

Open letter to my eye doctor

You asked what it was like, after 40-some years, to see again after you did that new ReSTOR procedure to replace my natural lenses with multi-focal implant lenses. I honestly can't remember what it was like to have unaided vision, so I scanned the decades of declining vision and discovered the effects near-sightedness and presbyopia had on my life.

Pre-tweens

When I carried home my first pair of glasses in the summer of Grade 4, I went straight to the living room window and put them on. It was summer, I remember, because I can still recall my awe at seeing the individual blades of grass quiver on our front lawn and the leaves on our birch tree twitch and twirl in the breeze. I couldn't wait to go back to school that fall and recline in the back row with my sparkly blue cat's eyeglasses.

Teens

Fortunately I passed swimming lessons in junior high, because I lost interest in water sports in high school when I noticed this slight hearing impediment whenever I entered a large body of water. Seems without glasses, I couldn't see *or* hear the swim coach yelling and waving her arms at me from the other end of the pool.

When I was asked to join the dive team, I walked out to the end of the high diving board and said no; it wasn't clear to me exactly where contact with the water would be made. Actually, I think I crawled out on the diving board because I also have height issues, and I don't know if that's related to vision loss or not.

But competing in gymnastics was okay: I could still train on the apparatus and floor because I could clearly see where my feet and hands were supposed to be when contact with either needed to be made.

In Grade 12, I was thrilled to get my first pair of hard contact lenses, tinted, no less, to accentuate my green eyes. The lens makers must have still been experimenting with natural shades of green, brown and blue, because strangers often stopped me on the street to comment on my grass green eyes.

Last week when my new permanent eyes started to feel dry, I wanted to take them out. My brain is still hardwired to my hard contacts after 36 years.

Twentysomething

After university I stopped playing squash and racquetball when it became mandatory to wear protective eyewear. Ski goggles couldn't accommodate my trendy Jackie O frames either and my years of downhill skiing in the mountains remain a blur, unrelated to speed (then) or memory (now). One or both of the lenses were constantly fogging up.

One night after skiing I got lost in the pool at Miette Hot Springs (near Jasper) after foolishly putting my glasses in the locker. I thrice circled the perimeter of the steamy

pool waiting for a familiar face to emerge from the mist. I couldn't hear my friends calling me because of my aforementioned hearing-loss-in-water condition.

Thirtysomething

Finally my optician said they had found a way to correct for astigmatism in soft contacts, by apparently not doing anything at all, so I went back to wearing contact lenses after years of glasses. The timing was perfect for practicing the self-defensive martial arts I was learning. Now I could do flying shoulder rolls without fear of tossing or squashing my gold aviator frames.

Fortysomething

Wearing thin, high-index plastic tiny titanium-framed lenses in my pre-progressive period, I dropped in to visit an editor I knew. As we talked, I couldn't help but notice a pair of glasses on her nose, another pair on top of her head and a third pair by her computer. Each served a different ocular need she felt compelled to explain when she started to search her desk for the ones on her head. I didn't know if this complex eye condition or the occupational hazard of my chosen career.

Now I've been an editor for nearly a decade and can inventory my spectacles: I keep one pair of old Oxford owl glasses in my car for emergencies, a second pair of progressives to take on vacation (since a colleague lost hers to a bikini-stripping wave in Mexico the second day), my intermediate-distance single vision for computer work, and my expensive new cobalt blue progressives for daily wear.

I noticed Dr. Joe you have a box in your waiting room for patients to donate old glasses. I will be flinging in no less than five pairs. My friend claimed the expensive blue ones and I'm keeping the intermediate vision frames should I need reading glasses again in my 60s. (I know you said I wouldn't need reading glasses or cataract surgery, but I can't believe this bionic vision will stay with me, unaided, forever.)

Fiftysomething

My chiropractor ventures my neck problems could stem from the chin-up tilt of my head at my computer. It's the position I've assumed to get the sharpest view the monitor through the middle third of my trifocals. Could someone please tell me what is so progressive about only being able to read three inches of text in any direction without having to reposition your head?

I've always loved reading. In my twenties and thirties, I read a couple books a week in addition to magazines and newspapers. Now I read a few chapters in bed and either my eyes get tired from not wearing my glasses, or, if I put on my glasses, my arms get tired moving the book back and forth while keeping my head and eyes stationary on the pillow.

It was a freaky experience the first time I drove my car after getting my eyes fixed. It felt like everything was right in front of me-- like surround sound for the eyes. Everything seemed bigger than life itself, including my thighs (but not my lips.) I was so used to

Linda Blair shoulder checking that I feared my eyeballs were straying too far in their sockets when I didn't fully rotate my head and just let my eyes glance back. Now that I know I can keep my head still and only rotate my eyeballs, I fully expect to sink more short putts this summer.

I did give the doctor one suggestion. If he could arrange to have someone in the recovery room with a syringe full of Botox or Restylane, patients of my persuasion will think they have died and gone to heaven, where hindsight and foresight is 20/20.

© 2009 Dawna Freeman