

2003

I CAN SEE

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I can see!!!

Forgive me for not writing during the last few weeks.

After noticing “floaters” in my eyes, I went to the Veterans Administration Hospital in Tampa.

Peggy went with me as is our custom. We find that whenever one of us sees a doctor — with the exception of Peggy’s GYN appointments — it’s best to have the other partner in the room. That partner ensures that all the questions we have listed are answered, and takes notes on whatever the doctor says.

The waiting area was crowded but comfortable. There was some show on with a lot of hollering and loud noises; not exactly the kind of show I would encourage people to see while waiting to find out how blind they really are.

I noted how many “old” people were in the room. Then I awoke to the stark reality that most of them were my age. I’m at that awkward age where you have too much room in the house and not enough in the medicine cabinet. Increasingly, I find myself singing along with the elevator music — whether or not I’m on an elevator.

Finally, we were called. The technician lead us to a small examining room. He was thorough — if not very forth-coming about what he discovered. He gave me the standard eye tests and seemed intrigued by what I couldn’t see. He dilated my eyes, assuring me that it was a standard procedure. Then he made 50+ entries into a computer system and told me the doctor would be with me shortly. In the interim, I was to wait in the Waiting Area.

Fortunately, Peggy was there to guide me back to the Waiting Area. Because of the eye drops, everything was a blur. I could still tell there was a television blaring something about someone cheating on someone else and being totally humiliated before millions of the gawking public. So I rested my eyes while Peggy held my hand, trying her best to reassure me that the sounds I had heard from the Technician were “good” moans; not

“you’re blinder than a drunken sailor on a 3-day shore pass” — “where is your guide dog” kind of groans.

Then a young ophthalmologist (“eye doctor”) came to get us. Through the haloed effect, he looked vaguely familiar. Having taught high school classes in the last five years, I could only hope that he had not been one of my students.

He dilated my eyes some more and said less-than-comforting things like, “I wonder what that is,” “...that’s strange,” and “Are you sure you don’t see flashing lights all the time?” Finally, he announced that he needed to call in a Retina Specialist.

The lady, whose blurry face had a comforting voice, began to reexamine me — more thoroughly than had the doctor. She began to show him things in my eyes and explain the different components of my eye. Suddenly, I realized that she was doing this for his knowledge; not mine.

Then she announced that I needed to come back in a few weeks; but, if I saw bright lights, I was to rush to the emergency room.

So, after the exhausting exam by a medical technician, an ophthalmologist, and a Retina Specialist, I was told not to use the computer, not to read, not to do any heavy lifting, or any work that might require me to look left-and-right rapidly.

I could watch TV. While there is too little content that one should consciously choose, there *must* be some redeeming channels.

Fortunately, I thought, there is the History Channel. Unfortunately, the History Channel picked this particular period to rerun *every* show I’ve enjoyed in the last year.

Fortunately, I thought, there is “CNN Headline News”. Unfortunately, 45 minutes of every hour was devoted to the “California Circus” called “The Recall” or “Re-Decision 2003.” Now I know that there are 143 certified candidates. I know that the ballots in Los Angeles County must be printed in 7 different languages. I know that a decision was made to print the ballots in other than alphabetic order to avoid “confusing the voters.”

Oh, and by the way — they mentioned in passing — more US troops died in Iraq, the US economy is in the toilet, and the planet Mars is closer than it’s been in 3,000 years.

The rest of television is a vast wasteland where original thought has been replaced by “cookie cutter” formulas of sex *plus* violence *plus* controversy equals money-making prospects.

As Rod Serling said, *“It is difficult to produce a television documentary that is both incisive and probing when every 12 minutes one is interrupted by 12 dancing rabbits singing about toilet paper.”*

So, during this time, I took more naps than I’d taken in the past 57 years — including my babyhood’s first month on your planet.

Through it all, Peggy supported me, encouraged me, and survived my constant whining about the demise of American television. When she had enough, she would calmly and quietly suggest that perhaps it was time for a nap.

Anyway, on Monday, August 25, Peggy and I returned to the VA Hospital. I waited three hours for a three-minute exam by a doctor from the Marquis de Sade School of Offensive Medicine.

He dilated my eye, blinded me with the brightest lights since New York City’s Broadway, and commanded over-and-over, “Look further up into your head.”

Then he pronounced me healed “for now.”

“Come back in a year and we’ll have another look.”

“Is there anything I should be doing?” I asked.

“No, everything’s OK,” he said with the assuredness of aircraft pilot trying to sober up after a late night while figuring out what that mountain is doing in front of the plane.

“I have no idea why they told you not to use the computer,” he concluded. “The ‘floater’ that you had has broken up and you should be able to see all right. We’ll examine you again — a year from now — and see if there’s any progress.”

To make a long story longer, I’m OK — for now.

Now, all I have to do, is read the 200+ email messages that came in during my off-line life. Find some way to thank Peggy for putting up with my period of “woe-is-me” and move on with my life — keeping one eye on the world and another looking for “floaters” in my left eye.

Life is a lesson in learning. My lessons from this experience are:

- ▶ *Lesson 1.* Losing my eyesight is a greater fear than dying.
- ▶ *Lesson 2.* When I removed the computer, reading, and television from my life, there is only nap-time left. I've vowed to take Peggy on more trips while I can still see.

- ▶ *Lesson 3.* “The real head of the household is the one who has custody of the remote control.”
- ▶ *Lesson 4.* Honey Bear, our puppy, doesn’t care whether I can see her or not, she’s going to be in my face whenever she feels the urge to be petted.
- ▶ *Lesson 5.* Peggy has got to learn to take more responsibility for the stupid things *I* do.

... but that’s another story for another time.