

*I can see clearly now...***COLUMN**

by Dave Tompkins

(After Laser Eye Surgery)

I'm sure we all have at least one friend who insists on forwarding us countless numbers of lame e-mail jokes. Not too long ago I received in my inbox a particularly lame one that is loosely connected with this story, so I'll share it with you. A man wants to pursue a woman by the name of *Clearly*, but he is in a terrible dead-end relationship with his current girlfriend, *Lorraine*. A terrible accident happens - yada yada yada - and *Lorraine* is dead. But instead of showing remorse, the man cheerfully starts skipping along singing:

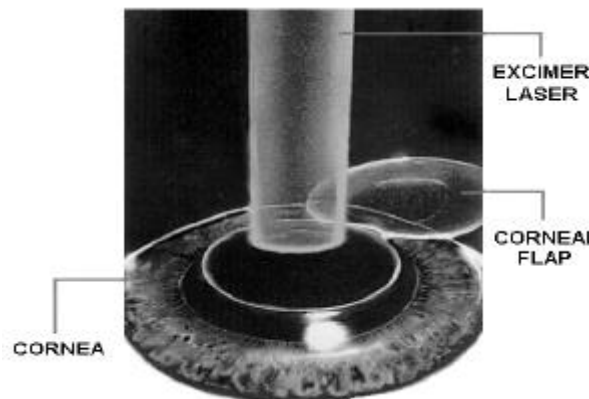
"I can see Clearly now Lorraine is gone..."

My story begins sometime last fall, when the GSS was researching health and dental plans. I discovered that the proposed health plan would partially cover the cost for laser eye surgery. My response at the time was that it seemed a little excessive, but it was a nice feature to include. The health plan was subsequently passed in a referendum, but I didn't give the eye surgery too much thought until a cold December day when my contact lenses were giving me grief. I whimsically decided to have laser eye surgery.

So in January, once the health plan was in effect, I looked up the specifics of our coverage. **Under our plan we have to go to LASIK Vision Canada.** I didn't know this at the time, but *LASIK is known as the McDonald's™ of laser eyes surgery.* LASIK's regular price for both eyes is \$1199, but they give covered UBC students a \$200 discount, and we can claim \$150 on our insurance, bringing the total cost for us to \$849. The price sounded pretty good, so I made the call.

They collected my stats and asked me a series of questions to determine my eligibility. They described the procedure to me and went through a very lengthy list of Dos and Don'ts. Here are some of the more interesting ones:

- No contact lenses for 2 weeks before
- No alcohol for 3 days before or after
- No sex for 2 days after (unfortunately, not a problem)
- No exercise for 1 week
- No heavy sports or activities for 1 month
- No water sports (without goggles) for 6 months



So I gave them my credit card number over the phone and requested a booking for as soon as possible, which turned out to be early February.

A few days later, I received a package in the mail which contained about 20 pages of information regarding the procedure. LASIK stands for *Laser In-Situ Keratomileusis*. Its description is as follows:

"The surgeon uses a device called a microkeratome to separate a thin layer of corneal tissue from the surface of the cornea, leaving a small portion attached that acts as a hinge. The flap is gently lifted up and laid to the side exposing the corneal bed. The laser is then applied to this tissue to reshape the curvature of your eye."

The information package consisted of overview materials, administrative details, a bigger list of Dos and Don'ts, and the *Surgical Consent Form*. The surgical consent form gives a thorough description of the procedure and lists no less than **21 different risks and complications associated with the surgery.** The risks range from dry eyes to Epithelial Erosions to hemorrhaging and retinal detachment. One of my favourites is something called "Sands of Sahara," which apparently hasn't been explained yet in the medical journals. At this point, I was trying to forget everything and return to my previous state of "blissful ignorance."

The LASIK office I went to was in Burnaby. Since one can't drive for the first three visits, I needed some chauffeuring. Fellow graduate students **Anthony Joch** and **Roger Miller** were fantastic and helped me out graciously. I was surprised at how large the waiting room was and even more surprised that it was full. As it turned out, the majority of the time I spent at LASIK was in the waiting room.

My first visit was for the pre-op inspection and included a couple of cool hi-tech tests. The first machine automatically measured my prescription by showing me a blurry picture that became progressively clearer. Then my head was strapped into a device and I was surrounded by fluorescent yellow concentric circles. It looked like a bad special effect from *Dr. Who* or *The Time Tunnel*.

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The technician then turned on the machine and things started to spin and change colours. I'm sure that the reader who has experimented with more hallucinogenic substances than I have would find this machine an even bigger hit. This machine performed a 3D scan of my eye surface, producing a slick colour printout that looked like a relief map and showing the contours of my eye. The rest of the pre-op was more traditional, involving the basic eye-charts. I couldn't drive because they put anesthetic drops in my eyes and dilated my pupils. The pre-op was a success and I was given the green light for the actual surgery.

On the day of the surgery I started to get a little nervous. I talked to a consultant for 20 minutes and we went through the post-op procedures. I had to sign a surgery **consent form** and initial every page to ensure that I had read it. He asked me if I wanted a mild sedative, similar to a valium, and I swiftly responded "Yes, please!"

Before you enter the surgery room you have to wear one of those blue puffy shower caps and put little booties over your shoes. I got up on to the surgical table and the first thing I noticed was that there were no head restraints. I was expecting some elaborate electric chair-like device that would prevent me from moving my head during the surgery. The nurse just politely advised me that the surgery would go much smoother if I didn't move my head. Great. Next, I made the mistake of asking the nurse how they would keep my eyelids open during the surgery. She then showed me this evil device that looked like two intertwined corkscrews. It looked like something right out of a torture chamber. At this point my breathing became irregular and my heart rate started to increase dramatically.

The surgeon came in and we exchanged some awkward pleasantries. They then forced open my right eye with that sadistic corkscrew and put in a bunch of different eye-drops. If you've ever seen the torture scene in *A Clockwork Orange* it's surprisingly right on the money. They then lowered this black device on top of my eye that produced a lot of suction. It is kind of scary **to have your eye open and see nothing but black**. Then I started to feel little tiny jabs in my eye. It felt like there was a tiny sewing machine making a circular pattern. I could feel it, but it didn't hurt. The surgeon then lifted off the black device and I could see again. The next part was a little trippy.

Imagine having 3 sheets of cellophane wrapped around your head and then having one of those sheets lifted up. Not surprisingly, that was *exactly* what it looked like when they lifted up my cornea. I was then instructed to look at a little red light. The actual surgery started to take place. Like a navigator in a submarine the nurse called out numbers and co-ordinates to the surgeon, who then zapped my eye with the laser. Several people have asked me afterwards if I could smell the cornea burning, but I was coming off of a cold and didn't think about it. **The whole procedure only took 30 seconds**, then they carefully lifted back my flap (again – very trippy), removed the corkscrews, and I was able to close my eyes.

The left eye didn't go quite as smoothly, as the corkscrews and suction device actually hurt quite a bit and I was wincing. Half-way through the procedure to cut my corneal flap, the surgeon instructed me to relax, but the damage had already been done. By wincing and tensing up, my left eye

LETTERS CONTINUED

In his February 2000 article "Stuck at the Infogate: Woes of a Library Catalogue User," Davor Cubranic provides a good summary of some of the user feedback the Library has received about one piece of its information systems, the catalogue. We take such feedback seriously, and work to improve our systems wherever possible. Unfortunately, not all aspects of our vendor-produced systems are within our direct control, so some changes may not come as quickly as any of us would like.

I'm writing to echo Mr. Cubranic's point about the importance of user feedback, and to let readers know how to provide it. You can send it electronically, even anonymously if you wish, through "Contact Library" on the UBC Library Web. Another way is to speak with the librarians at our Information or Reference desks. They're in close contact with students using our information systems and services, and represent your interests wholeheartedly. They can also clarify why problems exist, and possibly offer you some alternatives. Your feedback would be particularly appreciated during the next few months, as we work on a new version of the Web catalogue and a redesign of our Web site.

*Martha Whitehead
Head, Information Services
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the eyes have it

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was slightly bruised and looked bloody immediately after. Although it has mostly healed, it still looks a little bloody to this day.

After the surgery I was given lots of different eye-drops to take at different intervals and for different conditions. I was also given a pair of huge sunglasses and some protective disks to tape over my eyes while I slept. And then I stepped out into the real world. Everything looked hazy and cloudy, but for the most part **I could see**. One of the weirder sensations for me was to lose my manual zoom. I was previously near-sighted, used to moving something closer to me to be able to see it more clearly, but now everything was equally blurry no matter how close it was. That night I wasn't allowed to read, exercise, use the computer, or watch TV -- which pretty much precluded everything I ever do. I just and tried to resist the sensation to rub my eyes.

The next day I went back for my 1-day post-op. They put me through some tests and inspected my eyes.

They told me that I had a below-average recovery. The corneal flap was healing fine, but my eyesight wasn't as good as it could have been. It's never good to be told that you're below average, *especially* by a doctor.

My vision over the next week got progressively better. Every day I would wake up and see things a little more clearly. My night vision in low-light conditions was very poor at the beginning; I would see large halos around bright objects. I ended up driving 4 nights after the surgery, but I probably shouldn't have, and I was a little nervous. By the end of the first week I could drive at night without any problem.

I drove to LASIK for the 1-week post-op, and they put me through some more tests. Again, they said that my corneal flap was healing fine, but my eyes were a little dry and I should keep up with the drops. Then I received the news that I really didn't want to hear. After some tests, I was informed that they **over-corrected my vision**. I am now slightly far-sighted. I was -6 before and now I am +1. Now, being +1 isn't that big a deal. Apparently London Drugs sells +1 reading glasses right off of the shelf. Still, it's a little disappointing to hear that you're one of the statistics. I was informed that it's very probable that my eyes would correct themselves and regress to 0 -- especially since I was so near-sighted before. I was told that at my 1-month post-op inspection they would check it out again and see how I was doing.

It may sound like an unhappy ending, but it really isn't. It has now been two and a half weeks since the surgery and everything is fantastic. The farsightedness hasn't been a problem and I only have trouble reading if the text is less than 20 cm from my face. My eyes still get dry every once in a while and I have to apply drops, especially first thing in the morning -- but aside from that I don't even think about it anymore. I walk around in the day and can see everything perfectly. The mountains have never looked so good. On a really bright day (not that common) I have to make sure I wear sunglasses and when it's really dark out I see small halos. On occasion something with high contrast will strain my eyes a bit. But it's getting better every day.

I can't express enough how refreshing and exciting it is to walk around with my **new eyes**. It's like I've been reborn. Everything is a little more beautiful and vibrant. I have a little extra spring in my step and I constantly find myself skipping along, singing

"I can see Clearly now..."