

SPECTRIOS

• I N S T I T U T E •

F O R L O W V I S I O N

I WAS BLIND BUT NOW I SEE

Twenty years ago, John was diagnosed with diabetes. Because he showed no symptoms of the disease, he continued maintaining his lifestyle, not bothering to monitor his diet or blood sugar level. He was blind to the fact that over time, his diabetes was silently progressing and would result in long term complications. In 2013, diabetes reared its ugly head causing severe vision loss and amputation to part of his foot. John was emotional as he shared the story of how diabetes and vision loss wreaked havoc on his life, and he came to see there was hope for the future.

When did you first notice symptoms of vision loss?

In 2009, I went to get my driver's license. I looked into the machine for the eye test and the woman said, "Tell me what numbers you see to the left and to the right." I answered, "There are no numbers." I was amazed when she gave me a license.

My diabetes hit me all at once in 2012. I went on a trip with my girlfriend Roz

to New York and developed diabetic ulcer sores on my feet from walking too much. At the same time, I started noticing my vision was blurrier, but I didn't connect the two symptoms. I thought I needed reading glasses so I went for an eye exam. The doctor told me I needed to see a retinal specialist because there was bleeding in the capillaries behind my eye. I said, "Well that doesn't sound very good!"

What treatment did you seek for your vision?

I didn't do anything about it. I thought I was invincible and nothing would really happen. Boy was I wrong!



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How were you wrong?

I had surgery in 2013 to remove five bones from my left foot as a result of damage from the diabetes. While I was recovering from that surgery, a specialist from the Ophthalmology Department came and performed a series of tests. The doctor returned with the results. I had diabetic retinopathy and would never be able to read again. I started crying like a baby. I could live without my legs or my feet, but not my eyes.

What was the plan for your vision?

At that point, there was no course of action to do anything to improve my vision. Everything was very negative and the prognosis was that my vision would only get worse.

How did your vision loss and other complications of diabetes affect your life?

I came to Chicago in 2000 and taught philosophy, history, and political science at various community colleges after a successful twenty-one year career in New York in human resource management. There was nothing I enjoyed more than enriching a student's life. That came to a crashing halt when I could no longer drive or see well enough to teach. I was out of work for a year-and-a-half before I broke down and retired.

Did you have additional problems with your diabetes?

Yes, I developed a small sore on my right foot which turned into a very bad infection on Valentine's Day 2014. Roz brought me to the emergency room and it turned out I had a serious, potentially life threatening gaseous infection (gangrene) and underwent an emergency amputation which took one-third of my right foot. I became

affectionately known at the hospital as the St. Valentine's Day Massacre.

How did you cope?

I never gave up on anything in my whole life. However, I was so upset and depressed I really wanted to curl up in a ball and die. My mind, body, and spirit were broken. I went to my primary care doctor who sent me to a couple of therapists. They basically told me to toughen up.

How did you find the vision care you needed?

My primary doctor sent me to a retinal specialist at Loyola, who referred me to Dr. Tracy Williams. I had my first appointment with Dr. Williams in 2014. He spoke about how his unique approach to blindness and low vision, and the importance of treating the head, heart, and eyes. I was so enthused by his message, I interrupted him at every turn until he eventually said I needed to be quiet and listen. I don't know why, but by the grace of God he took me under his wing. I felt like his 60-year-old adopted son. Those were the most positive words I had heard since 2009 when I was told I would never read again.

What was Dr. Williams' plan?

Dr. Williams fit me with bifocal lenses and gave me a monocular telescope for spotting things at a distance. A sunny day is a good one for most people,



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but for me, it was the worst thing imaginable because the glare of the sun is blinding. I left Spectrios with special wrap-around sunglasses which blocked the ultraviolet glare. Before this day, I was practically homebound due to my vision and my feet. Now I could go outside. I was beginning to feel more human.

How did access to technology impact you?

Good things kept on happening. Leah, Spectrios Institute's counselor and assistive technology specialist, delivered a computer with special low vision software. A few years ago I started writing a story and then my vision went. When the computer came through the door I was overjoyed. I'd be able to write again.

On another day, a CCTV [reading machine] unexpectedly arrived at my door. Immediately I knew what it was. I ran to get a biography on Thomas Jefferson I started reading before my vision loss. I opened it to the page I had bookmarked long ago and put it under the viewer. I could read! That was huge for me!

How did you learn to become more independent?

Dr. Williams referred me to a rehabilitation counselor from the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS). The

counselor came to my apartment and worked on daily living activities. I was terrified of leaving the house and crossing the street. IDHS assigned a mobility instructor who taught me to use a white cane, look for landmarks, and listen for traffic. I've learned to take public transportation. I take two trains and a bus to get to Spectrios, but I don't mind. It's worth the trip!

I can't thank [Spectrios] Institute enough for everything they have done. Dr. Williams and his staff convey positivity and they succeeded in improving my quality of life.

How has your life been changed by your experience at Spectrios?

I once called myself the "used to be man." I used to teach, I used to walk, and I used to read. I know I'm not going to get my vision back, but I am blessed not to be totally blind. The fact is I can read, watch TV if I sit up close, or go on a trip and see Roz's beautiful smile. Now I ask myself, "What I am going to do next?" I have a future to look forward to. I may go back to get another master's degree to keep my mind active. I ultimately want to get a place in rural Virginia with Roz, raise goats, have a garden, and do my writing. I owe it all to Dr. Williams and his staff who changed my life. I'm ready for anything now.



THERE IS MORE THAN ONE WAY TO GIVE

Which of these options is right for you?

GIVE A GIFT OF CASH

Send a check or charge to your Discover, MasterCard, Visa or American Express.

GIVE A GIFT OF STOCK

Spectrios Institute has accounts set up to accept gifts of stock. If you use this method to give, please contact the Spectrios Institute Development Department to ensure a smooth transaction.

GIVE A MATCHING GIFT

Many companies offer a matching gift program providing employees with an opportunity to double or even triple their gift to non-profit organizations like ours. Contact your company's human resource representative for further information.

BECOME A VISIONARY MEMBER

HOW? Provide for Spectrios Institute's future with a planned gift. Some options are listed below. When you have finalized your plan let us know so we may include your name on our Visionary Members List with others who are committed to ensuring Spectrios Institute services are available for generations to come.

GIVE THROUGH YOUR ESTATE

When making or updating your will we hope you will remember Spectrios Institute. Consult your estate planning attorney who can assist you in adding the appropriate wording to your will.

GIVE THROUGH A CHARITABLE REMAINDER INSTRUMENT

(e.g. charitable remainder trusts, gift annuities etc.). This method of giving offers a tax advantage.

GIVE THROUGH A GIFT OF LIFE INSURANCE

Contribute a life insurance policy you no longer need and/or name Spectrios Institute as beneficiary.

Some of these options may offer a substantial tax advantage and support Spectrios Institute at the same time. Please discuss them with your tax advisor to find out more.

For further information regarding any of the "ways to give" listed above, contact the Spectrios Institute Development Department.



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Find out more about Spectrios Institute's programs by going to our website www.spectrios.org.

Go to the You Tube Link below to hear about John's first experience at Spectrios.
<https://youtu.be/nR0bx4KCp9U>.