

Blind

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rare cases. Risks are more intense in operations for convenience. According to Branch, this procedure requires the use of the excimer laser, which disrupts the bonds between the cells.

"Essentially it explodes the cell and lets the contents of the cell out. It then erases layers of the inner cornea or stroma," Branch said.

Although the laser has been around since the '50s, it was an industrial tool. Only in the last 10 years has the laser been used for clinical delivery on human tissue. Before, it was used to cut diamonds and to write on hard metals.

According to Stephanie Tew of TLC Laser Eye Centers, the procedure takes about 15 minutes per eye.

"The purpose of the procedure is to sculpt or reshape the cornea, or the inner eye....It etches the prescription onto the eye permanently," she said.

Although Elcock understood the risks involved in the procedure, she also saw it as a gift from God and a way to demonstrate His power in the world.

"I know this is God. He performs miracles every single day, and He has done it with my eyes," she said.

In her sewing room, this poster hangs above her Quantum XL-100 sewing machine. She calls it her Lambourguine.

She has at least six different sewing machines, and each one has a unique purpose. Over the years she has done wedding dresses for more than 50 weddings and for various proms. She also has designed choir robes for several churches. Most recently, she created afrocentric robes for the Senior Choir of her church, United Metropolitan Baptist Church.

"I don't allow anyone to come in my shop without knowing about my history of blindness and the ministry He gave me as a result. I pray with the brides about their wedding plans and the dresses they desire," Elcock said.

Last Friday, when Elcock, now 48, picked up the first pair of glasses prepared for her when she was 18 months old, she burst into tears.

"All I could think of was that I had to keep these thick glasses by my bedside, and I had to wear them constantly if I wanted to see at all," she said. "I never learned to swim as a child because I could never remove my glasses."

As a child, Elcock once broke her lenses, and she had to stay out of school for three weeks until they were remade.

When Elcock was 18 months old, her grandmother noticed that she would often walk into walls and into other objects in the home. Her mother, Willow Elcock, then took her to three opticians, who all diagnosed severe nearsightedness.

Elcock was declared legally

blind in 1952.

Finally, a Brooklyn doctor, Martin Bodian, decided to take on the task of preparing glasses for Elcock after he discovered that the youngster had an astigmatism. The doctor also suggested that her mother put her in special classes to learn Braille because she would be completely blind by the time she would reach puberty.

"When my mother received the news that I was legally blind and never would see, she began to pray; and she taught me to pray," Elcock said. "Her hope was never in man, but in God."

Willow Elcock learned to trust in God when she grew up in an orphanage as a child. She had to know that there was someone greater than she.

"I always worried about my daughter caring for herself as she grew up and went to school," she said. "God has brought me through so much in my life. I can never thank Him enough."

Each year, Bodian prepared new glasses for Elcock. Willow Elcock also did her part. "I had to use 150 watt bulbs in the house to provide a lot of light. I also requested that she sit in front of her classes at school, since she could not see from the back of the class," she said. "She did very well in school, but she had to almost put her head directly on the desk to see her work."

A crisis came in 1964 when Elcock reached puberty. She had severe headaches and



Grandma Regina Elcock helps her granddaughter Deonica Reid with her salad.



Regina Elcock and her mother, Willow Elcock, examine the first pair of glasses that were fashioned for Regina when she was 8 months old, in 1952.

blacked out at school.

A checkup revealed that the vision in her right eye had improved, but the left eye remained the same. Bodian could offer no medical explanation for this occurrence. "Apparently my vision was going in the opposite direction of what he had predicted. Prayers were being answered," Elcock said. "I was born with poor vision, but my mother refused to believe that her baby was blind. She never treated me like I had a handicap."

Her brothers, William and James, never saw her as vision impaired. As she followed them on the playground, she became one of the most outstanding athletes at her school.

Bobby Montgomery, currently a resident of Winston-Salem, who grew up with Elcock in the Red Hook Projects in south Brooklyn, remembers her well. Elcock attended P.S. 30, and Montgomery attended John J. High School and Brooklyn Technical School.

"We used to pick on her about her thick glasses. We called her four eyes and cork bottle eyes. Kids will be kids. But we couldn't say too much because she was an excellent athlete in track, volleyball and handball," Montgomery said.

However, Elcock was aware that "those 'cork bottle' lenses made me look ugly."

The fact became painfully clear when she removed her lenses to take her photo for her high school yearbook. A friend said to her, "If I had known that you were that pretty, I would have dated you in high school." Although it was meant as a compliment, it crushed Elcock's spirit. She was able to secure her first pair of contact lenses in 1982.

"It was then I discovered that grass was individual blades and not like carpet. I could only see shadows of color, but now I can distinguish more," she said.

She continued to make great

strides toward success. She completed her B.A. degree in elementary education at City College of New York and graduated with a master's degree in reading from Bank Street College of Education.

She is currently a Title I/Chapter I Early Involvement Instructor. She goes out into homes to show parents how to prepare their toddlers and kindergartners for first grade.

"Dr. Bodian confessed to me that he didn't understand why I wasn't blind and that he did not expect me to accomplish all that I have," Elcock said. "He called me his miracle baby. Now I know that prayer works."

Elcock sent a letter to the doctors responsible for helping her see.

"You are a part of phase three of my life," she wrote. "I've always been told that I couldn't or shouldn't do certain things because of my vision. I've asked God to help me in everything I tried, and he has been my eyes."

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