

Tuesday, 26 Aug 1997

LVES and ME PART III

Good Afternoon, Doris!

I received Kitten's VERY FIRST e-mail today at noon! The Internet had a two-hour flurry of mail between stepkat and tuckjim1 - I'm surprised something, somewhere, didn't go into melt down. Kitty's reaction to her initial use of the Internet was "love at first site". Thank you ever so much for your patience and understanding - you know, it were these two qualities I found in you that prompted me to tell Tia I was your number one fan; I'm adding 'wisdom' to that list.

Nuff of that...on to the subject:

The telescopes on my monocular telescopic glasses, I refer to them as my MTG's, extends about an inch out from the frame. The frames are just like regular, everyday type of correctional lens glasses. The 6X MTG is about « inch in diameter, and the 3X MTG is about 1/3 inch in diameter. In other words: they stick out like a sore thumb! I think there is no one on this planet who has ever seen me wearing one of the MTG's that hasn't done a double-take, you know, like "Whoa! What is that dude wearing on his face?"

I'm an avid 'walker'. I love to explore the avenues that are my geo-surroundings, and I love

to do it daily. Here, I usually start my walk at the beach (this is Beacon's Beach, City of Leucadia, California - a predominantly 'surfing beach') but have, in the three years I've lived here, walked along every route possible to get to the various beach access points. I've often walked up to ten miles, of an afternoon, but I usually do about five. I do this usually unaccompanied - except, of course, my friends: my MTG's. Otherwise I would probably spend the majority of my time at home. A totally blind person would not be safe trying to navigate this beach community. There is a paucity of sidewalks and a lot of sand, believe me, walking blind on sand is confusing because the movement of that sand under a foot can actually redirect the direction you want to proceed with. The foot MOV by the sand which was interrupted by the previous foot movement is so subtle, a person could get totally turned around, a blind person, and not even realize it. I know this because I wanted to walk on the beach just using my cane (I was afraid I would get the optics of the MTG's wet with salt water). What I described in that, probably confusing, sentence about getting turned around happened to me. I WEAR an MTG when walking the beach. I always have both sets with me ... it would really be the pits if I lost or damaged beyond use an MTG and not have a spare. Sometimes I am the only person on the beach, especially when it's not the tourist season, and I've had moments when I would have to reflect on where I was, relative to where the beach access was located. The field of vision for the MTG's is only about three

degrees, so I've had a few uncomfortable moments when I was actually lost - had no idea which way to go. Of course, I just tell myself to calm down, do a 360 degree pan, a few degrees at a time, until I figure out where I am and which way I need to proceed. Yep, it's scary, sometimes, but it's too wonderful being out in Mother Nature's Wonderland for me to let little problems like that keep me home. This is probably another very good reason for getting Low-Vision equipment availability news out to the public. I'm sure there are multitudes who are resigned to staying at home because of mobility hazards they probably have, and afraid they will again encounter. I've become aware, with the passing of time as a low-vision person, that there are many others like myself and that they know nothing of the equipment which could dramatically enhance their lives.

Well, Doris, now that you've got an idea of what the MTG's look like, let me throw in a few anecdotal scenarios from encounters with fellow pedestrians, strangers, while out on my own with my MTG: A day rarely passes that I don't encounter someone who has a question or comment about my eye wear. I think this quite normal, curiosity is a good attribute. I enjoy meeting strangers and engaging in conversations with them when I'm out on my walk. Sometimes I am totally amazed at some of the comments and questions. Please don't misunderstand my reason for relating to you the following anecdotes, in every case I found them to be totally amusing

and each scenario ended with the stranger and I being in a friendly, jocular mood.

I could probably write a book of these, but here are a few of my very favorite 'happenings.' I had occasion to go to Seattle to visit friends and do some sight-seeing while walking around Capitol Hill. The friends in my company were doing some window-shopping while I was standing near a pedestrian crosswalk - mostly just looking at people and hoping no one would notice or mind. When you see me, all you need do is draw a line from the telescope out to some object it's pointed at and you'll know what I'm looking at...gets to be a drag, sometimes. A fellow walked up to me and asked "Hey, Dude, are you with the FBI? You gotta van around here somewhere with dudes taping stuff? Just what's going on?" The fellow was obviously a wino, living off the street. As he stood there, wobbling in front of me waiting for my reply (I needed a moment to digest his words) I, using a calm and slightly falsetto voice said "No, Sir. I am an alien from a distant star. I'm sending pictures to my spaceship of possible suitable earthlings to take back with us." He disappeared from my field of view. I quickly looked around for him and saw him running down the street waving his arms frantically. Maybe I was his "pink elephant", if so, I remember thinking to myself, then my sarcasm was acceptable.

Another scenario has occurred sooooo many times that I could not even come close to telling you

how many times this has happened. The question to me is almost always worded the same way: "Are you a jeweler?" After about a hundred of these questions I developed a 'stock' response: "Yes, and I'm out looking for jewels, have you seen any?" The response to this is usually preceded by the proverbial "pregnant pause" and then followed with "Well, eh....no." I usually start to chuckle at that point and give the person a quick explanation. These "jeweler" incidents almost always end with laughter and then brief conversations about whatever.

One thing for sure, wearing the MTG's is a good way to meet people (and during the past decade I've been wearing these glasses, I have maintained a few lasting friendships with some wonderful people whom I probably would never have met, otherwise.

Another situation, and this has been repeated several times, though not as many as the 'jeweler' scenario: when I've concluded explaining my eye wear to a curious fellow-pedestrian I have received the following comment: "Well, it's a good thing you've still got your other eye to see with". My right eye is a prothesis, as you already know, and it's fitted in such a manner that when my left eye moves, the prothesis makes the same movement. I can explain how this is done if you'd like to know. The prothesis is handmade and painted by a craftsman, in the case of my current one - a craftswoman. She did such a wonderful job in making my prothesis that I've even had occasion

when going to a new place for an eye exam when optometrists and their technicians would try to examine my plastic eye just as they would my real eye. These persons usually felt a bit embarrassed upon the obvious discovery but I always see it as a complement when this happens. The thing that is hardest for me to comprehend is why someone, to whom I had just explained my visual ability, or inability, whichever the view may be, would think that I could see with the plastic eye. I have even had people ask me, and quite seriously, "Is it very hard to see through it?". Thank goodness this question has only been asked of me on two, maybe three occasions. I really don't enjoy the thought that there are people with whom I share our Universe who are THAT stupid.

There are more anecdotes about the MTG's, but these should give you an idea of some of the situations I deal with on a fairly regular basis when encountering the public.

A thought came to mind as I was describing my plastic eye to you. So please allow me a brief tangent, off the low-vision stuff to tell you about an incident that happened to me the summer of 1981. Let me precede this by saying that as a person ages, the shape and size of the eye socket changes and a new prothesis is in order about every seven years, or so. The eye I was wearing at that time was the first one I had, so it was about six years old. I was living in my sister's house in Garden City, Kansas. My sister, and this is my older sister,

Leslie, always nagged me about my hair - not keeping it trimmed and neat enough for her taste (I keep my hair long...its shoulder length...because I'm vain and it's the only way I can hide the scars on my head without wearing a hat. And I don't like hats unless the weather requires one. She convinced me, or perhaps I should say coerced me, into letting her take me to her hair stylist to 'neaten me up, a little'. I was sitting in the barber chair as the guy toiled away at my tangled hair. Leslie was sitting in the adjacent chair, and since she and this fellow knew each other quite well, a general barbershop type banter was going on between the three of us. Leslie said a 'funny', we all laughed. In the process of laughing sometimes tears tend to effuse from one's eyes...mine did: the plastic eye popped out of my eye socket and landed in the shampoo sink. The barber, I guess I should call him a 'stylist' FROZE - suspended animation, you might say. Up to this point he didn't even know I had the prothesis. Picture him standing behind me, holding hair with comb in one hand, just preparing to cut with open scissors in his other hand and seen his patron's eye fly off his head and into the sink. Phew! Talk about blowing someone away! My sister, totally calm and collected, stood up (no words had been said, yet), walked over to the sink and retrieved my eye. She washed it, handed it to me and said "Put your eye back in your face. Dan (or whatever his name was) needs both your eyes to do your hair symmetrically." Dan, at this point has realized what happened , says "wow" and

releases himself from his state of suspended animation and continued with my hair .. that is, once the three of us were able to stop laughing. I had a new eye made, while living in Garden City...needless to say.

O.K. Enough of the anecdotes...on to my BEECHERS.

Beechers is the name of the glasses and the name of the maker of the glasses. This eyewear was originally designed for the purpose of birdwatching. They can be obtained in either monocular or binocular style. The power is 10X. I'm not sure of the field, but it's significantly greater than that of the MTG's.

Because the Beechers are so strong, they are not recommended for mobility purposes: the closest they can focus is about fifteen feet. Anything closer than that is very blurred; these glasses were made for distance viewing with clarity, extraordinarily good clarity. Since the original idea was to be able to focus with great fidelity on a small object, in this case, a bird off in the distance sitting on a limb, or whatever, without disturbing the bird. In order to do this the glasses have to be powerful, and 10X is quite powerful. When I wear the Beechers I can see from one end of a city block to the other, in most cases; with the MTG's I'm limited to under hundred feet. The excellent clarity is obtained by the use of (I'm not sure of the exact number) seven mirrors that are arranged in periscope fashion. The viewfinder lens rests

directly in front of my iris; it's about a quarter of an inch in diameter. The mirrors are sequentially stacked upward to the viewing lens which rests against my forehead and directly in front of my eyebrow; a wide, adjustable nose bridge provides for correct positioning and a rubber band connects the side temple/bars, if you will, in order to keep this optical device in place (they're a bit heavy and would fall off if not held in place by the rubber band).

The Monocular Beechers I have, were provided me by the Veteran's Administration during that visit to Tacoma I spoke of earlier.

I carry the Beechers with me, along with the MTG's. When I arrive at a spot where I want to sit a spell and check out my surroundings (and a favorite is sitting on the beach watching the surf-riders' doing their thing). Sometimes when strolling along the beach, I wear the Beechers rather than the MTG's and use my cane for mobility purpose (since the Beechers won't focus close enough for me to see what's directly in front of me). I like walking wearing the Beechers because, of course, I can see clearer and further, but I can also make out obstacles ahead and make mental notes of them for checking out with my cane when I'm getting close to them.

The Beechers are great, for me, for watching television. At the time I obtained these glasses I had the use of a 27 in. TV and could see the picture infinitely clearer than with the MTG's, and I no longer had to be sitting close

to the TV in order to see it. I also found that with the clarity provided by the Beechers that I could actually read some of the printing that occasionally appears on the screen ...commercials, titles and even subtitles (such as on foreign language films). Sometimes the subtitles were too small, even for the Beechers, but it was great to be able to watch a program without having to have someone with me to read stuff for me.

Last summer the 27inch TV decided it was time for me to get a new TV - it died. Paul took me to Dow Sound City. He wanted me to look over their selection of televisions using my Beechers and make a determination as to which size TV would be best for me to read even better than I been able to on the 27in TV. I can cut this short - after awhile it was apparent to me that the 35 inch screen was the perfect size for reading with the Beechers. Paul bought the TV!

This was, I think, last June. The following October WebTV was put on the market. I had never used e-mail or surfed the internet. PC's and their tiny little monitors, and totally cluttered keyboards were truly an impossibility for me. I heard about WebTV on the 'Computer Connection Show' that is produced by CNN (it's on on Saturdays at Noon). I got to thinking that this was something I should check into. I asked Paul to take me to Dow, where he had bought the new TV. The salespeople were happy to give me a

demonstration. I was their fourth purchaser of a WebTV browser the day they went on sale.

Doris, I reached my limit, once again. I need to rest my eye and nose for awhile. I think LVES IV might just wrap up this story. Tomorrow I have an appointment with my low vision specialist (about 30 miles distant from here), so don't know if I'll get to part IV then; may have to wait until Thursday.

Until then, I hope all is well and happy with you. Give my regards to John; I hope he is feeling better today.

Hugz, my friend, your fan

Jim