

# I can see clearly now

## It all started in the fourth grade when I failed the school nurse's vision screening test.

A note went home to my parents and soon I was wearing glittery-blue-framed glasses that revealed new things about the universe, like individual blades of grass on the lawn.

From the start I had a love/hate relationship with my glasses. Headbands were big in 1962, and I owned one in every color. The earpieces on my new glasses fought with the edges of my headbands for possession of the space above my ears and, sadly, the headbands had to go.

So began my 50-year struggle with vision correction. I made the decision as I entered high school to no longer be the girl who wore glasses. Since my parents were not on board and my pleas for contact lenses went unheeded, I tucked my glasses into my purse for use in class and navigated the hallways blindly. I must have seemed like a terrible snob; unable to identify my classmates, I didn't often greet them in the halls. The squinting no doubt made me look crabby and is unquestionably responsible for the deep crease that now exists between my eyebrows.

My begging finally broke my mother down and I got contacts for graduation. Contacts, though not without their issues, took me fairly happily through the next 20 years. And then I reached my late 30s.

I suffer from myopia, which means I'm unable to see far away. My vision is further compromised by astigmatism, an irregular curvature of the lens that causes blurring. At age 38 I developed presbyopia, which is not a religion but "old eyes" that create the need for reading glasses. It's the trifecta of vision issues; how lucky can you get?

My doctor addressed the problem with monovision contact lenses that gave me a reading eye and a distance eye. It was the best solution available, albeit not a perfect one. Things were getting worse lately, and my annual check-up revealed the reason.

"You have cataracts," said the doctor.

Wait ... what? Surely I misheard him.

Several years shy of the average age of 63, I'm way too young for cataracts.

"You're a few years younger than average," explained my surgeon later, "but you're taller than average, too. It doesn't mean there's anything wrong with you. It just means you're not average."


While I liked the way he explained it, I was still pretty bummed out about having a diagnosis associated with old age. Then he presented my surgical options, which included replacement of my natural lens with an intraocular lens that would allow me to see far away and close up without glasses or contacts. Maybe, I thought, cataracts weren't so bad.



**T**HE SURGERY WAS WITHOUT a doubt the easiest I've ever experienced and the results are nothing short of remarkable. Waking up in the morning and seeing each separate leaf on the trees outside my bedroom window is almost as amazing as working a crossword puzzle without readers. I have new-found space in my bathroom drawer where I used to keep contact supplies, and a spare ten minutes daily that was previously devoted to lens care and handling.

To say there's a silver lining in the cataract cloud is understating it; this lining is 18-karat gold.

And isn't that so often the way it is? What we perceive as bad news so frequently turns out to be a blessing. Seldom do things wind up as unfortunately as we fear they will.

Last month's predicted end of the world didn't come, or you wouldn't be reading this. I wouldn't have taken the time to write it if I had thought for a moment the predictions would come true. Still, as this year begins, I intend to remind myself daily how lucky we all are to be here. Happy 2013 to you! 

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