

For those of us locked tight in the cholesterol padded cells of middle age, our changing and degrading eyesight is a new reality. Eyes are our windows to the world and the split in our vision, corrected by the magic of bifocals, is an undeniable signal of our passing from youth to the ambiguity of mid-life.



It starts simply enough. All of a sudden, you notice the word on the page isn't quite as clear as it was yesterday. You turn on a light. You turn on more lights. You need to hold this newspaper at a certain distance. You venture out to Walgreen's to buy a greeting card or a bottle of aspirin and instead find yourself experimenting with reading glasses distinguished by different levels of magnification as you spin a tower of eyeglasses nestled on the carousel of sight. Like Alice in Wonderland, you gaze into the Looking Glass at a face once free of vision paraphernalia, into the Lenscrafter landscape of middle age, the span of time Merriam Webster defines as "the period of life from about 45 to about 64."

I Googled the definition of middle age and an essay written by Robert L. Adams popped up. He offered a pretty good perspective on the subject. He believes that middle age is anywhere from 25 to 75 because at 25 we have probably achieved independence from our families and at 75 we are probably dealing with infirmities that return us back to a dependent state. Everything in-between is just that – in the middle. Adams equates youth to potential and aging to limitations, thus the idea that the realization of our limited potential causes depression resulting in mid-life crisis.

While I am meeting middle age with resignation and some disappointment, I tend to find humor in my aging body. Recently, I attended my second cousin's wedding in Pennsylvania and although my mom told me I looked "sexy" as we walked out the door of our hotel room, in the photos from the event I noticed that I was in extreme need of a consultation by a Lord & Taylor brassiere expert to lift and separate some rather depressed and depressing developments. Sexy in the eyes of my seventy-something mother is a helluva lot different than sexy in the eyes of a twenty-something best man.

At my last eye exam, I told my ophthalmologist that my eyesight seemed to be getting worse. I was having trouble reading. He asked me if I was wearing my glasses to read (they happen to be bifocals) and I told him no. He provided me the sage advice that maybe I needed to start wearing my glasses. We then proceeded through the usual stuff of eye examinations; eye drops to dilate pupils, reading the giant E eye chart without the aid of spectacles and one's evolution into a giant praying mantis looking through that apparatus with dial up lenses to test, modify and improve eyesight. "Better or worse?" he asks, quickly flipping monocles akin to those old-fashioned toys – View Masters – you'd point toward the light, rotating a picture disk with your index finger. (Now I'm really showing my age!) At the end of the exam, you're handed a prescription with numbers you don't understand, a bill you'd rather not receive and a confirmation that indeed you are processing down the aisle of middle age.

The bottom line is that I can't see like I used to. Neither can my relatives and friends so there is joy in numbers. We need more light to read. We need "granny glasses" and bifocals. My mom needs a magnifying glass. So what? We still have the exciting possibility of redefining ourselves at any age. Maybe our experience and hard won wisdom are truly our new lenses to the days and years ahead or to objects not readily seen or understood by those around us. Beauty is still in the eyes of the beholder and I stand in awe at the wonderful changes occurring in each of us as we mature through time.

As my eyesight changes, I have fun trying on new glasses because, once again, I have an opportunity to create a new persona. A buddy of mine likes to buy the most colorful and outlandish spectacles she can get her hands on and she won't spend a lot of money for them. She doesn't like to invest money in bifocals because she's always losing them or just can't remember what she did with them. Oh, did I tell you that forgetting things is the next best thing to degenerating eyesight? Now, where did I leave my summertime novel?