



SPECTRIOS INSTITUTE FOR LOW VISION

THE BRIGHTSIDE

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“

At ten years old, I met Dr. Williams at a Seeing Is Believing Clinic. He was the first person who explained my vision in a way that truly made sense.

I had so many questions. Was it possible to grow up, get married, and be a mom while living with vision loss?

The people I met at Spectrios showed me that the answer was yes.

”

Meet Melissa

We're excited to introduce you to someone who beautifully embodies the Spectrios mission—Melissa Taussig. We first met Melissa when she was just ten years old at a Seeing Is Believing Clinic. What began as a visit to better understand her vision has grown into a lifelong connection filled with purpose and hope. Today, Melissa is part of the Spectrios family in more ways than one, inspiring others to embrace their own journey with confidence and courage.

Flip inside to read Melissa's story in her own words.

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Your Gift Gives Hope

“I was told I couldn’t drive because of my wet macular degeneration. Then I found Spectrios. With the right glasses and training, I got back behind the wheel and kept my independence. Spectrios truly gave me my life back.”

– Sharon, Grateful Patient

Sharon’s story is just one example of the life-changing support we provide to children and adults living with vision loss. But we can’t do it alone. Did you know over 60% of our funding comes from generous donors like you?

Your gift helps keep our programs affordable and accessible, giving individuals like Sharon the tools and confidence to live independently.

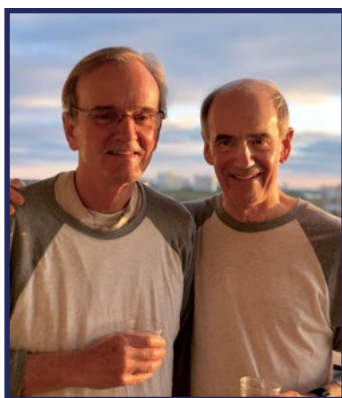
No matter the size, your contribution is a beacon of hope. Donate today! Place your gift in the envelope provided or give online at www.spectrios.org/gift.

donate today



**Give
hope to
people
with
vision loss**

A Message from Peter Whinfrey Chairman of the Board



My brother, Don, is visiting from Los Angeles for a high school reunion and our sister, Jane's, 50th wedding anniversary celebration. Like myself Don is also affected by Stargardt

Macular Degeneration. One of the many things we have in common is that we both have corrected vision of about 20/300. I asked Don to contribute to my regular column and share his thoughts on coping with low vision.

Narrator: When were you both diagnosed?

Don: I was diagnosed at about age 40 and each year it has gotten a little bit worse.

Pete: I was also diagnosed at age 40, but I'm quite sure the onset was 2-3 years earlier. Like Don, mine has progressed slowly over the past 36 years.

Narrator: What do you do to help the low vision community?

Don: I'm on the Board of Directors of the Braille Institute of America which helps low vision and blind people cope. I'm also a Trustee of Helen Keller International (HKI) which helps primarily women and children in the world's poorest countries survive through proper nutrition. HKI also focuses on removing cataracts and distributing Vitamin A to children for enhanced development of their nervous system.

Pete: In addition to my role as Chairman of Spectrios, I serve as a National Trustee for the Foundation Fighting Blindness, the world's largest non-government funder of research to find cures and treatments for blinding retinal disorders.

Narrator: Give us your thoughts about what is most important in someone's journey with vision loss.

Pete: My primary message is that you are not defined by your disability - you are defined by what ticks in your head and what beats in your chest. With the help of organizations like Spectrios, you can find your way towards achieving your goals.

Don: I agree with all Pete has said and also emphasize technology, technology, technology. For example, understand and embrace AI, consider downloading the ChatGPT app on your phone, and purchase a pair of Meta RayBan glasses.

Narrator: Any final thought, Pete?

Clearly the two of us consider helping other people with low vision an important part of our lives. We both are very proud to be part of the Spectrios mission. As always, thank you for your continued support.



Patient Story: Meet Melissa

My name is Melissa Taussig, and I am 46 years old.

When I was about six months old, my family noticed that I wasn't focusing. We saw an ophthalmologist who diagnosed me with an eye condition called Optic Nerve Hypoplasia (ONH), or underdeveloped optic nerves. I also had Nystagmus, which causes my eyes to move back and forth involuntarily, making it difficult to focus.

I was blessed to be born into a loving and supportive family. Though my diagnosis was unexpected, my parents handled it with hope and courage, advocating for me from the very beginning. Faith was central to our family and helped shape my sense of purpose and perspective.

When I was in fourth grade, at age 10, I attended a Seeing Is Believing Clinic. That's where I met Dr. Tracy Williams. He was the first person who explained my vision in a way that made sense to me.

I vividly remember that day. I received a magnifier, a task lamp, and a telescope.

At that age, my biggest goal was to keep up with my schoolwork and use my vision as efficiently as possible.

Because of my vision loss, I could only read large print when I held it directly in front of my better-seeing eye. I could see just a few letters at a time, which made reading slow and exhausting. I remember struggling to see my math book and reader, spending hours trying to focus and comprehend what I was learning.

That's why those tools meant so much to me. The magnifier and lamp made it easier to complete assignments, and I relied on them all the way through graduate school.

The telescope became my window to the world beyond the classroom. It helped me enjoy trips to the theater and the zoo.

During that first SIB Clinic, I also met Leah Gerlach, a longtime rehabilitation counselor. Leah was the first "Grown Up" I had ever met who also had low vision. This was long before social media, so as a 10-year-old, I had many questions for her.

Most importantly, I wanted to know if it was possible to grow up, get married, and be a mom while living with vision loss. Leah shared that she was both a wife and a mom, which gave me so much hope and encouragement. She became a friend and mentor to me.

My Teacher of the Visually Impaired (TVI), Mary Ellen Drobnik, was also with me at that first SIB Clinic. She went above and beyond to support me through elementary and junior high school, and we still stay in touch to this day. The understanding and care she showed me have carried through my life, and I hope all TVIs know how life-changing their support can be for their students.

Those early experiences set me on a path toward independence.

The summer before I went away to college, I returned to Spectrios for a technology evaluation.

Continued on Page 5...

I was able to get screen reader software and a reading machine. Technology has come so far since then, but at the time, these tools were cutting-edge and a huge help to me throughout college.

After college, I planned to attend graduate school, but I was facing some accessibility barriers. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was still relatively new, and I was getting some pushback as far as accommodations went. That summer before grad school, Dorothy Troyer, the former Director of Development at Spectrios, wrote a beautiful letter on my behalf, advocating for the support I needed. By the time I started classes in the fall, all my accommodations were in place. I felt incredibly supported and went on to earn my master's degree in Clinical Psychology.

After finishing graduate school two years later, I sent my résumé to Spectrios, and Dorothy kindly offered me a job. My former Spectrios counselor, Mary Kozy, had retired, and I filled her position as Adjustment Counselor. Mary made a significant impact on my life through her clinical supervision and mentorship, and she has remained a friend ever since.

Living with vision loss comes with challenges. I am not able to recognize faces, and steps, curbs, and other obstacles can be hard to see. I now use a cane or my guide dog to help me navigate safely and confidently.

The emotional side of vision loss is often overlooked. The most helpful thing we can do is find words for our experiences and connect with others who understand. That's why those early encounters with Dr. Williams and Leah Gerlach were so important to me as a child, and why I now feel called to walk alongside others as an adjustment counselor, offering

emotional support.

I believe it's important for everyone to find creative outlets or hobbies that bring joy and build confidence. For me, its spending time in the kitchen cooking and baking. I've continued to find new gadgets and strategies that make it easier and more fun.



Family is also very important to me. I've been married to my husband, Bob, for 20 years, and we have two kids now in high school and college. When they were little, we had a tandem bike with a trailer and enjoyed family bike rides together. Eventually, they rode their own bikes alongside us. My family embraces the opportunity to adapt and find ways to make every activity inclusive for all of us.

My retired guide dog, Ophelia, and my current guide dog, Argus, have both been tremendous blessings. I can't say enough about the transformative power of the guide dog lifestyle. These dogs have given me greater independence and have also helped me build social confidence.

To anyone on a similar journey, know that you are not alone. The greatest blessings often come from the people who enter our lives through shared experiences. I'm deeply grateful to the staff at Spectrios, past and present, for their care and dedication. During my time as a patient, employee, and volunteer, I've been privileged to meet remarkable individuals whose resilience, compassion, and empathy have profoundly shaped my life.

Let's Be Specific

by Dr. Rachel Park, OD

As a low vision doctor, my job is to understand my patient's goals and provide rehabilitation plans that improve their quality of life. So, when a patient comes to me and says, "I want to see better," I have to ask them to be specific.

"Seeing better" is a general goal, but what does that really mean? For a patient who has already been diagnosed with irreversible eye disease and low vision, it could mean any number of things.

Each low vision exam at Spectrios lasts about 60 minutes, giving us time to get to know our patients and ask detailed questions about their lifestyle, occupation, and hobbies. This allows us to identify the specific challenges they face day to day and create a rehabilitation plan that addresses their unique goals.

A prime example is Angela, a patient with age-related macular degeneration. At her exam, I learned that she is retired but leads an active lifestyle. Together, we identified five very specific challenges we could address to greatly improve her quality of life.

1) She was unhappy with her distance spectacles (new from elsewhere) and wanted to feel more comfortable when driving.

- Her distance prescription was adjusted, improving her visual acuity from 20/50 to 20/40. Though it's only one line of improvement, it was one she appreciated. We also discussed telescopic glasses as a future option if her vision declines.

2) She found "pinch and zoom" on her iPhone and iPad annoying.

- Her iPhone settings were adjusted to improve her overall view. She also learned that there are iOS apps designed for people with low vision. She will return for Access Technology training to learn more.

3) She plays piano, and reading sheet music was blurry with her reading glasses.

- She was prescribed near-point bifocals—the top section improves clarity at the desired distance for sheet music. A music stand light was also recommended.

4) Her current reading glasses were "okay," but she had to hold a flashlight to see small or colored print.

- Her near-point bifocals were boosted significantly in the bottom section to help her read small print with greater speed and accuracy. Angela was advised to hold reading material a few inches closer for the prescription to work properly. A floor reading lamp was also recommended.

5) Angela was wary of using a kitchen knife and struggled to see buttons on appliances.

- She will return for occupational therapy and plans to educate herself on as many adaptive strategies as possible.

With each of these five specific challenges addressed, not only could she "see better," she could read small print with ease, feel less frustrated using technology, cook in the kitchen with confidence, drive with comfort, and continue to enjoy playing piano.

Ultimately, Angela found hope in knowing that there are options for her even as macular degeneration continues to progress.

Investing in Yourself, One Device at a Time

by Mark Chalmers, Access Technology Manager

As an Access Technology Specialist, my job is to help people with vision loss find tools that make life easier and more independent. That starts with understanding your goals and matching technology to what can help. Often, that means getting more out of devices you already own, like your phone.

Smartphones can make a big difference for people with vision loss, but only if they're set up to work for you. I can help adjust your settings and show you how to use features like screen readers and voice assistants. I might recommend an app, like the new text-to-speech app for iPhones called Live Read. It's a simple, easier-to-use version of Seeing AI.

Smartphones have been a real game-changer, but they can't do everything. Sometimes you need extra tools—like a bigger screen, hands-free options, or technology that works without WiFi or cell service. That's when I recommend other devices that make certain tasks easier and possible.

I talk with a lot of patients about this, and one thing I hear over and over: hesitation. Even when people have the means, it's natural to pause before investing in another tool. Some of these devices can be expensive, but it's important to remember: this is about investing in yourself and your independence.

Investing in yourself is one of the most rewarding things you can do because the benefits last a lifetime. Everyday tasks like reading mail, following a recipe, or adjusting the thermo-stat become easier and less frustrating, giving you a boost of confidence and independence. Plus, the tools and devices

you invest in are built to last, so the value only grows over time.

Examples from our tech lab:

- Video magnifiers are popular with people who don't have smartphones or want to supplement them. They range from portable Humanware Explore magnifiers to larger Mezzo Focus desktop magnifiers with movable trays that can improve reading speed.
- Devices like the LyriQ Reader or OrCam Read provide easy ways to have text read out loud.
- Ray-Ban Meta glasses provide a hands-free way to identify products, read package labels, or describe your surroundings.

I can personally attest to the Explore 5 magnifier. Even though I have a free magnifier app on my

iPhone, the Explore 5 is my tool of choice at home because it lets me complete the many short reading tasks I face each day quickly.

Your independence and wellbeing are worth exploring what's possible. Personal appointments with me or Chris give you the chance to talk through your goals, try devices firsthand, and get training and support.

You are worth the investment!



Cooking with Confidence

by Katrina Stratton, OTR/L

Cooking is one of my favorite topics. As an occupational therapist, I think about it often because cooking, even simple meals, is an essential part of daily life.

For individuals with vision loss, this essential skill can present real challenges. Many of my patients share how difficult it feels when vision loss threatens their ability to safely prepare meals for themselves or loved ones.

Because cooking involves sharp knives, hot ovens or stovetops, and attention to detail, it's understandable that some people give it up altogether. There's also the added pressure of cooking for others, worrying about presentation, whether food is properly done, or the fear of making someone sick.

With the holidays approaching, these concerns often come up even more. But cooking can still be safe, enjoyable, and deeply rewarding.

Recently, **Debra Erickson**, executive chef and founder of *The Blind Kitchen*, joined our First Friday support group. Debra reminded us that cooking with a visual impairment is absolutely possible.

There are so many adaptive tools, strategies, and techniques designed to help individuals with vision loss cook confidently.

I often tell patients my job is to help you learn to do things a little differently, and cooking is no exception. Here are a few of my favorite tips, along with some we learned from Debra:

Safety First: My go-to tools for kitchen safety are cut-resistant gloves and oven gloves for knife and heat protection, as well as a talking thermometer to check if meats, fish, and other proteins are cooked properly.

From Debra's presentation, I've also added the "Flame Tamer" to my list. This is a stovetop-sized, flame-resistant blanket that can smother small fires by throwing it over the stove if flames appear.



Organization and Tools: Because tall, skinny bottles are easy to knock over, opt for (or transfer ingredients into) short, wide jars. Also, measure spices using your hands or The Blind Kitchen's tactile measuring spoons (theblindkitchen.com).

Embrace Adaptive Technology: Invest in a talking barcode scanner, a liquid level indicator, and other kitchen tools designed for people with low vision. And consider the Be My Eyes app or the Ray-Ban Meta Glasses for visual assistance. Debra also suggests the WayAround app for labeling.

Vision loss doesn't have to end your love of cooking. I work with my patients to help them rediscover the joy of cooking through training, organization, and the right equipment. If you'd like to continue the discussion, come see me in the clinic. I always love talking about cooking!

Summer Highlights: Grandma Martyl Low Vision Camp

We believe every child with vision loss deserves the chance to explore their potential, make friends, and have fun in a safe, supportive environment. Our Grandma Martyl Low Vision Summer Day Camp offers just that—a week of adventure and connection for teens.

This summer, 12 campers joined us, including four new faces. All had previously attended one of our free Seeing is Believing low vision clinics. Campers explored assistive and low-tech tools, practiced self-advocacy, and enjoyed hands-on activities like:

- Touring gardens and the Vivid Creatures exhibit at the Morton Arboretum
- Meeting our friends, the Wheaton Lions, and ceramic crafting at Whim Studio
- Creating moss mosaics and succulent art at Aster Gardens

- Running the bases like the pros at Guaranteed Rate Field, hosted by the Chicago White Sox
- Relaxing with a sound bath, labyrinth walk and yoga at Mindfulness with Meka

We were thrilled to welcome back Harlem, a former camper turned volunteer camp counselor. Christian, a former camper, also joined us to present and share his experience with his guide dog, Zeke.

This life-changing experience is only possible because of generous donors and the Reinsdorf Family's grant in memory of "Grandma Martyl" Reinsdorf. You can help continue this tradition of confidence, independence, and joy. Make a gift today to support next summer's camp and empower more children with vision loss to discover what's possible.



Golf for Sight. Give with Heart.

Thank you to everyone who supported our Golf Classic!

We are thrilled to share the incredible impact of your support at our 30th Annual Golf Classic. More than 100 golfers showed up, had FUN, and played with purpose in support of life-changing vision care.

Thanks to the generosity of our players, sponsors, and donors, the event brought in \$155,000 to advance our mission.

With two matching gifts, \$30,000 went directly to our Seeing is Believing program,

empowering children K–12 to thrive in the classroom despite vision impairments.

The success of this event helps make independence, confidence, and opportunity possible for those with vision loss. Thank you for helping make this happen!

Relive the fun! Visit spectrios.org/golf to see photos. We'd love to have you join us next year. Contact Sandy at 630-690-7115 x102 to get involved.

Thank You "The Masters" & "The PGA" Sponsors



Spectrios Institute Tributes

Add "in honor of..." or "in memory of..." to turn your check or online donation into a Spectrios Institute Tribute.

GIFTS IN MEMORY

Bea Almassey
Rich Almassey

Jeanette T. Baldyga
Joseph & Jacqueline Baldyga

Helen Barbera
Pamela Scudder

Joan Names
Carol Glynn

Bob Hammerschmidt
Barb Hammerschmidt

GIFTS IN HONOR

Martyl Reinsdorf
Alicia Santana

Ellen Petit
Christian Petit

Phillip Gates/brother of James Gates
Elizabeth Toombs

Oscar Encina
Arthur & Dora Jackson

The Last Word: Let Kindness Be Your Guide by Dr. R. Tracy Williams, OD



As a young boy, I often witnessed kindness in action. My parents and grandparents were proud members of the Kindness Club, and they made sure my membership was something they nurtured constantly.

It always made me feel good to hear someone's thoughtful words or see their caring gestures.

How great it is to be greeted with a cheerful "Good morning!" or wished a sincere "Have a great day!"

It may seem simple, but kindness has the power to lift spirits and bring a smile to someone's face. That's what makes it special, as it's given with respect and a good heart.

Kindness truly is Goodness!

Showing patience, practicing good manners, and doing small good deeds, like picking up trash, returning an abandoned grocery cart, or helping someone with a task, are all simple acts of kindness. A random act of kindness, like dropping off a coffee cake, is always a delightful surprise.

Kindness also grows when you volunteer for service clubs or support meaningful missions with purposeful causes.

In 2026, Spectrios Institute will celebrate 40 years of our mission. For the last 39 years, I've witnessed kindness in action every single day.

Together, for four decades, we've been able to build a truly impactful Kindness Club. Its

members include:

- Our Board of Directors, giving leadership with heart
- Our grateful patients, showing perseverance and gratitude
- Our Seeing is Believing students, sharing smiles of thanks with a new pair of glasses
- Our supporters, spreading kindness to ensure every child and adult with vision loss receives the help they need
- Our staff, brightening the lives of our patients with their talents

Our "Deicke House of Hope" is one of those special places where the Kindness Club meets to dream up ways to do good deeds for children and adults with vision loss.

It welcomes new visitors with open arms, turning them into new friends, all in the spirit of advancing the mission of kindness.

I invite you to join us in keeping kindness alive and growing.

Whether you experience it as a patient, give it as a volunteer, or share it as a donor, your kindness helps us continue the good work that begins each day at the Deicke House of Hope.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Tracy", with a stylized flourish underneath.



39 years of serving people with vision loss!

Spectrios Institute for Low Vision
at Deicke House of Hope
219 E. Cole Avenue
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www.spectrios.org



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SUPPORT GROUPS



Topics - First Fridays - 10:30 AM CT

Technology Support
Second Wednesdays - 7:00 PM CT

Chat Group
Third Wednesdays - 7:00 PM CT



**JOIN US IN OUR MISSION
TO EMPOWER LIVES,
FOSTER INDEPENDENCE
AND IGNITE HOPE FOR
CHILDREN AND ADULTS
WITH VISION LOSS.**

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