

Loose in the Foothills

by Bob Ring

Seeing is Believing

Ugh ... those eye drops almost killed me! In the last six weeks I've taken over 250 drops! Over the same period I had cataracts removed from both eyes and my natural lenses replaced with artificial lens implants. The result – a miracle really - is that I can now drive without the high-powered glasses that I've worn for over 55 years!

A cataract is a clouding of the lens in the eye that affects vision. According to the National Eye Institute, by age 80, more than half of all people in the United States either have a cataract or have had cataract surgery.

I first noticed cloudy vision a couple of years ago. A visit to my optometrist, Dr. Stephen Richman, determined that I was starting to develop cataracts in both eyes. By early this year, my vision had worsened so much that Dr. Richman referred me to an ophthalmologist, Dr. Laurence Kaye at Tucson Eye Center.

Dr. Kaye confirmed that cataract surgery was in order. I had a choice of replacement lenses: standard (limited vision improvement, covered by Medicare) and premium (probably better all around vision improvement, but costs more).

I chose the standard lenses. I was not concerned about the expected continuing need for glasses; after all, I've worn glasses most of my life. Dr. Kaye then selected the best distance vision improvement lenses for me from a number of choices.

So the surgeries were scheduled – right eye first, then two weeks later, the left eye. Three days before the surgery on my right eye, I started a daily regimen of three sets of eye drops (anti-inflammation and antibiotic), with directions to continue the drops until they were all used up. Same deal for the left eye.

Just before they wheeled me into the operating room, Dr. Kaye wrote his initials with a magic marker on my forehead over the eye scheduled for surgery. This was to ensure that the correct part of my body was being treated. No complaints there - except that getting all that magic marker ink off my forehead took several applications of alcohol by both a nurse in recovery and me later at home.

Before the operation, they gave me numbing eye drops and a light sedative; I was awake throughout. The delicate procedure involved using an ultrasound “hammer” to break up the cataract and a vacuum to remove the pieces; then Dr. Kaye emplaced my new lens. That's all I want to know about it!

Each eye took less than ten minutes, it was painless, and my total stay in the Camp Lowell Surgery Center was about two hours per eye. After each mid-day operation, Pat

and I hurried around the corner to eat an anniversary-special prime rib sandwich at Chad's restaurant.

Following the operation on my right eye, I was temporarily "out of balance" visually. My distance vision was good out of my "new" right eye without my glasses, but I needed the glasses to read with my left eye. So the glasses were on ... off ...! Pat came up with the great idea of removing the right-eye lens in my glasses to give me the best of both worlds.

After my left eye was done, my glasses were history. But I still need assistance for close work, like reading. So I bought a pair of inexpensive drugstore reading glasses, which work fine for now.

At the end of May, I will go back to my optometrist for a checkup and probably order new permanent glasses to make my distance vision perfect and provide reading capability.

Meanwhile, the reaction of some of my friends has been interesting. Seeing me without my familiar glasses and hearing my story, they say "fantastic" and "congratulations." Pat and I agree - it really is wonderful. Even my orthopedic surgeon son is impressed with the success and the technology.

After the surgeries on each eye, I was presented with an official card documenting the parameters of my newly-emplaced artificial lens – different for each eye by the way. About three years ago I got similar cards for my three heart stents – so I'm well on the way to becoming an official, documented bionic man.



Here I am ready for cataract surgery on my left eye. (Photo by Pat Wood)