



# Seeing the Bright Side

## Positive attitude and cataract surgery help Vauhnee Baptist see the best in life.

When bad things happen, Vauhnee Baptist has a way of looking for the silver lining.

“I have multiple sclerosis and I’ve had it for 37 years,” she said. “I was 34 when I was diagnosed.”

Vauhnee faced the news with courage and dignity, not letting her condition get in the way of earning both an undergraduate and a master’s degree from Eastern Illinois University while raising two teenagers. Within the first four years of diagnosis, she had also lost her mother, divorced and became wheelchair-bound.

“I would say that my 30s were tough years, but I come from a lot of strong women and they were good mentors,” she said. “I really can’t complain. MS can sometimes affect your eyes. I’m lucky that my MS was not in my eyes.”

However, like many older adults, Vauhnee started developing cataracts a few years ago, causing her eyesight to worsen. “She was constantly having to switch glasses to see at a distance or to read close-up. It wasn’t easy because she has mobility issues in one hand and no mobility in the other hand,” said Susan Federicks, Vauhnee’s personal assistant.

“I guess my biggest fear was that my right arm would quit and I wouldn’t be able to get my glasses on and off,” Vauhnee said. So, she made an appointment with Ophthalmologist Ryan Pine, MD, to discuss her options.

Dr. Pine recommended cataract surgery, which would involve removing the clouded lens from each eye and replacing it with an intraocular lens implant. Vauhnee had no doubt that Dr. Pine would do a great job, but she was amazed by the way he and his team at Advanced Ophthalmology went above and beyond to give her the best possible experience.

When Dr. Pine and team learned that Vauhnee was also scheduled to have a medical procedure to improve her MS, they were quick to push up her cataract surgery schedule

so it didn’t interfere. “Vauhnee was also turning 70 in November and we were having a surprise birthday party for her,” Susan explained. “Dr. Pine’s office went above and beyond to make sure she could get this surgery done before both events, and they made arrangements to do one of her surgeries on their noon hour to squeeze us in.”

Measuring Vauhnee’s eyes for the lens implants presented another challenge. “The measurements had to be extremely precise and we couldn’t get her into a normal chair, so the technicians had to do some adjustments with the machines. They were gracious enough to help me lift her up and hold her and balance her without moving her a slight inch because the measurements have to be so precise,” Federicks said. “The girls were wonderful about getting it right.” This scenario had to be repeated on several occasions prior to surgery to confirm the measurements for accuracy.

Vauhnee especially appreciates Dr. Pine’s thoughtfulness and willingness to try something new in order to best help her. For the first time, he implanted a different type of multifocal lens in each eye to eliminate her need for glasses. He even arranged to have one of the lenses donated since it wasn’t covered by insurance, explaining Vauhnee’s unique situation to the manufacturer. “Dr. Pine has such a big heart, and he wanted to make this work for her,” Susan said.

“It’s amazing what Dr. Pine did for me because he put a lens in one eye so I could see distance, and he put a lens in the other eye so I could read, but I can still see distance with it too,” Vauhnee said. “I don’t need my glasses at all. It’s wonderful.”

When Susan took Vauhnee to her next medical procedure not long after, Vauhnee was amazed by how well she could see. “I kept saying, ‘Isn’t it beautiful outside?’ I think it was a nice day, but I think I was really noticing the difference in my eyesight,” she said. And she was genuinely surprised and thankful for her good eyesight when her children, grandchildren and friends gathered at the Moose Lodge in Charleston to celebrate her 70th birthday!

“I have been so lucky all of my life. I just can’t complain about anything,” she said. “When I have symptoms or bad days, it is still frustrating, but I decided long ago that MS wasn’t going to define me or dictate my life.”

Through the years, Vauhnee learned to become a fixer and a problem-solver. For years, she worked as a social services director and later as a psychology teacher at Lake Land College. She is grateful to live independently in her home with the help of several Illinois Department of Rehabilitative Services personal assistants, including Susan.

“I have a lot of wonderful people around me,” she said. “When I was diagnosed, I guess I couldn’t have anticipated what was going to happen to me in the future. It was frightening, but I look back and it’s all worked out.”



For more information about about Advance Ophthalmology or to make an appointment with Dr. Pine, call **217 348-0221**. His office is located at 1605 Reynolds Dr., Charleston.