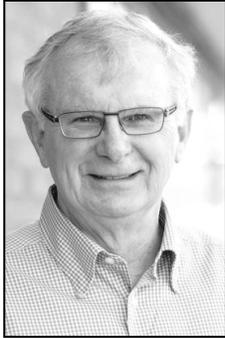




# GLAUCOMA RESEARCH SOCIETY of CANADA



*Stuart Murray, a member of the Board of Directors for the Glaucoma Research Society of Canada, has glaucoma, is legally blind and continues to lose vision. In this article, Stuart shares his personal perspectives on adapting to vision loss.*

## Living with Glaucoma Vision Damage: Some Pleasant Surprises

Many of us have had the unpleasant experience of being told that we have glaucoma, and that the disease is chronic. In my case, I was also told that considerable vision had already been destroyed and if I did not start treatments immediately, I would be blind within 6 months. That was over 20 years ago. At that time, the situation looked rather gloomy. However, over the years, there has been good news and pleasant surprises.

**Most people who are treated for glaucoma do not go blind.** Many keep most of their eyesight. Those diagnosed early and treated early may not have any noticeable change in their eyesight. The key is to take medications and eye drops as prescribed by your ophthalmologist.

**A person can lead a very normal life with little remaining vision.** I only have between 15 and 20% of my vision remaining. But that is enough to enable me to kayak, bike, work and enjoy a nice sunset. It is truly amazing how much the eye and brain can achieve with only a small amount of visual input.

**Tools to keep us productive and functional are already in our hands.** For example, I have been using a computer with Microsoft Windows for years. When I started having problems seeing and using my laptop, I found there were free, built-in tools in Windows that are ready to help. With a mouse click, I can turn on high contrast, make the mouse pointer larger and more colourful, and turn on "Magnifier". I can use Magnifier to change colours and make small items larger, enabling me to see them. The Apple Mac has similar features.

I use an iPhone and with three button presses I can flip it to high contrast mode. The high contrast I use has a black background and the print is a very bright, clear, yellow.

**Loss of my driver's licence really wasn't that bad.** The important thing is to stay independent. I walk more and use public transportation. Walking more has health benefits and I have found public transportation is much better than it used to be. Now buses are GPS enabled and a person can easily check the time of the next bus from a cell phone.

What amazed me was that I can plan my transit route, including the buses and times I should take them, using the free Google Maps application. I find Google Maps is more useful than dealing directly with the transportation companies.

*Continued over ...*

**So far, I have had almost no recreational limitations because of my vision loss.**

I love to bike. Now, rather than bike on public roads, I bike on trails. I just bought a new mountain bike. Because of my vision, I purchased one that has high quality “Rock Shocks” on the front fork. They help me bounce over the obstacles and through the potholes that I don’t see but hit. I also have a good helmet and gloves in case I fall.

**Organizational support for the visually challenged is very strong.** On its website and in its newsletters, the Glaucoma Research Society of Canada provides tips on how to keep your remaining eyesight. It also presents information at its Annual Supporters’ Meeting each October. CNIB provides support and tools to help after your sight is mostly gone. I find it helpful to stay close to both organizations.

**Most of the annoyances that come with poor vision can be solved through trial and error.** With a little effort and attention, we can each develop our own personalized solutions. For example: one of my challenges is walking through crowds of people. I cannot see some of them due to glaucoma tunnel vision and loss of the peripheral visual field. Also, because of scattered gaps and blurred areas in my remaining vision, I can only see portions of people. The simple solution is to walk close to a wall and always be scanning back and forth. Never tripping over the top or bottom stairs or other obstacles, avoiding breaking dishes because I can’t see them, and avoiding losing my wife in a crowd - each had its own different solution.

**Early on I was concerned that I would have to learn Braille if I wanted to continue reading.** However, I don’t believe that will ever be necessary. I use a Kindle eReader. I like it because I can load books and PDF documents into it and make the font very large and the background very bright. This makes reading easier. It also has a text to speech feature which I have not yet used. A large array of magnifiers can be purchased that can be used to read paper books. Some will convert the text to speech.

**One very pleasant surprise I experienced for the first time last year was a CNIB Tech Fair.** I discovered many different types of magnifiers, some using high technology including goggles like Geordi La Forge wore in Star Trek that can be used to zoom in and make hard-to-see images clear and convert text to speech.

My favorite item was a small device that looked like part of a ballpoint pen. It attaches to one arm of your eyeglasses and a tiny wire goes to a small clip that fits in your ear. This device could read signs and books as you turned your head towards them and you would hear the description from the ear clip. It could also store over 100 photographs of people you know and if any of these people approached, it would tell you who was approaching, their distance and location.

The Tech Fair also had classroom sessions and the opportunity to meet other people with the same issues. I strongly recommend attending a CNIB Tech Fair to everyone who is visually challenged. I certainly plan to make a CNIB Tech Fair and the Glaucoma Research Society Annual Meeting of Supporters yearly events.

**Remember: Life doesn’t stop because of eye problems. Blind people have accomplished things that seem impossible.** They have had normal lives, raised children, run businesses, climbed Mount Everest, become famous painters, worked as carpenters, doctors, entertainers, and the list goes on.

**For more information about the Glaucoma Research Society of Canada or to make a donation, go to [www.glaucomaresearch.ca](http://www.glaucomaresearch.ca) or call 416-483-0200 1-877-483-0204 (toll-free)**