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EDITORIAL: Old Age ? I've got my eyes on you

Recently, I took my family to get their eyes checked.

I hadn't been to the optometrist since OHIP stopped paying the bill (years ago) and the children, 13, 12 and 9 had never been.

I knew before I went that the news wasn't going to be good for me. Everyone in my immediate family wears glasses or contacts and bad eye sight was just something we have leaned to put up with.

?Can you read this to me? I don't have my glasses on?, ?What does that sign say??, ?Does that say pickles or peanuts?? ? these were all common phrases in my household growing up. As a teenager, I took a sick pleasure in knowing that I had 20/20 vision and was exempt from joining the ranks of the four-eyed freaks that I lived with ? even if I it meant I was the official ?reader? of the family.

Arriving at the eye doctors, I knew that was about to change.

Before our appointments, an assistant took us in to have our eyes measured. Of course I had an astigmatism (Wikipedia: an optical defect in which vision is blurred due to the inability of the optics of the eye to focus a point object into a sharp focused image on the retina. This may be due to an irregular or toric curvature of the cornea or lens). Basically, my eyes are shaped like ovals. The 13 year old had a slight astigmatism as well. The younger ones were fine.

We then took turns in the optometrists chair and placed bets on who had the worst eyesight (a rather strange but ritualistic way my family shows love through ridicule). The kids went first, oldest to youngest, and I went last.

The oldest had poor vision, and will probably require glasses in the next few years. The two younger kids passed their exams with flying colours (and are not colour blind).

I took my seat. It was dark outside, and I was tired. I had been staring at a computer screen for 8 hours that day and was nervous about what I would learn about my eye health ? I already knew it was rapidly deteriorating.

The words were small, the room was dark, and the children were snickering. ?Mom, you're blind,? my youngest said. I silenced him with a death look (oh yes, I can see that far when giving the ?go to the car? look) and all chatter stopped.

?Okay, Wendy, read the top line for me,? said the eye doctor.

?Um...?, I was already struggling, ?I think it says ?E' ?O' ?I' ?P'??

?Hmmm...? said the doctor. ?Let's try this.?

Placing various lenses, in various combinations over my eyes he would repeat himself, ?Is this better, or, is this better??

Nothing was better. Yet everything was better? The longer the exam went on, the more confused I got.

The test concluded (finally!) and the lights came on. With frozen eyeballs I sat, awaiting the bad news.

According to the doc, I was both near sighted (can't see far away) and far sighted (can't read what's in front of my face). Yep. I was blind (according to the rough translation of the word as offered by my youngest earlier).

Although I needed bifocals I opted for a pair of reading glasses ? reading was more important to me than seeing the TV and I couldn't afford two pairs.

I picked out a nice pair of frames, deciding that if I needed to wear glasses I may as well have fashionable ones. And left the office. Driving home that night I started to recognize how blurry the street signs were and knew that the need for a second pair of glasses wasn't far off. This sucked.

The kids were happily chatting over their DQ Blizzards I had bought for them on the way home ? a special treat for being so ?nice? to me at the eye doctors. They were happy I was the most ?blindest?.

My glasses came in about a week later. They were relatively comfortable. A good thing, I thought, since they were to become a permanent fixture on my face.

Since I've started wearing glasses my dependency on an ?extra set of eyes? has grown tremendously. I literally can't see without them now and I find myself wearing them everywhere I go. They just stay on. That way, I'm never looking for them, and those pesky fingerprints that appear from out of nowhere don't pop up.

Call me four-eyes, but at least I dealt with my vision loss. I guess I should be grateful it wasn't earlier and it isn't more severe. When was the last time you saw the eye doctor?