our profession. The flame kindled in newly enlightened and motivated individuals who set about exploring new vistas, seeking new horizons. And Ophthalmic Photography flourished.

"I first met Don Wong at ICOP in Toronto in 1994. I was impressed by his humility and friendliness. Here I was, meeting one of the icons of our profession for the first time, and finding him very down-to-earth and accessible. It gave me a very good feeling about the OPS as a whole."

Gordon McGregor, CRA

“Don was one of the first ophthalmic photographers I met when I joined the Society, and his professionalism and his patience in listening to students was inspiring.”

Paula Morris, CRA, FOPS

“I heard of Don Wong when I first entered this unique little profession of ours, in 1983. My mentor, Marlene Fishman, had been trained by Don. Her instruction was peppered with references to his insights and teachings. His book is in my office to this day. In ophthalmic photography lineage terms, this sort of makes me a "grandson" of his.”

John Gerty, Jr., CRA

"He has truly been my #1 mentor, and loyal confidant through the years. No matter how insignificant I felt at any given time he always made me feel like Indira Ghandi."

Denise Barsness, CRA, COMT
**The Disposition of a Gentle Man, the Persistence of a Bulldog**

Don Wong emerged from a modest background which, at that time, relegated most to a life of hard labor and few opportunities. It is even a greater wonder then, that he would ultimately come to play such a pivotal role in molding the emerging face of this new, arcane specialty; to make of himself an individual who became synonymous with the craft and with the dissemination of the knowledge necessary to ply that craft; to become an individual who, through a lifetime of ceaseless contributions, has become the very embodiment of that craft.

When the history of Ophthalmic Photography is finally done, and the chroniclers have laid their pens to rest, the name Don Wong will command a place of unusual significance. Not that his name is not already well known. To the contrary. Within our profession the name of Don Wong is instantly recognized the world around. Yet the measure of his overall contributions may not be common knowledge. Contributions both great and small. Contributions which often affect a single individual and are not apparent to the world at large. Contributions made over decades, tendered freely, spurred only by an insatiable appetite for our collective success, pursued with unwavering tenacity and undauntable persistence.

Observing but his quiet and unassuming demeanor, few would suspect the intense flame of passion harbored within for his chosen vocation.

"I realize that Don’s dedication to the craft and science of ophthalmic photography has not diminished since his instrumental role in the formation of the OPS over 25 years ago. We are still implementing ideas that are the result of Don’s insight and initiative. He continues to be a forceful figure in our field."

*Paul Montague, CRA, FOPS*

**The Beginning**

Don’s father came to this country, as many like him, in hope of a better future. Here he met Don’s mother, also recently arrived from China with her family. They met and married in 1929, spent their honeymoon on Coney Island, and settled in New York City. Just a year after the birth of his sister, Dorothy, Don was introduced to this world in 1931. The day was June the First. (It was apparent that Don would waste little time in starting on his long list of “firsts.”)

Seeking a gentler environment in which to raise his children, the senior Wong moved his family out of the city to the farmlands of Queens. A bold move for 1934, made in spite of well intentioned warnings to the contrary. Among the very first Chinese families to the area, they were certain to risk the hazards of the trailblazer. Nevertheless, Don’s father purchased tools and lumber, and set about the task of constructing a laundry which would also serve as the family home. Thus, they settled into the peaceful, daily life of Jackson Heights.

The laundry prospered in the hands of the elder Wong, who’s philosophy on life paid no homage to sloth. Don’s childhood became the forge in which his character was cast and his work ethic tempered by a father determined to give his children opportunities of which he could only dream. He knew the value of work, and recognized the critical difference an education could play in molding the future. He labored long and hard, with his children at his side, toward the realization of this goal.

"Don is humble to the brink of embarrassment, a trait I find in most people of greatness. They are the one percent who contribute selflessly and affect people immensely without fully realizing their importance in the grand scheme."

*Mark Croswell, CRA*
"I met Don Wong in the 1970's in New York City at an OPS Regional meeting and was touched most by his humility. This seemed unusual in such a heady profession."

Ray Bloch, CRA

Education and the "Buccaneer" Camera

In high school, as Don was preparing for a college degree in engineering, he made the disconcerting discovery that he and numbers appeared to lack compatibility. Consequently, in 1949, he entered a pre-medical program at Columbia College in New York. During the second half of his graduating year, with several applications into medical schools, Don's studies were suspended by his mother's illness. His help was desperately needed in the family business and his prospects for medical school quickly dwindled to extinction. (Working more than full time in addition to his studies, it took until the end of the following summer to fulfill the requirements for his BA degree.)

By that time, his father began voicing the hope that Don might take charge of the successful family enterprise. Don, however, became interested in medical illustration as a career and made an appointment with a leading illustrator of the time. Upon viewing his artwork and realizing what was expected of the profession, Don thought the required level of artistry beyond his capabilities. As a related alternative, this individual suggested medical photography, and fate dealt another winning hand in the great game of chance that we call life.

Photography was already of interest. At the age of seventeen, passing by a photo store window, Don's imagination was irrevocably captured by a shiny, new, bell and whistle bedecked 35mm camera boldly emblazoned with the incredibly credible moniker of "Buccaneer." Don carried home his new booty with joy in his heart (and an empty place in his wallet). A week later the lens fell off and is still missing. Nor has Don any recollection of photographs issuing from that first, exciting affair with photography. Nevertheless, his knowledge and tastes rapidly progressed. His second camera was an Argus C-3 (an instrument exceptionally well suited for self defense) and his third a Leica F3 (remarkably well suited for photography).

In 1953, in addition to his already busy schedule, Don took a basic black and white and color photography course at the New York Institute of Photography.

Two years later, there followed a photographic technology course from Columbia University School of Engineering and, in 1957, he enrolled in a course on film production, sound and recording, at the City College Film Institute.

The Emergence of a Career

Medical photography seemed tailor made for Don's interests and early skills. In 1953 he began as a junior photographer at Cornell Medical College where he remained for two years, learning the basics of medical and scientific photography. (In 1954, Don also married his lovely bride, Sai-Loo. They would have two children, Douglas and Lisa. And, in spite of the long hours he spent at his professional pursuits, Sai-Loo continues as his lifelong companion and friend.) The subsequent year was spent at the Flushing General Hospital as a medical photographer in the Pathology Lab. During this time, he learned autopsy and gross specimen photography, as well as photomicrography. In 1956, he was hired as the Chief Medical Photographer at the Manhattan Eye, Ear and Throat Hospital in New York. He was to remain there for the next five years. During that time he became quite active in the Biological Photographic Association (BPA) and earned certification as a Registered Biological Photographer (RBP). He also served on key committees and chaired the New York Chapter for two years. It was also the time when he embarked on his lifelong mission of teaching.
A Shaky Beginning

When Don took over as Chief Medical Photographer, his outgoing counterpart spent a week orienting him to the responsibilities of his new position. At the end of the last day, the man wished Don well, and left. Moments later he returned, went to a small cubicle in a corner of the photo lab and pushed aside a folding door. Pointing to an instrument, he told Don that it was a fundus camera, whereupon he turned and left for the last time. That was the entirety of Don’s training in ophthalmic photography.

"Naturally, I did not excel in this technique for the better part of a year, most of my pictures being blurry because of accommodation. As a result, my job was in jeopardy and I didn’t know what to do."

Imagine, this celebrated Pioneer, almost fired for producing fuzzy fundus photographs! This might well have short circuited his ultimate career in ophthalmic photography. (Some time later, he suddenly and quite unexpectedly, discovered the presence of “cross hairs” in the eyepiece of this Baush and Lomb carbon arc fundus camera. Not surprisingly, it was not his favorite instrument. He also confesses that he found the hissing of the arc somewhat intimidating.)

To Make Matters Worse

"One day, a very prominent Glaucoma specialist came to my office and asked me if I could take motion pictures through a slit-lamp. (I thought he said split-lamp. What did I know?) I was so scared that, instinctively, I replied affirmatively, then realized what I had done. In a panic, I called my mentor in medical photography. Of course, he had no idea what I was talking about and referred me to the Chief Medical Photographer at the New York Eye and Ear Infirmary."

It is difficult to imagine the awkward circumstances in which Don found himself. For most of us, the avenue to help with our problems has ‘always’ been in place; the OPS well established and a ready source of answers to our questions. Now, as we try to visualize ourselves in Don’s situation during that painful initiation, we may begin to glimpse the magnitude of the difficulties encountered by such early pioneers.

A Helping Hand

A Pivotal Juncture

"If I had to chose the one, single person who had the greatest influence on my adult life, the task would be easy. With a simple act of kindness, John Goeller prevented me from abandoning medical photography as a career to seek another way of life. In spite of the fact that I was a complete stranger to him, John tried to tell me about slit lamp photography over the phone. (I still thought he was saying split-lamp.) In exasperation, John invited me to his studio and spent more than three hours with me that evening, giving me a short course on slit lamp photography."

It was a most fortunate turn of events, certainly for Don, but more so for the profession and our Society. This crucial juncture was to grow in significance as the years unfolded and his many contributions made their mark. It is very difficult, indeed, to imagine our evolution deprived of the influence of this extraordinary individual.

"Don’s genius lay in recognizing the fact that ophthalmic photography could be a field unto itself, independent of general biomedical photography. He saw the potential breadth and depth of the field—and then encouraged younger photographers to explore and deepen their understanding. He was always interested in helping photographers learn."

Patrick Same, CRA, FOPS
Don's entry into the full time pursuit of his ultimate specialty came in 1966 when he took a position as an ophthalmic photographer to work with Dr. Irving Leopold at the Mt. Sinai Hospital and Medical Center in New York.

"I became completely enthralled with ophthalmic photography and fluorescein angiography."

He continued to attend the annual BPA meetings. One day, Dr. Leopold asked him what he thought of a new fundus camera that had been on display. Don recalls registering confusion since no fundus cameras were shown at the BPA meeting. It was not until some time later that Dr. Leopold realized that Don had attended the BPA meeting instead of the annual meeting of the American Academy of Ophthalmology and Otolaryngology. Needless to say, Don was chagrined and resolved to spend his time at the meeting which far more represented his current specialty and general informational needs. The very next year, he attended the 1969 Academy meeting in Chicago.

"I, of course, didn't know anyone at this meeting, so most of my first days were spent just drifting around by myself, spending a great deal of time at the Zeiss booth. One day, while looking at a new fundus camera, I noticed a group of men talking and laughing nearby and overheard photographic jargon. One of the men noticed my interest in their conversation, broke away from the group, came to me and asked if I was a photographer. This was my first meeting with Johnny Justice, Jr. I found him to be very gracious and friendly. He asked me to join the group, where he made introductions all around. Later during that week, Johnny invited us all to gather together to discuss an idea that he had of forming an association of eye photographers. Twelve persons attended that first meeting to discuss the desirability/feasibility of organizing. Because of my good experiences with the BPA, the idea excited me greatly. It was the most natural thing for us to unanimously agree to Johnny assuming a leading role in this organization, and so he did, with an incredible passion."

Apparently, one of the first items of business that was discussed was the naming of the proposed organization. Since the BPA had been in existence for a while, they naturally gravitated towards the term "Association."

"Some of the suggestions caused some hysteria when we began looking further down the road and began considering the Fellowship part of the association."

Not everyone was delighted with the progress being made. Don recalls the painful memory of the BPA hierarchy taking him to task for his "disloyalty" to his "parent organization" and his new found enthusiasm for the OPS, to which they apparently referred to only as "that other group". Don withstood the political pressures and remained loyal to both organizations. Since the OPS was clearly and totally dedicated to his new specialty, however, much of his time was expended in promoting its cause, which he continues to do to this day.

The BPA, perhaps aided by the natural attrition of members of seniority, did ultimately embrace the OPS as a fellow organization and the two societies have enjoyed an excellent relationship ever since.

The rich medium of Don's mind proved a fertile culture for innovative thought. From the outset, he looked beyond the horizon, promulgating Ideas that often proved ahead of their time. Some would see years pass before the tide of public opinion would once again lift their keels from the sand and fill their sails with the impetus of their now finally recognized utility. As a result, some Ideas tend to be credited to their contemporary facilitators rather than to the source of their genesis. Don would be the last to take exception. It is the execution of the idea and its benefit with which he is most concerned. And he certainly understands the vagarious nature of
passing time and shifting perspectives. For me, and for our collective history, however, it is important that the record be as complete and accurate as possible. It is also appropriate that credit be tendered where due.

"Through the years, I have received more than my fair share of recognition for the founding of our society. In my view, if it were not for Don Wong's ideas and constant "prodding" during the formative days before incorporation, and without the help of my secretary, Jessica "Pixie" Eichrodt, the Ophthalmic Photographers' Society would not have become a reality and would not be the huge success that it is today.'

Johnny Justice, Jr., CRA, FOPS

"From the beginning I felt Don demonstrated a calm wisdom, reflected by his professionalism and visions of the future. A newsletter, a journal and certification are some of the visions he proposed during the founding meetings of the Ophthalmic Photographers' Society. He inspired and encouraged me to pursue my interests in teaching... The least that should be said, is that Don Wong and his deeds have contributed greatly to what the OPS is today.'

Terrance Tomer, COPRA, FOPS

The First Newsletter

During the 1971 annual meeting, Don proposed a society journal to better serve the portion of the membership unable to attend the national meeting. He had been puzzled by a static numeric membership in spite of new member enrollment. The logical conclusion was that members unable to attend meetings were benefiting marginally and failed to renew. A journal could provide news, technical/scientific information and an opportunity for greater involvement. The Board of Directors, however, thought a journal beyond the capabilities of the fledgling Society. Undaunted, Don proposed a newsletter in its stead. His initiative won the day and the Board appointed him the first Editor of the Society's first official publication, the OPS Newsletter.

The First Certification and Education Committee

Also at the 1971 annual meeting, Don was approached by an individual inquiring whether the Society was planning to issue certificates in recognition of the unique professional status of their members. He immediately recognized the propriety of the Society's involvement in such matters. Adding education as a critical part of the process, he made a formal proposal for the formation of a committee.

The Board exhibited some reluctance in committing to this course of action. It was a major step, one with many potential complications and political implications. Nevertheless, it appointed Don as chairman, charging him with the task of determining need and feasibility. Within twelve months, a detailed proposal, complete with curriculum and levels of certification, was ready to be placed before the Board at the next annual meeting.

As with many great ideas, especially one as potentially influential as certification, time can play a significant role in determining success or failure. In looking back, the importance of that undertaking at that time was simply overshadowed by more topical issues related to the day-to-day function of the members. Its ultimate importance, as we recognize it today, was simply off the scale in those early days. It is interesting to note that it was the subject of great and often heated debate, and the process was to take many convolutions before it finally flew on its own. It would be seven years after its proposal by Don before the Society was ready to conduct its first certification examination.

The First Journal and Nirvana

Six years after its first introduction, Don once again presented the idea of a societal journal. The Board was still concerned with the magnitude of such an undertaking and was somewhat less than encouraging.
Once again Don persisted, perhaps sensing that the time was, indeed, right. The Board reluctantly agreed to a feasibility study and, once again, Don was appointed first Editor.

Upon returning home from the meeting, Don, with the characteristic "luck of the Irish", discovered that the Folio Show, a convention of publishing houses, was being held in a local hotel. He and Ken Fong (his nephew and later, assistant editor) made arrangements to attend. They spent the day making the rounds of booths to obtain information on the cost of printing a journal. As the day progressed, their early enthusiasm diminished with the waning hours. Apparently, all the printing companies they had interviewed had minimum printing runs of 20 to 25 thousand copies. The Society would need a mere thousand. It began to appear that the Society might not have a journal, after all. No one was willing to deal with such a small number, and in all that vast exhibit hall, there remained just one, short aisle of possibilities.

Then, incredibly, as all hope began to fade, they came upon a "tiny, little booth" representing a very small printing service located in downtown New York City which expressed a willingness to work with them.

"We came as close to Nirvana as is possible."

Thus, just twelve months after his appointment as Editor, the first issue was published under its original title of Journal of the Ophthalmic Photographers’ Society.

It is difficult to place an accurate value on such accomplishments. Indeed, it is difficult to establish the criteria by which such products are to be valued. Most are measured by their effect on an individual or an organization at any given time. Therefore, all have a flexible value, dictated by circumstance. What is indisputable, however, is that such products, (especially one so tangible as the Journal), have inordinately high value in their collective effect. And the Journal shines as an uncommonly bright star in the crown of achievement that is Don’s dowry to our profession. Few societal endeavors can rival the significance of the Journal. Few have contributed so strikingly to the level of professionalism with which we are now associated.

"To Don, I say thank you from the bottom of my heart for enriching my life. You make me proud to be an ophthalmic photographer."

Mark Croswell, CRA

The First International Meeting

Constantly analyzing and weighting the effectiveness of our programs, Don became increasingly aware of the dearth of ophthalmologists’ participation in our scientific sessions. During the 1982 annual meeting in San Francisco, he encountered Dr. Koichi Shimizu, who had coordinated the First International Symposium on Fluorescein Angiography in Tokyo ten years earlier, which Don had attended. During their chat, Don became aware that the 1982 meeting of the American Academy of Ophthalmology, in progress, was combined with the meeting of the International Congress of Ophthalmology. It was a shock to realize that it had not been apparent up to that moment. Most of the OPS meeting organizers were similarly unaware.

Don realized that this was an important opportunity lost. The international contingent could have been engaged in discourse regarding their practices, views and needs, furthering the collective cause. Representatives of far off lands could have participated in our programs, enriching the educational experience for all. The Society had, perhaps, become somewhat egocentric. Neglecting to look over the near horizon, we had overlooked the obvious and failed to capitalize on a wonderful resource. Don, of course, took the offensive.
The proposal, this time, was nothing less than audacious! A meeting to be held at the time of the next International Congress of Ophthalmology, scheduled for 1986 in Rome. As one can imagine, the Board of Directors was not overwhelmed by enthusiasm. Understandably so. This would be a major undertaking, one fraught with considerable fiscal risk, far from our comfortable shores, in a land full of people who spoke a different language. The Board would have been remiss in its duties had it not questioned this proposal with care. Far from furthering our goals, a failure would have been catastrophic. Fortunately, Don and his cohort of supporters again persevered and, again, he was named Chairman of the committee charged with the task of determining feasibility.

With meticulous planning and under the vigilant direction of Don Wong and Marlene Fishman (Meeting Co-Organizer and Co-Coordinator), the 1986 International Conference on Ophthalmic Photography was a resounding success. The Society had leapt into the international arena and had acquitted itself very well. A new era was launched. New friends were made, doors opened. We became a true brotherhood of ophthalmic photographers.

It did not stop here, however. There would evolve even more ambitious plans.

"We realized that the time had come to act on Don's ideas which had been brewing for over ten years"

Paul Montague, CRA, FOPS

Facilitating the exchange of ideas on an international level, Don and his fellow planners had precipitated a spontaneous chain reaction among the international group of participants. A formal structure to link ophthalmic photographers world wide was envisioned. To this end, a coalition of the three established Societies would look into assuming responsibility for future international programs. A meeting of representatives of JOPS, BOPA, and OPS met during the Toronto International Meeting in June 1994 to explore the establishment of an International Federation of Ophthalmic Imaging. A continuation of that discussion is planned for ICOP '98 in Edinburgh, Scotland.

The First Rochester Comprehensive Course

As a member of the BPA's Education Committee, Don was aware of that organization's special relationship with the Eastman Kodak Company in Rochester. Don decided to tap this wonderful resource for the OPS and, working with Martin Scott of the Kodak Technical/Scientific Division, outlined a proposal for a week long course to be held at the Eastman Kodak Marketing Center in Rochester. In addition to placing at our disposal their elegant facilities, Kodak would underwrite the cost of the entire meeting.

Concerns over attendance of a week long meeting were quickly dispelled by very high registration numbers, and a highly successful first program was conducted in 1985 under Don's direction.

The First Society Historian

The following quote summarizes this segment very well:

"I have always been impressed with Don's attention to detail. He is driven to write things down so that the history of the OPS will be preserved. I believe it was this ambition that caused him to create the position of OPS historian, and act in that capacity for many years, collecting memorabilia and assembling documents that might be useful to future generations.

But Don's role has not been limited to the keeping of our history, it has been one of making it."

Paul Montague, CRA, FOPS

The Written Word

"I was very excited to meet Don because I had read his articles in the BPA Journal on fundus photography and fluorescein angiography. It was very exciting to meet 'the master'. He turned out to be a lovely, quiet guy. He made me feel special."

Jamie Nicholl, COPRA
Don’s prowess as a teacher is legendary. He is as effective in conveying understandable information as he is prodigious in his application of this finely honed talent. His contributions to teaching do not, however, stop at the lecture hall or the classroom; the workshop or the quiet one-on-one. Don is also a writer of great ability and fecundity. His most ambitious projects include “Techniques of Fundus Photography and Fluorescein Angiography” published as a five part tutorial in the Journal of the Biological Photographic Association in 1977 (winning the “Best Journal Paper of the Year Award” from the BPA), and the celebrated “Textbook of Ophthalmic Photography” originally published by Inter-Optics in 1982.

In the Foreword to the book, G. Peter Halberg, M.D., F.A.C.S., writes:

"...I believe this text is destined to become a classic in its own time."

His statement proved quickly true. The book has provided a critical foundation of knowledge for many individuals entering this field and continues to be in demand, fourteen years after its initial publication.*

The Highest Distinctions and More

The Ophthalmic Photographers’ Society recognizes its major contributors with special distinctions. The highest distinction for long term contributions directly affecting the Society is Fellowship. Don was elected a Fellow in 1977, the inaugural year of the Fellowship program. Today, there are a total of 36 Fellows. A perhaps somewhat more prestigious award is given for "Outstanding Contributions to Ophthalmic Photography". As the title suggests, this recognition is for specific and significant advancement of the craft itself. Don, its recipient in 1979, is one of just a handful of individuals so honored.

It is probable that Don, with the awards mentioned above, plus numerous others received throughout his career, would have been satisfied. The Society, however, was not. As a recognition more commensurate with his immense contributions, a totally unique award was devised. "The Don Wong Award for Excellence" was created to carry his name forward, in perpetuity, recognizing the most meritorious paper at each year’s Scientific Session. A distinctly unique honor, for a uniquely deserving individual. (Only one other award carries the name of an individual; the Johnny Justice Jr. Scholarship Award.)

The OPS truly represents Don’s greatest professional love. The Society has been his home, its members his family. Nothing motivates him more keenly than a new program or an interested student. His advice and wisdom have been sought by generations of society leadership. Simultaneously, his gravitational field uncannily finds the uninstructed, those who benefit most from an initial helping hand. I simply cannot recall a meeting where I have not seen Don in quiet conversation with someone new to the society, someone at the threshold of their career, receiving the encouragement or constructive evaluation necessary to propel them along.

His leadership skills are the stuff of legends. In ready evidence as he conducted the responsibilities of one office or another, but even more impressive when they surfaced spontaneously, generally in response to a seemingly irresolvable crisis at a business meeting. I remember numerous occasions when, amid heated and oft unorganized debate, Don rose to his feet, thereby commanding the attention of the assembly. He would then address the issue, often from a perspective as yet unvoiced and would, in the measured tones of reason, propose an equitable compromise. Few people in the history of the Society could equal his unique talent for perception, combined with the ability to articulate the issues and synthesize a solution acceptable to the majority.

"He taught me to observe and question the situation, and to then take appropriate action."

Marshall Tyler, CRA, FOPS

* Book available through: Ophthalmic Photography and Imaging Specialists. Contact: Lisa Wolf, 72-07 Myrtle Avenue, Glendale, NY 11385
As this Biographical Sketch will probably serve as part of the history of this uncommon member, it is incumbent on it to accurately and completely reflect Don’s contributions to the Society. Yet the attempt to be complete must be tempered with the realities of space and time. An exhaustive listing would compile a titanic tome which would likely go unread. Instead, I hope to achieve a suitable compromise (Don will certainly approve) in volume and “user friendly-ness.” Nevertheless, because of their significance, I will list his principal, official roles within the Society.

- Founding Member 1969
- Interim Vice President 1969-70
- Constitution Committee Member 1970-71
- Vice President 1971-75
- Chairman, Education and Certification Committee 1972-73
- Secretary 1972-74
- Founding Editor of the Newsletter 1974-75
- President 1977
- Fellow 1977
- Board of Certification Member 1978-83
- Founding Editor, *Journal of Ophthalmic Photography* 1980-90
- Historian 1983-90
- Chairman, Long Range Planning Committee 1983-85
- Chairman, Education Committee 1983-85
- Editorial Committee Member 1988-90
- Board of Education Member 1988-90
- Chairman, Advisory SubCommittee to the BOE 1990-92
- Board of Directors 1969-1974, 1990-93

Quite remarkable.

Then illness intervened, and Don was forced to reduce his involvement in teaching and in the Society.

“This left a terrible gap in my life.”

But not for long. In 1991, following the completion of the new Cabrini Eye Care Center, he got permission to conduct continuing education seminars in the facility. The first one was held in November of 1991 and they continue still on a monthly basis. (Don has taught on over 100 such occasions since 1991.) Should someone need training at a time other than the scheduled courses, Don provides individualized, private instruction. He uses two digital systems for this purpose and finds them excellent teaching tools.

“These one-on-one sessions are the most gratifying to me, because they are more informal and serve a much better cause than speaking to a larger group.”

“In Asia we speak of the Seven Dragons when referring to the socioeconomic powers that shape Asia. In that same light, Don Wong is certainly one of the Seven Dragons of the OPS... Every place I go, a piece of this wonderful and gentle dragon follows. Don has shared with me the art of fishing and for that and much more, I thank him.”

*Ben Szirth*

**And now, Retirement?**

Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary defines the word as “withdrawal from one’s position or occupation or from active working life.”
Considering the evidence, that definition seems to have been overlooked. When he turned 65 this year, Don decided to retire from his many years at Cabrini. Nevertheless, when I call him there, he is always in.

Apparently Don has had a change of heart. There is a saying that it is difficult to keep an old plowhorse out of the traces, and it appears impossible to keep Don from what he loves to do best. He recently established a free lance technical service company that will continue to offer seminars and more publications. He is currently engaged in updating his textbook, and is contemplating an encyclopedia of ophthalmic photography.

It appears that Don Wong’s career will simply continue. Elements of great mass and forward momentum are, after all, very difficult to halt. Even his current hospitalization for surgery is but a temporary lull in a most impressive continuum.

In closing, I turn to another statement made by Don during our interview. With the opening proverb, it brings us full circle and places Don’s professional life in wonderful perspective. He spoke of the time when John Goeller helped him with the “split-lamp” problem...

"I was so grateful to John. He gave me new hope for remaining in this profession. On my way home that evening, I realized that there was no way that I could ever reciprocate John’s kindness and made a silent promise to myself that, if I ever was in a position to help someone else, I would do so. This incident played a pivotal role in everything I did for the next forty years."

"When I was growing up, my brother Don was my hero----perhaps only as a ‘big brother’ can be. In 1969, Don got me my first job as a medical photographer... Then in 1971, Don was able to help me to attain my first position as an ophthalmic photographer—based on the strength of his reputation in the ophthalmology community alone... Don’s ability, and willingness to help me launch my career is fairly representative of how he has helped to launch ophthalmic photography careers for untold numbers."

Scott Wong

A promise kept. A kindness repaid ten thousand fold. I cannot imagine a more successful or illustrious career.

Authors note:
As I began to write, I discovered the ultimate opportunity to indulge in every favorable cliche ever coined. Here was an individual whose professional life has been so meaningful and contributory to our craft that I began to wish for the alternate task of listing his faults and mistakes instead, knowing that my work would much sooner be done. I have done neither. However, I did compromise a bit. It is impossible to write about such an individual without the use of superlatives. One’s supply is also soon exhausted. Nor is it practical to list all of Don’s accomplishments in this article. It would take several journals. I have endeavored to speak to the highlights of his career and form an overview representative of his accomplishments. For my part, it has been a pleasure and a distinct honor. To those contributing quotes go my sincere thanks. They add a wonderful perspective and a “personal touch” representing the many who have been fortunate enough to know this “Gentle Dragon” and experience his wisdom and friendship.

The Author: Csaba L. Martonyi is Associate Professor and Director of Ophthalmic Photography at the W.K. Kellogg Eye Center, University Michigan, Ann Arbor.
"Don Wong and I have worked together for more than 25 years. Although he entered the medical community as a photographer, his varied talents and organizational abilities led to his appointment as Department Manager. Despite his many responsibilities and success in this role he always returned to teaching as his primary interest. He is a close and loyal friend as well as an esteemed colleague."
—Robert A. D'Amico, MD

"Great photographer, loyal friend of many years. With all your faults, I love you still."
—Ruth S. Long, MD

"Don is a great mentor and teacher; but more significant is that Don Wong is truly a great friend."
—Daisy Rodriguez

"In all the years that I've worked with Don there are two great passions that make up his personality. One is his love and devotion to teaching ophthalmology and the other is his dedication to fairness."
—Mahmoud Ibrahim