

The Patch



By Mort Laitner

I had been lying in bed depressed for seven days. My son came into the room and as he dropped the mail on my lap said, “Dad, here’s the mail, and there’s an interesting package with no return address on it.”

Holding the manila envelope in my right hand, I looked through my right eye and observed it was postmarked Miami, Florida. My son was right; there was no return address. I remarked, “Travis, I wonder what’s inside and who sent it.”

I ripped it open, tearing the envelope into shreds. There it was, a rectangular box with a photo of a handsome young man wearing a pirate-style eye-patch. The box read CONVEX EYE PROTECTOR. A note was taped to the box. I silently read the note and shut my right eye as tears dripped down my face like an eye-dropper that misses its mark.

Travis asked, “Dad, are you okay?”

Eight days before the package arrived, I was at a party when electric sparks exploded inside my eyeball. My eye doctor repeatedly warned me that this would happen because my eyeballs were egg-shaped, and therefore, would likely detach and potentially cause blindness if not quickly patched. I knew that it was a detached retina having had this experience two years earlier in my other eye.

I immediately phoned my eye doctor, “Doc, my left eye is sparking. What should I do?”

The ophthalmologist responded, “Have someone drive you down to Bascom Palmer as soon as possible! I’ll contact the on-call surgeon to be on standby to examine your eye and repair the detached retina, if necessary.”

As I heard the doctor hang up, I thought about my last surgical experience. It wasn’t so bad. The eye surgeon explained, “If the fluid leaks out of your eyeball, I’ll have to fill it with air. And for the next ninety days, you’ll spend your waking hours watching a TV which has been placed face-up on the floor with your head tilted in one position until the air pocket settles.

I prayed like I never prayed before. I used all of my mental powers. “Please Lord, no leakage.” I knew if the fluid had leaked out my mental stability would collapse.

I could not handle ninety days of TV torture. I would have ended up in a mental hospital. My prayers were answered when I awoke from the anesthesia. The first question I asked the nurse was, “Did the fluid leak out of my eye?” When I heard the nurse say no, I thanked G-d and fell back asleep.

Now, two years later, I was having a déjà-vu experience, same hospital, same condition, same surgery, and same prayers, but DIFFERENT RESULT.

I would have a buckle placed on my left eyeball. I already had one on my right, and if the buckles didn’t coordinate with each other, I would have double vision. This time, my prayers were only partially answered. No leakage but no coordination. As each day passed, I grew more and more depressed. I asked myself, “Why me? How will I handle this?”

I thought about the people I knew who had disabilities. They all moved on with their lives. They embraced their disability with courage, fortitude and poise. They learned from it and were better because of it. I sat up in my bed and resolved, “No more pity, sadness nor tears. From this day on, I will embrace this challenge.”

I opened the eye-patch box and stretched the black elastic band snugly over my head. It felt tight, but I no longer had double vision. This problem was solvable – no more headaches, no more seeing two of everything. I could now drive at night. I could read without closing my eye. But at what cost - the stares of children reacting to a one-eyed pirate? I decided I would salute them by giving them my best, “AAARGH!! Ahoy matey!” I would learn to love their facial reactions of bewilderment.

That original eye-patch is long gone, and I have bought many since then. But I still carry the anonymous tear-marked note in my wallet. I often pull it out as a reminder whenever I or a friend faces a crisis and read it out loud,

“EMBRACE THE CHALLENGE.”