



www.cviatlanta.org

Electronic Press Kit

Blind/Sight: Conversations With the Visually Inspired

Photographs by Billy Howard with illustrations by Laurie Shock

VSA arts of Georgia, Arts for All Gallery

May 1 through June 22, 2007

Turner First Thursdays on May 3 and June 7, 5-8 PM

<http://www.vsaartsga.org>

Contact:

Ann-Laura Parks, Center for the Visually Impaired
404-875-9011 ext. 4278, aparks@cviatlanta.org

Jaehn ("Jane") Clare, VSA arts of Georgia
404-221-1270 ext. 202, jaehn.clare@vsaartsga.org

Billy Howard
404-873-0256, billyhoward@mindspring.com

Backgrounder

[Press Release](#)

[Slide Show](#)

[Fact Sheet](#)

[About Billy Howard](#)

[About VSA arts of Georgia](#)

[About the Center for the Visually Impaired](#)

Exhibition images, text and sound bites

[Artist's Statement](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[Download exhibition images, text and sound bites](#)

Copyright notice and information: All photographs, exhibition text and audio © 2006 Billy Howard Photography; all illustrations © 2007 Shock Design. The images, text and audio in this press kit are provided to media representatives for purposes of news coverage only. All other uses are prohibited. Access to this press kit does not imply unlimited use permissions nor any release of copyright restrictions. Images, text and audio are provided for one-time, press related use only. Long-term use or use of these materials in publications, CD-ROMs, DVDs, Web sites (other than online articles), and any other non press related, for-profit use is prohibited.

If images, text and/or audio is to be used on a press Web site, their use must be of finite term (i.e. content may not remain online indefinitely). Images shall not be displayed online in the high resolution format provided in this kit, but must be reduced to screen resolution (72 dpi). Digital images, text and audio may not be redistributed to other parties.

The copyright holders reserve the right to withhold access to images if false representation is suspected or there are questions about intended usage.

739 West Peachtree St., NW
Atlanta, GA 30308

Ph: 405.875.9011
Fax: 404.607.0062

Accredited Member
National Accreditation Council

A United Way Agency

[Download images, text and sound bites](#) (Click links to download files. Contact Ann-Laura Parks for alternate file specs)



Annie Portrait

[Download hi-res jpg](#)



Annie Illustration

[Download hi-res jpg](#)

[See
Exhibition
text](#)

[Audio sound bite](#)
(4.26MB mp3
TRT 3:06)



Cliff Portrait

[Download hi-res jpg](#)



Cliff Illustration

[Download hi-res jpg](#)

[See
exhibition
text](#)

[Audio sound bite](#)
(4.12MB mp3,
TRT 2:59)



Henry Portrait

[Download hi-res jpg](#)



Henry Illustration

[Download hi-res jpg](#)

[See
exhibition
text](#)

[Audio sound bite](#)
(4.05MB mp3,
TRT 2:57)



Mao Portrait

[Download hi-res jpg](#)



Mao Illustration

[Download hi-res jpg](#)

[See
exhibition
text](#)

[Audio sound bite](#)
(4.80MB mp3,
TRT 3:29)



Nikki Portrait

[Download hi-res jpg](#)



Nikki Illustration

[Download hi-res jpg](#)

[See
exhibition
text](#)

[Audio sound bite](#)
(6.04MB mp3,
TRT 4:24)



Ashley Portrait

[Download hi-res jpg](#)



Ashley Illustration

[Download hi-res jpg](#)

[See
exhibition
text](#)

[Audio sound bite](#)
(4.01MB mp3,
TRT 2:55)



Hal Portrait
[Download hi-res jpg](#)



Hal Illustration
[Download hi-res jpg](#)

[See exhibition text](#)

[Audio sound bite](#)
(6MB mp3, TRT 4:22)



Stan Portrait
[Download hi-res jpg](#)



Stan Illustration
[Download hi-res jpg](#)

[See exhibition text](#)

[Audio sound bite](#)
(5.61MB mp3, TRT 4:05)



Raina Portrait
[Download hi-res jpg](#)



Raina Illustration
[Download hi-res jpg](#)

[See exhibition text](#)

[Audio sound bite](#)
(4.01Mb mp3, TRT 2:55)



Helen Portrait
[Download hi-res jpg](#)



Helen Illustration
[Download hi-res jpg](#)

[See exhibition text](#)

[Audio sound bite](#)
(3.11MB mp3, TRT 2:15)



George Portrait
[Download hi-res jpg](#)



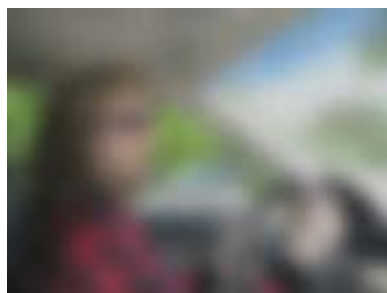
George Illustration
[Download hi-res jpg](#)

[See exhibition text](#)

[Audio sound bite](#)
(4.22MB mp3, TRT 3:04)



Glenn Portrait
[Download hi-res jpg](#)



Glenn Illustration
[Download hi-res jpg](#)

[See exhibition text](#)

[Audio sound bite](#)
(5.57MB mp3, TRT 4:03)

Fact Sheet

Exhibition Summary

This exhibition of large format photographs portrays 12 individuals who live with vision loss that ranges from low vision to total blindness. Using images and audio, photographer Billy Howard challenges common myths about blindness through the compelling personal stories of 12 people who possess inspiring vision of their own.

Exhibition Specifications

For *Blind/Sight: Conversations With the Visually Inspired*, Howard will create a series of 12 portrait photographs showing a diversity of ages, ethnic backgrounds and types of vision loss from low vision to total blindness. Each portrait will be displayed at 24" x 36" accompanied by an illustration by artist Laurie Shock depicting how the person sees the world. These images may look as if seen through thick fog or they may be completely dark or they may be blurred images where some portions are recognizable and others are not. Each set of images will include text and audio of an interview with the person in the photo and an audio description of the images. In the interviews, each subject will talk about their self concepts, how they perceive the world visually and how the world perceives them.

Exhibition Dates

Arts for All Gallery, VSA Arts of Georgia: May 1 – June 22, 2007
Permanent installation at CVI: June 2007

About Billy Howard

<http://www.billyhoward.com>



Billy Howard is a commercial and documentary photographer with an emphasis on health, education and social themes.

Books—Author, Photographer

Epitaphs for the Living: Words and images in the Time of AIDS

Portrait of Spirit: One Story at a Time a book of images and interviews of people with disabilities with an introduction by Christopher Reeve

Angels and Monsters: A Child's Eye View of Cancer with an introduction by Jeff Foxworthy

Selected Publications—Contributing Photographer

Atlanta: The Right Kind of Courage by Jimmy Carter

The Unfinished Presidency: Jimmy Carter's Journey Beyond the White House by Douglas Brinkley

Pandemic: Facing AIDS with an introduction by Kofi Anan, edited by Rory Kennedy

Selected Broadcast Media

Good Morning America

CBS This Morning

Performance Today (NPR)

And the Band Played On (HBO)
The Coming Plague (TBS)
Tribute to Dr. Martin Luther King, 1996 Olympic Games Opening Ceremony

Selected Collections

Carter Presidential Center
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
High Museum of Art
Library of Congress

Other Credits

Past artist in residence, École Nationale Supérieure de la Photographie, Arles, France
Distinguished lecturer, University of Texas at Austin
Distinguished lecturer, University of the Arts, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Instructor, Rocky Mountain School of Photography, Missoula, Montana
Honorary Doctor of Literature, St. Andrews College, Laurinburg, North Carolina

About VSA arts of Georgia, Arts for All Gallery



Arts for All Gallery is a program of VSA arts of Georgia, a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing access to the arts for people with disabilities and those with low income. VSA arts of Georgia is affiliated with VSA arts, an affiliate of The John F. Kennedy Center for Performing Arts, and an international nonprofit organization founded in 1974 by Ambassador Jean Kennedy Smith, with the mission to create a society where all people with disabilities learn through, participate in and enjoy the arts. For more information: www.vsaartsga.org

About the Center for the Visually Impaired



The Center for the Visually Impaired is Georgia's largest comprehensive, fully accredited facility providing rehabilitation services for individuals of all ages who are blind or visually impaired. Since 1962, the Center has grown to serve as a model of innovative services.

The mission of the Center for the Visually Impaired is to offer comprehensive services to promote independence with dignity and the preservation of self worth for individuals of all ages who are blind or visually impaired. For more information: www.cviatlanta.org

Artist's Statement

Blindness is not always darkness and darkness is not always lack of vision. On these walls you will meet twelve individuals who see the world not through their eyes, but from their heart.

What does it mean to be blind, to have a visual impairment, not to see? I thought it was about darkness. It is not. It is about light, energy and the boundless creativity of the human mind to discover the world using all senses.

Each of us has a unique view of the world around us. The people documented here know that. They have discovered their own ways of seeing and only ask that you join their conversation.

We all have different ways of seeing, the important thing, is that we listen.

Acknowledgements

This project started with my friends Subie and Phil Green. Phil began losing his sight over 30 years ago. I watched as this brilliant man whose hobby involved the art of tying fishing flies, a precise art requiring the ability to focus on the smallest elements of wire, thread and feather, slowly and painfully lost his ability to see. His grace and ability to adapt and continue his incredible zest for life has inspired me and this project has been an acknowledgement of that gift.

When Subie became director of CVI we decided we would work on a project to help bring a voice to the clients they serve throughout the state. CVI is one of a very few organizations funded by the state to serve the more than 250,000 Georgia residents who are blind or visually impaired. She is uniquely qualified to direct this organization. Married to Phil for over 35 years she has a profound and personal understanding of what it means to be blind.

Ann-Laura Parks, development associate at CVI, and an artist herself, immediately had a passion for this project and has been a combination fund raiser, cheerleader and brainstormer. Her idea for the subtitle helped me focus on the uplifting nature of this project.

My wife Laurie Shock has been my principal collaborator in this project. A gifted artist, her illustrations of what each person sees is the final piece of the project and the element that gives it meaning beyond being a simple display of portraits. We are not only introduced to each of these remarkable individuals, but through Laurie's interpretations, we get an idea of what it is like to look through their eyes at the world around them.

There is no point in a project if it has no way of reaching an audience and Jaehn Clare, director of artistic development at VSA arts of Georgia, believed in this project from the beginning. She not only provided a venue for the exhibit, but volunteered to provide the audio descriptions of the artwork, an integral element in bringing to life this exhibit for the visually impaired. Her statements bring an elegant simplicity to the images allowing those without sight a glimpse into the essence of the photographs.

There is another community of individuals and organizations, without whose support we would not have been able to accomplish this work. I am indebted to those who wanted to be part of this project through their financial and in-kind contributions.

Lucinda Bunnan

LUBO Fund

Lynda and Ben Greer

Sally Wood

Toco Hill Picture Framing

April Cline, Danny Whisnant and Bettye Harris with Georgia Radio Readers Service (GaRRS)

The City of Atlanta, Office of Cultural Affairs and the Fulton County Arts Council/Georgia Council for the Arts Grassroots Arts Program

Elizabeth Firestone Graham Foundation
Bob Khoury and Showcase, Inc.
David Chapman and Professional Photo Resources
Traeci Stevens for transcribing the interview tapes
Kelbi McCumber for her invaluable assistance on each of the photo shoots

And finally, the twelve individuals you see on these walls were my most intimate collaborators. Believing in this project they bared their hearts and souls in interviews that, when we listen carefully, paradoxically provide a window to a new way of seeing.

Exhibition Text

ANNIE

Annie Maxwell, 60, blind from birth with no known cause

Annie Maxwell did not know she was blind until she was seven years old. “Nobody told me. I kind of thought everyone lived in the same fogginess that I did.”

When her brother, a year younger than she, started school, she said, “Hey, wait a minute. Something is not right.” That was the last time Annie has ever been left behind.

When kids at her children’s school made fun of their mom’s eyes, Annie asked to do training sessions with the students to teach them about blindness. She was a hit. The children understood. It was the adults that became the obstacle.

“I realized this, that when you’re visually impaired or blind, you have to be the leader, because if you’re not in the leadership role, they won’t listen.” So Annie got involved with the school fundraisers, tallying more money than anyone else, and was elected president of the PTA. Now they listened. Parlaying her intelligence and personal charisma into a life filled with family and achievements, Annie went on to receive a masters degree in recreational therapy. She teaches children and young adults how to manage their lives in a seeing world through the STARS program at CVI.

She recently received a Robert Wood Johnson Community Health Leader Award for her work, an honor never before bestowed on a blind person.

“I’ve always felt that I had to kind of live above other people and what they were doing in order to make myself known and to make myself noticed as an individual. I don’t know if that is something that is good or bad, but it is one of the things that is real.”

What Annie Sees: Annie’s vision is categorized as light perception and contrast vision. Her vision is not measurable in a doctor’s office and she can’t count fingers on a hand, but if there is light and contrast she can make out shapes and see colors. On a bright day she can determine where the sidewalk ends and the grass begins. On a cloudy day, if there isn’t much contrast, everything looks gray. When approaching an object she can’t see, like a pole, she can feel it before she gets to it, because the sound around her changes.

CLIFF

Cliff Hembree (with Sampson), 34, trauma

Cliff Hembree was a Tuscaloosa County police officer, injured in the line of duty. While responding to a domestic violence call he was struck by a vehicle, driven by the woman who made the call. He was thrown against his unit, ricocheted off and thrown down the road. His brain injuries registered over twice the trauma that Shepherd Center: A Catastrophic Care Hospital, in Atlanta, normally sees and they credit his good physical condition and a ballistic vest to saving his life.

Cliff lost all of his vision that night, as well as suffering severe brain injuries. His optic nerve damage is rare. As he explains it: "Your eye is basically the camera. The optic nerve is the little film guy. He runs it to the camera store in the back of your brain. The back of your brain is the Eckerd's that develops it."

That process no longer works for Cliff. In its place Cliff sees hallucinogenic images of cartoon-like figures, a symptom of Charles Bonnet Syndrome in which the brain sends out random imagery. Amazingly, he maintains a positive spirit and feels he and his wife Lisa are stronger than ever. He received Sampson, a guide dog, three years ago. "It's given me a lot of independence. Sampson and I have gained a lot of camaraderie and love with each other."

"I have grown closer to God through this process. He kept me alive for a reason. He's told me I'm going to see again one day. We're regular church goers and grow together spiritually, Lisa and I both. It's brought us together. I respect her for what she's been through and what she's given up and what she's had to...it's hard for her to deal with someone who has a brain injury and who's blind. I worry about that some. And then she deals...she's pretty damn strong about it."

What Cliff sees: The overall background is a smooth, solid black. Within the black field are small, light-green specs that vary in shape, size, and orientation. Some fade in and out while others appear and disappear more quickly. Shadows are sometimes present as well. Due to Charles Bonnet Syndrome, a cartoon-like image appears over the background. It's not a recognizable cartoon but rather an image composed of eyes, arms, legs, and other things wrapped around each other in something resembling a football tackle.

HENRY

Henry Hall, 5, retinopathy of prematurity

Henry Hall will charm your socks off. At the beginning of the interview, he began: "If I can wait just a minute, that'd be great....to get my brain started. His brain is a wondrous thing.

Born with multiple visual disorders, Henry's vision is like a crazy quilt with each part of his eye seeing a little different and some parts not at all. As he views the world his mind connects all of these puzzle pieces into whole cloth.

Henry has been learning braille, in his words, since he was a little boy. Now, at five, he talks about his favorite letters, speaking in the dot patterns that form his alphabet.

“I’ve been learning Braille since I was just about three years old. And I like to read Braille and I think I’m going to teach you some more letters I’ve learned. Now you’ll never forget this one. “B” is just dots, one, two and “A” is just dot one.”

Getting around he uses his cane, appropriately named “Mr. Cane.” He has two dogs, one who “bites a little bit. She is my best dog I’ve ever had! I’ve been teaching my dog some tricks about every day. And she loves me, and I love my dog Riley too.”

His family circles Henry with love. He was born early, at 24 weeks, with both retinas detached. Part of his optic nerves have died and parts of the nerve are small. He has border-line glaucoma and very small optic chiasms.

His mother, Martha, said it was devastating to find out Henry was visually impaired. “You grieve for your child and what they’ll miss growing up. But we made the decision a long time ago that Henry is a little boy first, who just happens to be visually impaired. And that’s how we’ve raised him. And he is active and happy and involved and participates in everything that he wants to participate in, with very few limitations.”

What Henry Sees: Henry’s visual field is akin to looking through Swiss cheese. He has little to no vision in his left eye and the sight in his right eye is splotchy with no depth perception and no peripheral vision. There is a pocket in the lower inside area of his right eye where he can see things close-up and in a different pocket he can see things in the distance. Of all the colors, yellow is the easiest for Henry to see.

MAO

Mao Ueno, 5, optic nerve glioma

At five years old, Mao Ueno has no fear. Before the count of three he is the first in his swimming class to jump in and his leap is into complete darkness. Mao is totally blind.

A rambunctious wound-up bundle of energy, laughter and devious delight, Mao loves to make those around him laugh with his clever pranks. Diagnosed with neurofibromatosis when he was one and a half, Mao developed tumors in his optic pathway and lost his vision shortly after he turned two.

“He’s very outgoing, social and a chatter box,” says his mother Sachiko, who is originally from Japan. “He has no fear of new things. And he’s a very curious boy. So, I think that’s a very good asset for him.”

Mao likes tadpoles and says they can tickle you and make you giggle. Then Mao inches his way around the table, touching the edges to chart his path, moving closer and closer. And so it is that he has become a tadpole and is on a mission to tickle the interviewer.

Shortly before losing his sight, his mother took Mao to a petting zoo. He retains a visual memory of the animals he saw there, but every animal gets the same name: doggy. “You know, bunny is a doggy, he call everything doggy,” Sachiko laughs.

Before Mao was born, Sachiko never imagined having a child with special needs. Now life has new meanings. Each year marks another year that Mao has survived, every birthday is special.

His medical difficulties have taught Mao's parents the goodness in other people, who did not know them, yet reached out to help.

"When he grows up I just want him to be independent. And then I want him to do the same things for other people."

What Mao Sees: Mao has no visual imagery, he sees only a dark shade of gray. Because he has a visual memory, he talks about things he sees through his rich, visual imagination.

NIKKI

Natelkka (Nikki) Frye, 53, cataracts, detached retinas

Nikki Frye walks through the world experiencing all of her senses in ways she never imagined before losing her sight. Her heightened awareness coalesce in her heart, where her feelings of love and peace have bloomed as her vision has faded.

"How has blindness affected my life? I still feel like the same person, but how I move in the world is different. And the things that are important to me are probably different, and my goals were different, more materialistic I think."

"I do feel a more openness towards other people, like when I meet them initially, there isn't a sight for me to almost take a picture of and see if there's something in there that is like that picture that I saw of a person. So what I'm trying to say is, I don't put as much judgment out on people. I think that living as a blind person has made me a lot more accepting. I feel people's hearts first. That energy comes to me first and that's what I kind of ride on."

She fights the prejudices and misunderstandings of the sighted world, wanting nothing more than to be accepted for what she sees in her heart, not through her eyes.

"I was thinking about how other people see a blind person. And I do notice how people talk to me, and a lot of times it may sound like they're talking to a child. Or they talk a lot louder. Or they found a pity in their voices. I just want to say, I'm still the same person. I'm a whole person. I haven't lost my education. I haven't lost any of my mental ability."

Nikki is a massage therapist in East Point, a profession that allows her to use another sense, touch, to reach people.

What Nikki Sees: Beginning from the right side, there is a dark gray field that is smooth and not grainy. As it moves to the left it becomes a lighter and lighter gray. A large swath of gray, lighter than the background it covers, sweeps all the way across at an angle like a brush stroke. The top of the swath is smoother than the bottom which is jagged, like the hairs from a paint brush. In the far bottom left peripheral corner is a small circle where images break through. It's somewhat foggy and easier to see colors such as red and orange. It can reveal the feet of people nearby or other things low to the ground.

HELEN

Helen Trentadue, 84, macular degeneration

At 84, Helen Trentadue is lively. And if you're looking for a good conversation, she's your destination.

Being with Helen is like being at your own little party. Like gifted social people she immediately puts you at ease. And she always has a story to tell. Initially taking her diagnosis with “a grain of salt,” she became devastated when she learned how drastically it could effect her.

Thus started Helen’s education, and she read everything she could on her condition. It was through this research that she discovered the Maxwell Low Vision Clinic at the Center for the Visually Impaired where, she says, she “learned to live whole heartedly independent.”

One day while getting gas for her car she noticed liquid pouring on her leg and realized she didn’t have the nozzle in the tank. Then she noticed she had two unmatched shoes on, “and I thought: whatever in the world is wrong with you Helen!”

Although she passed her driver’s test, she lost her spirit for driving. “I was always being cautioned: you live in an area where children will be playing in the streets. Everybody has pets. And I heard that and will admit I just lost my incentive to want to drive again.”

Not to be daunted, Helen took computer classes at CVI. “I can send email. I can do quite a bit on the computer and I write all my letters and so forth. One thing it does, it saves me from having to buy beautiful stationary. So that, in a way, satisfies me!” So Helen traded her car keys for a keyboard. Nothing can stop her.

What Helen Sees: Helen’s vision differs from what doctors typically report for someone with macular degeneration. The right side of her visual field is dark, blurry, and foggy. The center of her vision is light and images fade away. On the left side she can make out some objects and color, although it is difficult for her to determine details like eye and hair color. Vertical straight lines appear distorted and wavy. Due to Charles Bonnet Syndrome, she sees visual hallucinations of miniature, green bushes with tiny, white flowers as well as fluttering butterfly wings, clear and distinct, superimposed off to the side of her vision.

GEORGE

George Guerrero, 11, brain tumors

George is a tangle of energy and delight. His smile can light a room and his solemn gaze belies his age. He is quiet now, but that doesn’t fool his father who says at school George is known as the best talker.

Born with breathing problems George spent his first 17 weeks in the hospital. His breathing improved but on subsequent visits to the hospital tumors were discovered in his brain. Little by little he began to lose his sight. Three years later he lost his vision completely.

He and his father make quite a pair. On Father’s Day he always has chocolates for his father and on his father’s birthday he presents him with a letter, written in Braille. George reads him the letter. The love between them fills their home.

When he was photographed he was told he looked fourteen. This caused great delight in George. “Really! I look fourteen?” At eleven, this was quite the compliment. “But I’m not quite a teenager. I will be soon though. Time flies. Soon enough I’ll be 12 and then I’ll be 13.”

Asked if he keeps his father out of trouble, he responds: "Yeah. Well really he's the one who's supposed to keep me out of trouble since he's the one in charge. Right Pop?"

A happy boy who loves games and travel and math and his father says George likes to discover things. He also loves all kinds of music and is especially fond of rap.

George asks his father if one day he will be able to see. "I say you know, I hope. I'd give my life for that but what can I do? I say well, we just have to live on what we have and be happy with it. So maybe one day something better is coming up."

What George Sees: George cannot see and has no light perception. However, George does have visual experiences, due to unknown causes. The overall background is a dark gray and he sees different colored moving shadows of people, horses, and other animals. He describes them as soft, blurred, and alive.

ASHLEY

Ashley Whitley, 17, Leber's congenital amaurosis

Ashley Whitley has the voice of an angel. Standing perfectly still she sings *The Star Spangled Banner* for a small audience and the room is quiet except for the crystal clarity of notes coming from somewhere deep inside her soul. Growing up with a visual impairment, Ashley says, has been both good and bad. And the bad often has to do with the perceptions of others.

"Having a visual impairment does effect relationships with peers in many different ways. Back in elementary school no one really accepted it and they kind of made fun of it. In middle school it got a little bit better, but, I mean, it was still just annoying."

Finally, in high school, Ashley says the stigma has worn off, and she finds herself answering students questions about visual impairments. She wants to pass along her wisdom to another generation of young people with visual disorders and is planning a career as a vision teacher, a sort of guidance counselor for the visually impaired in schools.

Meanwhile, researchers are working on an operation that could help her see, but she doesn't know if she would try it.

"Something that everybody asks me, if you had a chance to get your vision back—or not back because I never had it—would you? And I always say, I don't know, because I'm so used to what I have. I don't know if I could handle the change."

Her energy and positive attitude lift the spirits of those around her. She may not see well, but she sees beautifully.

What Ashley Sees: Ashley's vision measures 20/500 at close range. Her eyes have the same amount of light coming in as a fully sighted person and she is able to distinguish colors as long as they are dissimilar in tone and value. Details are not visible to her so she sees color blocks and shapes of the people and objects around her. Her vision is consistent across her entire field and images do appear as three dimensional. This is how she might see students sitting next to her in a classroom.

RAINA

Raina Hoffman, 7, albinism

Pretty, precious, precocious. Raina is this and more. Like all children, in one way or another, she is perfect.

A pale white Chinese girl with white hair and steel blue eyes, in a small Georgia town she gets attention and is the local celebrity. Everyone knows her and everyone asks about her.

Her parents were looking to adopt a Chinese child and found it difficult because of a quota. Then they discovered another list, of special needs children. They found a little boy with Albinism, but he had health problems and the orphanage took him off the list. That is when they found Raina.

Like Dora from her favorite children's book, Raina likes to explore. Her favorite destinations are inside her house. Outside "is mostly where I bump my head." Her mother says she's fast and has "had stitches from the playground and lumps and bumps and scratches."

Raina is in first grade. If she holds books very close she can make out the words. "She's doing really, really well," her mother says. "Considering that she has astigmatism too. At the end of last year she took a standard reading where they have to read 30 words in 60 seconds. And she read 74."

She has several friends. She's a social butterfly." One friend tells people that Raina is blind. "Sometimes I want to tell people but my friends just go and say it right before me and I want to speak for my own self!"

Raina has two dogs, Uno and Flash and a cat named Fridge. She also has a brother. A year after they adopted Raina, the boy with health problems was doing better and was put back on the list. His name is Isaiah. They are quite a pair.

"Raina has made life very interesting. I've learned a lot of things that I never thought I would learn. She's very lively, she's a lot of fun. Sometimes she's kind of strong willed and difficult. She's a colorful character. We don't know what we'd do without her."

What Raina Sees: Raina isn't able to see distance very well and has little depth perception. She can see colors, especially bright ones and it helps if they are against a background with a different tone and saturation. She can distinguish things if she is right on top of them. Raina has a rat terrier, with a red collar, named Uno. This is how she might see him.

STAN

Roy Stanley Turman, 56, diabetic retinopathy

Poked in his right eye when he was 10, Stan Turman has viewed the world through his left eye his entire life. That changed when small blood vessels inside his left eye started to burst, a side-effect of diabetes.

One day while reading, a red haze came over his eye. "It just seemed like a waterfall, it just kept flowing and flowing and flowing. And that's when the fear set in. It is an immeasurable feeling. That sense of being alone in the dark is absolutely overwhelming."

At first he wanted to be left alone to stew over his situation. Group counseling sessions at CVI helped change his perspective. "Coming here helped me look at things totally from a different perspective because I was able to laugh and have fun with people in similar situations. And you found out that the only things changed in life is that you just can't see as clear as you used to. To a great degree your self esteem has been restored."

Society brands people as damaged goods, according to Stan. "And you're not. Beautiful minds, you know, we just can't see as well. But our minds are still sharp, our spirits are strong, and you know, we're contributing members of society. That's what I'd like people to know, that we have something still to contribute."

Stan views his challenge as more mental than physical. "I've found there's a correlation physically between the level of stress and my vision. "So I make the most of the situations that I have. And there's nothing better for me than to meet each day with a sense of enjoyment."

What Stan Sees: Stan cannot see anything out of his right eye. The vision in his left eye is very blurred and colors appear smeared. In looking at someone two to three feet away, he can see where the eyes and nose on the face are, but he cannot make out any detail. When blood vessels burst in his eye, the bleeding appeared as an amber blotch in his visual field, similar to dye dissolving in water. Floaters will sometimes appear as straggly black lines. Any tension Stan feels can cause his blood pressure to rise, which in turn causes his vision to become cloudy. He cultivates a stress-free life to maintain the vision he has.

HAL

Hal Westmoreland, 52, cytomegalovirus (CMV) retinitis and cataracts

Hal Westmoreland's emotional strength and courage confront our concept of what the human heart can bear and shatters it. Interviewed three days after his partner of 24 years, Jim, died, Hal exuded grace and humility.

"It's impossible to separate the blindness from the HIV AIDS because they go hand in hand really. I lost so many friends to AIDS that it's just a constant reminder, you know, the blindness is."

"Before I became blind, when I had the HIV AIDS, friends treated me....they were much, much more... After I became blind, then the friends just scattered. People don't exactly flock to be your friend when you're blind."

But Jim stayed. "He did everything, you know. And it's not that he did everything for me, he encouraged me to learn to live as a blind person. He was very supportive, and he was great, couldn't have been better, couldn't have asked more."

Hal lives alone with his two dogs. The spirit of the man that stayed with him through the darkest days of his illness and helped him learn how to enjoy life as a blind person permeates their home.

The phone rings often, as family and supporters from his church check up on Hal. In the midst of pain, Hal is surrounded, more than he knows. His kind spirit reaches out, people are touched. He is not alone after all.

What Hal Sees: The overall background is like a gray fog. There is no light coming into the right eye, but some light does come in through the left eye. The gray is darker around the edges and periphery with lighter shades toward the center. He is able to see bright red and orange colors in his left periphery. When he moves his hand in front of his eyes, he sees it as a lighter gray, shapeless shadow. Approximately 70% of his visual field contains wiggly, string-like lines floating and coming toward him in a gray, fluid-like field.

GLENN

Glenn Scott, 65, glaucoma

Glenn's wife, Linda, will tell him that he talks long after he has something to say. They banter and laugh, signs of a long and loving marriage. Diagnosed with glaucoma when he was twenty-nine, Glenn has used special eye drops his entire life, but his vision remained almost perfect until the past three or four years. When his sight started to deteriorate, it came on really fast.

"It would be very easy to sit back and let people wait on you – if you could find them – have people wait on you hand and foot. But that's just not my particular makeup. I've always believed that things happen to you for a reason. We may never know what that reason is, so you just have to learn to adapt to doing things differently."

An avid woodworker with a shop full of power tools, table saws and band saws became off limits. His love of reading has become difficult, but he has found other resources that provide books on tape and newspaper services that are read daily over the telephone.

"You just find when this kind of situation arises, other things to do, or other ways to get at basically the same thing."

While riding along with his wife, she may accuse him of napping. "Most of the time it's just I know that there's not anything out there I can see. So I think the imagination kind of takes over and I can see where we may be riding along and kind of drifting along the air. That's just a fantasy on my part."

As the interview ends, Glenn is still talking, and he still has something to say.

What Glenn Sees: Glenn's vision differs from what doctors typically report for someone with glaucoma. His peripheral vision is the same as his central vision. Everything he sees is enveloped in a blurred, white, cloudy haze. He is able to determine colors, but no detail of any kind. He can see the blurred outline of objects, but may or may not be able to determine what they are. The quality of his vision does change depending on the lighting conditions. On a sunny day, walking into a bright room, he might be able to recognize a sofa, chair or table.