



# The Little Acorn



## The Official Newsletter of the *VSD Alumni Association*

Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind

P.O. Box, 2069, Staunton, VA 24402

February 1, 2022

Volume 20, Issue 1

**[Editor's note:** The following article is written by Robert Daniels, a VSDB student (Class of 1972) who completed his Senior year, not at VSDB but at Gallaudet College (University now) for *New Horizons*, a publication of the Deaf Seniors of America (DSA) – permission for the reprint was granted by Al Sonnenstrahl, DSA President]

### Dear Journal

By Bob Daniels

Summer, 2021

Losing your vision as you get older is difficult.

Losing your vision as a deaf person as you get older is an absolute BITCH. Trust me—I have firsthand experience with this. It is not a trip down the much-glorified Helen Keller Lane.

My journey began in my early 30s. I was diagnosed with glaucoma in both eyes. This disease runs in my mother's side of the family. A blind aunt, a partially blind uncle, my mother's early onset of glaucoma in her late teens. I was given eye drops. I asked the doctor how long I would need to use them.

"For the rest of your life." I was in my 30s and already concerned about eye disorders.

I was warned then that my eyes would not be as strong as I grew older. What did I know then? I was young, working hard, traveling the world, and having a wonderful time. My nearsightedness was corrected with funky eyeglasses and tinted contact lenses. I looked at glaucoma as a minor inconvenience that eye drops would fix.

Then came the "floaters" in my right eye. I was in my early 50s vacationing in Hawaii. I dismissed the floaters, thinking them a temporary thing. By the time I arrived in Washington, DC, after my Hawaiian vacation, I was unable to see out of that eye and was immediately admitted to Johns Hopkins Wilmer Eye Clinic.



They performed surgery on my detached retina the very next morning. I had waited too long to correct this. My retina detached again and the doctors had to put a "buckle" on my eye in hopes that it would keep the retina intact. The surgeries left scarring on my macula. I became legally blind in my right eye.

That's where the challenges began with one remaining functioning eye late in my life. I lost my depth perception. Unmarked stairs and escalators became one endless visual strip. Uneven pavers and sidewalks had to be navigated by the soles of my

feet. I would trip and fall so many times.

Flashlights became mandatory in each room in my house. If an ice cube fell to the floor, either I got down on all fours to find it with my hands or discovered a puddle of water with my bare feet later.

Even spraying cologne was a challenge. I often missed the nozzle on the first try and ended up with nice-smelling palms.

Talking with friends in dimly lit restaurants presented challenges. People on my right would try to get my attention but I would not see them unless my table mates alerted me to it. Night vision became much more difficult. People would comment on how brightly lit the rooms in my house were. I didn't know what "Normal" lighting was anymore.

But, I persevered. I kept up with my travels to remote countries, finding humor in my physical limits. I was determined to maintain my independence.

Then the other shoe dropped.

Four years ago, on a trip to Bali, I experienced floaters again in my only functioning eye. Here I was, a 22-hour flight from the USA on a developing island with limited medical care. I