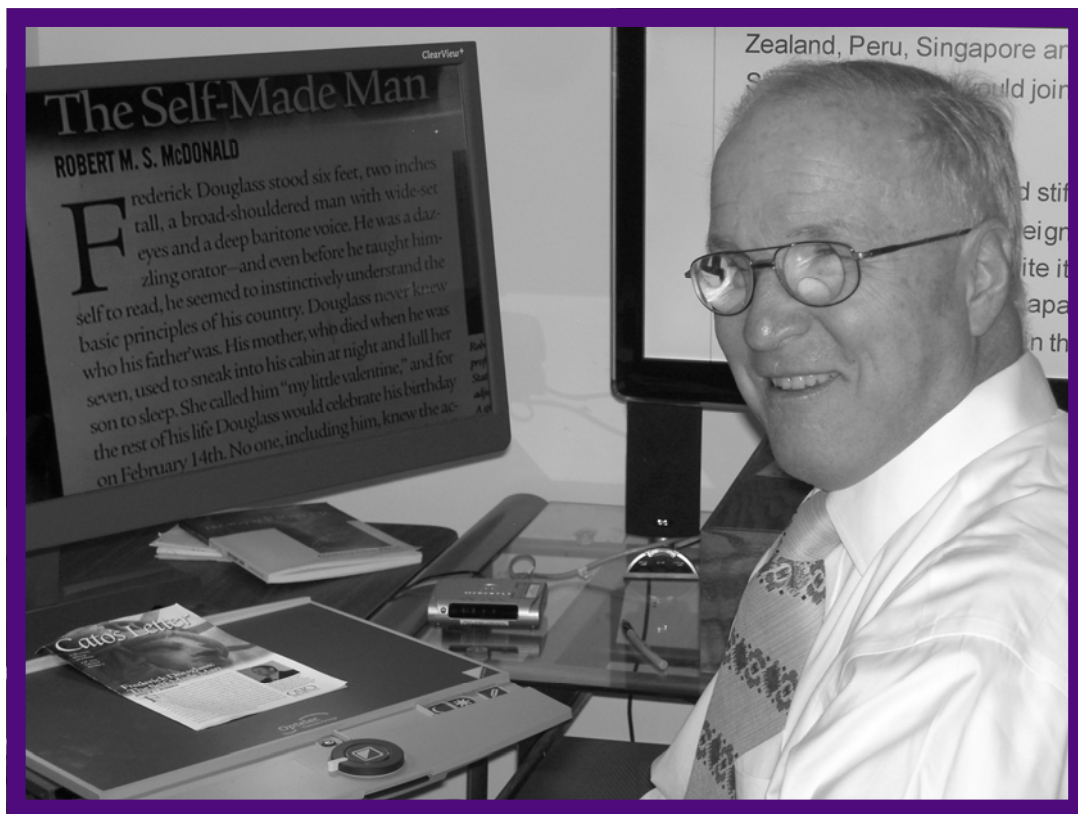


Beating the Odds: Battling Unemployment with Vision Loss



“I work and I am independent because of visual rehabilitation. The expertise, low vision devices and latest technology Spectrios provides, saves and maintains jobs.”

GROWING UP WITH VISION LOSS

Joe was six-years-old and this was the most exciting day of his life. His mom and dad had heard about corneal transplants and were taking him to the eye doctor to discuss the possibility. Joe was looking forward to getting new eyes.

Joe was a premature baby. The light and oxygen that kept him alive almost destroyed his sight. At age six, he was blind in one eye and had limited vision in the other, even when wearing glasses. He was disappointed when the doctor explained a corneal transplant wasn't for him.

“It was a most significant emotional moment for me. I thought I was going to have new eyes. I couldn't stop crying. I was stuck with what I had and it was not going away. Acceptance was a long time coming.”



Joe: Bottom row, second from right

In the 1950's, help was available for visually impaired children, but not in their neighborhood schools. Joe traveled daily from the suburbs into Chicago to attend Sight Saving Classes, where there were teachers trained to teach kids who were visually impaired. There, Joe had large print typewriters and books. They even had desks that could be adjusted so the kids could get closer to their school work.

He graduated from high school with grades that got him accepted to college. He needed extra time for all that college reading, but Joe was determined. He aspired to be a lawyer.

Upon college graduation, Joe attended John Marshall Law School, but the rigorous schedule and volume of required reading was overwhelming. After one semester Joe dropped out. What followed was not pretty—two years of unemployment, two more years pushing linen carts at a hospital, and a six month temporary job with the Illinois Division of Unemployment Insurance. Joe asked himself,

“What do I want to do with the rest of my life? Maybe it's time to return to law school.”

JOE'S JOURNEY TO A SUCCESSFUL CAREER

In his late 20's, Joe got a job transfer to Chicago where he worked days and went to law school at night. Hunching over his books, he developed herniated disks, which caused severe back pain and neuropathy in his fingers. But Joe was determined.

“Law School was very difficult. It took everything I had, but I earned my law degree and passed the Bar.”

The hard part was over – right? Wrong!

“Trying to find jobs were some of the most difficult and discouraging times of my life. I couldn't get my foot in the door. People are reluctant to hire someone with vision loss.”

It was four years after leaving law school before Joe found his first position. He worked 20 hours a week at no pay for a friend's bankruptcy law practice and, in return, received space to build his own practice. Joe continued advancing his career in bankruptcy law during the 1990's and was one of the top lawyers specializing in Chapter 13.

Joe's dream though, had always been to work for the State of Illinois Department of Unemployment as a Hearing Referee for the Board of Review. Not willing to give up, he applied frequently over a period of 17 years. In 2001, his dream job became a reality and he has been employed there for 10 years. When asked how his co-workers respond to his vision he said,

“They recognize that I don't make excuses for my vision loss. I produce the same quality and quantity of work as they do. That's a compliment.”



TECHNOLOGY KEEPS PEOPLE WITH VISION LOSS EMPLOYED

Joe who is now 60, says access to technology has kept him employed and independent. His CCTV (electronic reading machine) helps him read print while maintaining a healthy posture. His computer enhances print and reads to him if necessary. Access to the internet enables him to find information independently.



VISUAL REHABILITATION IS A CONTINUOUS PROCESS

As a patient of Spectrios Institute since 1997, Joe has learned that visual rehabilitation is a continuous process. As vision, career and lifestyle changes, so do the necessary tools.



“As I’ve gotten older my already limited vision has declined. I visit Spectrios to learn about what’s new in technology to help me. Recently, Leah, Director of Technology, recommended a video magnifier. There is no glare and with its lighted background I can read the train schedule, instructions on food packages and even small print on medicine bottles in the dark!”

Joe never gave up on his dream. He has spent many years focusing on establishing and maintaining his career. The road to success was a rocky one, but Joe’s vision did not determine how successful he could be. Joe determined that.

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