

OPTOMETRIST CURES HER OWN MYOPIA

What You Can Learn from Her Natural Vision Improvement Success

— BY DOUG MARSH —

Antonia Orfield, who began wearing eyeglasses in the eighth grade, was in her early teens when she read the book, *Better Eyesight Without Glasses*, by eye doctor William Bates.¹ Orfield's father, afraid he'd passed along his poor eyesight genes, had given her a copy of Bates' book in the hopes that it might be of help.

She intently practiced various Bates techniques over a three month period expecting that she'd be able to quickly reverse her -2.50 D myopia.² Although such an unrealistic result wasn't to be, to the surprise of her eye doctor, her prescription remained stable at her next eye examination. In his smug arrogance, the eye doctor had confidently predicted continual progression of her myopia throughout her teen years. He had even told her earlier that more young people were doomed to become nearsighted by the evolutionary process, and anyone who suggested otherwise was a quack.

Orfield's prescription actually stayed the same until her twenties, when other stressors caused her myopia to worsen. Her prescription jumped over -3.00 D after a whiplash injury at age 22. Then, during her second pregnancy at age 29, she developed more acuity problems. After being overprescribed above -4.00 D for a couple of years, an examination by a different eye doctor lowered her prescriptions in each eye to -3.87 D and -3.37 D.

At age 33, Orfield met a behavioural optometrist who specialised in myopia reduction. So intrigued that he had improved his own nearsightedness and that of many of his patients, she decided to embark on the same program. A combination of strategies were incorporated, such as continual reductions in lens prescrip-

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tions as her vision improved, stress reduction, postural improvements, physical exercise and eye movement retraining.

It took seven years to accomplish, but Orfield succeeded in eliminating her myopia to virtually zero D. The experience was so fascinating and empowering that it motivated her to become a behavioural optometrist. It would be a dramatic shift for the stay-at-home mother whose former career was that of an English and social studies teacher.

Both during her university studies and as a practicing optometrist, the long hours, pressures and demands caused a minor recurrence of myopic stress. Nevertheless, Orfield managed to stabilise and reverse the very low myopia and restore it back to almost nil. Her optometric practice centred on being a vision healer - helping patients to halt or reverse their myopia. Many accomplished such success in less time than Orfield.

She also had a bigger view in mind, as she felt it was important that "myopia control and reduction be an ongoing project for all functional

myopes," and that success like hers "could be duplicated easily with large numbers of functional myopes in primary care practices [her emphasis]."³

NATURAL VISION IMPROVEMENT PRINCIPLES INVOLVED IN HER SUCCESS

A misconception about the *Bates Method*, the original name for what's now generically termed *Natural Vision Improvement (NVI)*, is that it's all about regimented eye exercises. There's a false notion that Bates taught a series of eye aerobics intended to strengthen weak eye muscles. On the contrary, Bates emphasised that he simply taught people with imperfect sight how to properly use their eyes like those with normal vision.

"When a person has normal sight the eye is at rest, and when the eye is at rest, strange to say, it is always moving to avoid the stare."⁴ Straining to see better with an effort actually backfires, immobilising the eye muscles - the "stare" - and lowers acuity. Bates taught people how to reacquire relaxed vision habits to reduce eyestrain. It was very much an art form, as individuals would invariably respond in their own unique ways and at different rates of progress. No two cases seemed to be the same.

Orfield stated that most of her success was not due to any special effort on her part. She originally ended up being dependent on eyeglasses by "gradual, stealthy adaptation" and managed to get out of them by "gradual de-adaptation."⁵ That de-adaptation was mainly a process of minimising eyestrain with proper movements. Her healing process also included lifestyle changes that promoted good health. The following are a few key NVI fundamentals that can be gleaned from her case of myopia reversal:

WEAKER PRESCRIPTIONS

To have any chance at controlling myopia, it is imperative to begin weaning oneself from full strength concave prescription lenses. For those with moderate to high myopia, NVI specialists recommend one weaker pair of glasses for distance viewing and a second, even weaker, pair for reading and near work. For people with mild myopia, a second pair may be unnecessary, as reading and near work could most likely be achieved without wearing glasses. Consult with the resources noted at the end of this article for particulars and recommendations about reduced prescriptions, especially when required for safe activities.

Orfield's myopia improvement journey immediately began with two sets of reduced eyeglass prescriptions. As her vision improved with time, subsequent pairs of further reduced eyeglasses were prescribed at various intervals. She felt that the reduced prescriptions for reading and near work most likely had a major impact in relieving eyestrain. Often, she would also wear no glasses for some close activities, such as gardening. That same strategy may have been what helped stabilise her eyesight as a teen when she experimented with the Bates Method. At that time, she didn't feel comfortable wearing her distance glasses for reading, so she took them off for most near work.

In his original 1920 book, Bates wrote an *entire chapter* about the injurious effects of eyeglasses. The major harm comes from locking in a worst-case refractive error (the minus diopter value on the prescription) as a constant state which would otherwise never be maintained continuously. The acuity of persons with normal eyesight is flexible, as they unconsciously experience minor fluctuations in refraction. Orfield could definitely relate to Bates' observations once she was well into her myopia improvement program and experienced such fluctuations. She concluded that "many eye doctors were guilty of overkill" when determining prescriptions, leading to "overdosing with minus [lenses]."⁶

SHIFTING AND APPARENT MOTION

Shifting and *apparent motion* are two fundamentals of normal sight that Bates originally defined. With shifting, the eyes should be continuously moving from one point to another no

matter how minuscule the motion. It ensures that a person avoids straining to see, or as Bates would frequently say, to "dodge the stare." With apparent motion, also called *oppositional movement*, stationary objects in the periphery appear to be moving in a contrary direction of head and eye movement. This fundamental awakens the peripheral vision which becomes deadened while wearing prescription lenses.

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During her myopia reduction journey, Orfield made it a priority to go outdoors for lengthy walks as much as possible. Although the general exercise and sunshine were definitely of benefit, she was intently attuned to her surroundings while walking and shifting her gaze. She described how she would change her focus from near to far on various still or moving objects, taking in fine details of colours and shapes, or reading small letters on distant signs.

Orfield also expressed her elation concerning the other fundamental. "One incredible evening, 'the apparent motion' of the trees and hedges... caused me to perceive distances in new ways... the apparent speed of

the stationary objects that seemed to move past me and around each other was all related to their distance from me as I walked past them."⁷ To her jubilation, the "more real" world, with vivid three dimensional depth perception and expanded space, was emerging before her eyes. In contrast, her previous view behind prescription lenses was a stark and foreign virtual reality of compressed space and depthless two dimensions.

STRESS REDUCTION WITH HOLISTIC HEALING

Bates was a pioneer in the study of stress, for he realised that nearsighted tension wasn't simply localised in the eyes, but radiated throughout the body. F.M. Alexander, a contemporary figure in England who developed his Alexander Technique (AT), was also a pioneer in holism, and Bates praised his work in a 1927 article.⁸ Alexander apparently had documented cases where myopic children restored normal vision after they received training of correct head and neck posture relative to the torso.⁹ Myopes typically have chronic neck, jaw and shoulder tension combined with other problems that may include headaches, balance or coordination difficulties, and heightened anxiety.

Part of Orfield's myopia reduction process entailed AT lessons. She quickly learned that posture and vision are related, as she released a significant amount of neck tension which, in turn, reduced her lens prescriptions further. AT instructors told her this was a common outcome with other students, and that further releases in neck tension weren't possible without cutting back lens power. Orfield also had treatment from a cranial chiropractor at one stage to help resolve her old whiplash injury and other anatomical issues.

In addition to the postural and cranial work, Orfield incorporated





that isn't available from simply reading how-to books.

If you are seeking an optometrist who would fully support myopia control, a behavioural optometrist would be the choice. However, they are few and far between, and those who specialise in myopia control are even a rarer breed.

The Optometric Extension Program Foundation: www.oepf.org

The College of Optometrists in Vision Development: www.covd.org

FOOTNOTES

1. *Better Eyesight Without Glasses*, published in 1943, 12 years after Bates' death, was an edited and abridged version of his original book, *The Cure of Imperfect Sight by Treatment Without Glasses*, published in 1920.

2. Antonia Orfield, "Seeing Space: Undergoing Brain Re-Programming to Reduce Myopia," *Journal of Behavioral Optometry* 5, no. 5 (1994). Refer to this optometric journal article for full details of Antonia's fascinating recovery from myopia to normal vision. The article is available online at www.oepf.org/sites/default/files/journals/jbo-volume-5-issue-5/5-5%20Orfield.pdf

3. *Ibid.*, 129.

4. William Bates, "Common Sense," *Better Eyesight* 7, no. 12, June 1923, 388.

5. Orfield, 129.

6. *Ibid.*, 128, 129.

7. *Ibid.*, 127.

8. William Bates, "Tension," *Better Eyesight* 12, no. 5, November 1927, 272.

9. Aldous Huxley, *The Art of Seeing*, "Appendix 1," (Harper and Row, 1942); Reprint, with a foreword by Laura Huxley, (Creative Arts Book Company, 1982), 147.

10. For further discussion on this topic, see my article "Restoring Your I-Sight: How the Soul Unites the Senses in Healthy Seeing," *New Dawn Special Issue Vol 9 No 5*, 61-64.

healthy lifestyle practices that included her walks, as noted previously, swimming, meditation, yoga, and good nutrition. In her home, she added full spectrum lighting in the kitchen and bath areas. Later in her treatment process, she partook in some vision training, both at the behavioural optometrist's office and at home. The goal of such training was to integrate proprioception, balance and posture with various vision skills.¹⁰ Orfield believed all such habits and changes helped play a role in improving her eyesight.

Deep within her heart, and at a very young age, Orfield instinctively knew that she wasn't doomed by evolution to be an incurable myope. Her early exposure to Bates and NVI set the stage for her mission in life. She had the tenacity and drive to not only cure her own nearsightedness, but also to make a radical career shift in order to help others achieve similar success. May her legacy include the fulfilment of her vision that such myopia treatment will someday become more prevalent and mainstream.

► Dedicated to the memory of Antonia Orfield, M.A., O.D. (1941-2009)

► Doug Marsh's book *Restoring Your Eyesight* is available from *New Dawn* magazine - see page 71.

RESOURCES & PRACTITIONERS

For those interested in controlling myopia, my book, *Restoring Your Eyesight: A Taoist Approach*, is but one source of many on the topic of natural vision improvement (NVI). Readers are encouraged to obtain as much material as possible, and a good starting point is the website, "Inner Blindness" (www.iblindness.org), hosted by David Kiesling, an expert on Bates and his NVI methods.

Also check to see if you are fortunate to have a Bates instructor or vision educator in your area, as there aren't many world-wide:

Bates Method International: www.seeing.org

Association of Vision Educators: www.visioneducators.org

Lessons from such practitioners are recommended for many people who require the one-on-one instruction and support



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