

9-11-95

Eyeglasses

When I was a little girl every now and then I would entertain two occasional weird ambitions that undoubtedly were connected to a desire for attention. I wanted a broken arm or rather the cast and sling that went with a broken arm, and I wanted to wear glasses. Well, I never have broken a bone and I don't regret the lack. I'm sure I would not have liked the discomfort, although I probably would have enjoyed the attention. As for the glasses - well, let me tell you about them.

Eyeglasses: now, I can't get along *without* them (every morning I put on my glasses in order to find the floor!), but I can recall several times when it's been difficult to get along *with* them. By the time I had my first trip to an ophthalmologist in 1949, my desire was not for attention but for relief from eye strain. That visit began a string of weird experiences. Paul and I had appointments for eye exams at Duke Hospital in Durham. Our eyes were duly dilated for the examination. As we were leaving, we asked the doctor if it was safe for us to drive, something we had not considered when we both made appointments away from our home in Chapel Hill. He assured us that the dilation did not affect our far vision, just the near sight.

With that assurance we decided to keep our plans for seeing a high school football game in a small town some forty miles away. We drove there without any difficulty at all. We stopped in the village for something to eat and found that we couldn't read the menu. What to do? Paul thought of the binoculars we had brought along for the game and reasoned that since, used properly, they brought far objects up close, reversing them should make near objects seem far away, putting them in the range of our dilated vision. He turned them around and, sure enough, was able to read the menu. He was in the process of giving me my choices for dinner when the waitress arrived, decided he was making fun of the menu, and stalked off, refusing to wait on us. The manager agreed with her, a decision made easy by the crowd waiting for a place to sit. We went dinner-less to the football game, using our binoculars in the proper way.

After a considerable number of years of contented wearing of glasses, I had my next traumatic experience with glasses. My appointment to have my eyes examined just happened to coincide with my fortieth birthday. When the doctor noted my newly acquired age, he mentioned that I probably would have to wear bifocals. Not surprisingly, his exam confirmed his prediction. I wasn't happy about the diagnosis which forced me to admit my age to all who recognized the bifocal effect. That was attention I did *not* want. I didn't question the diagnosis; in fact, I found adapting to the bifocals not at all difficult. Since my far vision needed no correction then or at the time of my next examination, I opted to have half-glasses, then newly popular. I thought they were charming and not at all difficult to keep up with, but Paul didn't like them at all. When I paid little attention to him, he patiently bided his time until my next appointment for an eye examination. Then he commented rather forcefully that the half glasses made me look at least ten years older. I heard him that time and settled for full glasses, with the top part plain glass.

Over the years, my far vision did need correction as my near vision demanded more and more correction. As long as I was teaching, I chose to have executive bifocals, a straight line across the lens, making it easy to read endless papers but causing my glasses to be very heavy. Even after I switched to plastic lenses, my spectacles tended to make my nose and ears sore. But I didn't change the style of lens until I retired and my nose and ears insisted on liberation. The smaller lower lens served very well until a year ago, when the new glasses I got didn't correct my vision as well as I had been accustomed to. In fact, I found that my reading vision was close to being double and was very tiring. I complained to the optical people, but my fussing only gained me the assurance that I was neurotic (not stated but definitely implied). At home I returned to my old glasses and found that they did so much better than the new ones that I put the new ones away and forgot about them.



At my last eye examination, I explained my problem to the doctor who said that I probably had as good correction as is possible - at my age. I kept on happily with the old specs, but two days later, they suddenly broke into two pieces, un-repairable. I quickly found the old, that is, new glasses. They were preferable to not being able to see anything at all. However, within a day, my nose and ears were so sore and my vision was so blurred that I reluctantly admitted that I'd have to get new glasses. Perhaps the frames I had selected were too large for my face, resulting in my inability to focus properly. Or maybe I *am* that neurotic.

After lengthy consultation at the optical store, I decided on the lightest lenses available. The resulting glasses are so comfortable that my poor nose and ears recovered in a day. I have accepted the fact that I cannot have 20/20 vision any more, but I do feel secure walking and driving as I go about my daily routines. So, I never achieved the broken arm or the glasses that would gain attention for me - except for the binoculars, of course.