

Welcome to Retina India.

All about Retina, for those with an interest in Retina & Retinal Ailments.

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Celebrating the International Women's Day, March 8, 2012, this March issue of Retina India Newsletter is dedicated to the spirit of women in all spheres of life.

Everything has its wonders, even darkness and silence, and I learn, whatever state I may be in, therein to be content.

- Helen Keller

Moving Forward

By Jean Parker

March 8th is celebrated as International Women's Day in much of the world. Its purpose is to recognize women's lives, celebrate the accomplishments of women and draw attention to the problems we still face. This day is also an opportunity for women around the world to take stock of our lives, evaluate where we have been and re-evaluate where we want to go.

For blind and visually impaired women, this dialogue with oneself inevitably emerges as one about independence, how we define it for ourselves and how we take our place in the world around us. Although this usually begins as an internal dialogue it quickly becomes clear that discussions with others are a necessary step in our quest for as much independence as possible. Our families, close friends, co-workers and those we do business with on a regular basis might be a part of this discussion. Other blind women are vital participants.

Whether a woman has been blind since birth or since last week is irrelevant. Gaining independence in whatever way we as individuals define it, is a lifelong process. It requires a variety of techniques and strategies at different times and what is effective for one woman may prove impossible for another. It is necessary therefore, that we

set an example for others by not passing judgment on the adaptive skills we choose to adopt in our own lives. Instead, we can all benefit more by learning from and supporting each other in the process of making life meaningful.

As we identify the aspects of independence we want for ourselves, it is important to set goals. If traveling to a new location independently or learning a new job-related skill is a worthy goal, the work will progress more easily if it is broken down into manageable steps. We are all tempted to make drastic changes all at one time. But it almost always works better to set goals that are achievable before moving on to the next step.

Let's suppose for example, that your goal is to travel from your residence to the home of a friend or relative who lives some distance away. If you know your city or town well then you already have an idea of where you must go and can move onto the next step of deciding how you will get there. Your choices could include taking a rickshaw or taxi, bus or train or going on foot. The mode of transport you choose will determine what you must learn next.

If on the other hand you are leaving home on your own for the first time, you might have other tasks to do first. It is common for people, especially women, who are newly blind or becoming independent for the first time, to experience resistance from family members to their desire to undertake independent travel. If this is the case it often helps to discuss it with another blind woman who has experience traveling unaccompanied in India for ideas about getting information from others, safety and handling the attitudes of people you will encounter. Not everyone you meet will be enthusiastic that you are navigating the world by yourself and they will usually express their views to you with conviction. When this happens, it is necessary to have self-confidence and belief in your abilities. It is imperative that you not let others define your independence for you.

Throughout all of this, advice will be given to you whether you ask for it or not. Evaluating its credibility can be a challenge but drawing on your past experience and knowledge will help you to remain assured and self-confident. You will have to decide if the people around you have legitimate concerns or are simply being overprotective and undermining your progress. A certain amount of experimenting will have to take place in order to test the credibility of those who make pronouncements about your capabilities. If you determine that you simply cannot continue living with an overly protective parent or relative, you might have to explore other options. This often comes to a head when a blind adolescent prepares to attend college or university and will be living away from home for the first time. Having the assistance of other blind people will help make things easier for both you and your family.

We face a lot of prejudice and discrimination in society and it isn't going away any time soon. It is vital that blind women meet together, communicate with each other and share ideas for having a fulfilling life despite them. Together, we are in a much better position to be successful obtaining an education, getting a good job and having a supportive, but not overprotective family. Everything is easier if blind women move forward together.

Jean is a visually challenged broadcaster who lives in Pune. She had done radio journalism course in the US and worked in Latin America before coming to India.

MY EUREKA MOMENT

By Deepti Richa

For days that grew to months, and years, one question never seemed to retreat: “What about tomorrow?”

The what if, what if not, if only, and what not – instead of fading, only began to grow stronger. And the anticipation, fear, self-doubt, and tears grew larger. Suddenly, losing sight at once appeared more reassuring than losing sight over time. At least, the parameters that had to be coped with don't gradually change, as also people's expectations from me – for the worse.

Retinitis Pigmentosa has been my ... should I call the other half? Soul-mate? The doppelganger? Best friend? It has always been with me, making its presence felt tentatively, quietly doing its job from the side (pun intended!), but scarcely taking away times that I enjoy. Or so I thought.

I have fought with it, took refuge in it, complained about it, grew from it, ganged up against it at Retina India meets, applauded it, squirmed when relatives prejudiced against it, thanked it with gratitude for the humility it has taught, tried to hide it from the world, marveled at its consistency, but wondered why it had to be such a dreadful teacher. And it still remains with me, continuing to exist and grow inside me. And I understand that I cannot exist without RP as long as I live.

With this frame of mind running over and over like an entire reel in my head, RP began to slowly drive me helpless. Advice, like “Focus on your present”, or “Believe in yourself” fell on deaf ears. Because, truth be told, if you're serious about life you're serious about RP. The anticipation of tomorrow cannot be cured by humility; gratitude cannot bear fruits for tomorrowyears' (Hey! If yesteryears is a legal word, then why not tomorrowyears?) ambitions.

“RP has given me nothing that I can use to win despite it”, I used to tell myself, day in and day out. But one day, after 50 or so laps from the door in the hall to the window, I sat down and stared at the blank-screened laptop. And I understood. Taking life seriously was my choice. It was my choice to have given RP so much importance that I had run a marathon within the 10 feet of my room. Everything in life – when I look closer – has the potential to make me feel miserable. And in some cases, they did. There are a number of issues other than RP that are equally daunting, but I continue to live unaffected. Like money.

And what do I know? With time, some issues really did stop affecting me. I was persistent, of course. I really believe that money is just a medium of exchange, and not the only medium. So even if I've spent a fortnight with just Rs.500 in my account and get wiser about why people fret over money, I still parrot that money is only as big as you want it to be. It's all mind games, all these silly little things.

That, ladies and gentlemen, was my Eureka moment. The more sensitive you are to RP, the more miserable life

appears. The more you take it in your stride – like the “battery low” when you are about to finish, like the sole mango in the fridge on a quiet summer morning with nobody at home – the less complicated life is; and the more interesting.

Move along folks, we have enjoying to do. Because I’m telling you, like Prateek Agarwal said that his friend said, who in turn heard it somewhere, I believe, “Eat, drink and enjoy...for tomorrow you may die(t)”.

Foot Note: Deepti Richa writes. And intrinsically so, with sarcasm.

HONOUR FOR ACHIEVERS

The third edition of [IBN7 Super Idols](#) celebrated the courage and determination of 11 specially-abled achievers for facing physical challenges and conventional barriers to realise their chosen dreams. The Super Idols were felicitated at a glittering awards ceremony in Mumbai on March 21, 2012, when Bollywood actor Salman Khan presented them with a cash prize of Rs 1 lakh each. Among the winners was **Sachu Ramalingam**, a qualified visually impaired person and consultant in low vision blindness accessibility technology, inclusion advocate for persons & women with disability.

In Mumbai, as part of International Women’s Day (IWD) celebrations, [State Bank of India](#) felicitated five women achievers who are visually challenged. They were **Vaishali Sawarkar**, who represented India in the World Open Chess Championship for blind women in Greece and was ranked 8th in the International Marathon race; **Trupti Nayak**, who represented the country in desert trekking and the international marathon race; **Neha Pawaskar** and **Sarita Katariya**, who participated in the International Autumn Chess Tournament; and **Veena Patil**, Managing Director, Kesari Travels.

In addition, State Bank of India also selected and awarded five of its women employees on the occasion of IWD; two of them, **Lalita Srinivas** (Bangalore) and **Mamta Baldev Chadiramani** (Mumbai) are visually challenged.

In Coimbatore, **T.R. Rajeshwari**, a visually impaired music teacher, was among four women achievers honoured on International Women’s Day at Avinashilingam Deemed University for Women.

Source: Newspaper reports (March 2012)

JUSTICE, AT LAST

Indore-based Purnima Jain had cleared the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) examinations with distinction in 2008 securing a high 1123 marks, and an excellent interview score of 210 out of 300. Still, she was

denied a posting because she was visually challenged.

The determined lady embarked upon a four-year long battle by moving the Madhya Pradesh high court, approaching Central Administrative Tribunal, meeting Union Minister of State V Narayanaswami, and finally the Prime Minister himself.

After PM's intervention, Jain (who, incidentally, holds a degree in Law and Masters in Public Administration) has been offered a job in Indian Railways Personnel Service (IRPS) under Group B of Class I.

In a similar case, Ajit Kumar of village Kheri, Mahendergarh district (Haryana) too became an IAS officer by overpowering his physical handicap of blindness.

Source: Newspaper reports (March 2012)

3 PERCENT OF BLINDNESS IN INDIA CAUSED BY DIABETIC RETINOPATHY

Diabetic retinopathy accounts for three per cent of all cases of blindness in India and more awareness on the condition is needed to help prevent this figure from rising further.

A diabetic retinopathy screening camp was organized at the Raj Bhavan in Chennai, Tamil Nadu. Governor K Rosaiah said that although progress from lack of symptoms to blindness due to diabetic retinopathy may take several decades, early detection and proper treatment can help prevent diabetics from losing their sight.

Diabetic retinopathy is retinopathy (damage to the retina) caused by complications of diabetes mellitus – the small blood vessels in the retina become damaged as a result of prolonged, high blood glucose levels. It affects most people who have had diabetes for 10 years or more and is the leading cause of blindness in adults under the age of 65.

[Source](#)

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY CELEBRATIONS BY RETINA INDIA CHAPTERS

The International Women's Day was celebrated by Chennai and Bangalore chapters in their respective cities in the month of March 2012.

The Chennai meeting laid special emphasis on greater advocacy for women. The panelists included a state government official; an educationist and clinical psychologist; a head mistress of a school which supports

differently challenged children in the normal stream; and a gynaecologist.

The meeting in Bangalore focused on a wide range of issues like economic independence of women; problems of vi women in rural areas; independent living skills; need for political awareness; importance of Inclusive education; and gender bias in private sector employment.

For detailed reports, please click [here](#).

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