

# IN THE SHADE

**Niki De Lara, 54 from Kent was just 24 hours away from going blind...**



I have to be so careful



Jayl supported me all the way

**P**eering at me, Betty, my 92-year-old mum, had a confused look on her face. 'Why are you wearing those dark glasses today?' she asked me.

It was September last year, and I was visiting Mum in the dementia care home where she lived.

Despite often being confused, this time, Mum was right – it was dark, and I was wearing sunglasses.

'Don't worry about that, how are you feeling?' I asked, trying to change the subject.

I couldn't tell Mum the real reason I was wearing my shades.

It would break her heart to know I'd lost the vision in my right eye.

It started in 1997 when I was 32. After suffering a miscarriage, my husband Jayl, now 57, and I had been devastated.

The trauma had caused me a great deal of stress, which caused my right eye to inflame.

Diagnosed with uveitis – a swelling of the eye – I suffered with eye ache, often saw halos, and battled terrible nausea. There was

nothing doctors could do, and over the years, my symptoms came and went.

I'd pretty much got used to it, but in 2013, at age 47, everything changed.

'This pain just won't go away,' I moaned to Jayl, rubbing my eye.

Over the next few weeks, my vision in that eye started to blur, and then gradually disappear.

Terrified, I saw my doctor. And after running tests, I was given devastating news.

'You have uveitic glaucoma,' my doctor told me.

It was a complication of uveitis which caused damage to my optic nerve.

It meant my vision would never improve – in fact, I was going blind in my right eye. I burst into tears.

I wasn't even 50 yet – how could I be going blind?

I thought only old people had glaucoma.

A few months later, in 2014, I had an operation to save what was left of my optic nerve.

Surgeons drained my eye so it would function, but unfortunately, there was nothing they could do to save my vision.

I was grateful, but now I only had vision in one eye.

And after that, I struggled. Being blind in one eye meant I had no depth

**My optic nerve had been damaged**

perception. Even things like pouring a cup of tea and walking down steps was difficult.

I soon found that wearing sunglasses helped, and started wearing them all the time.

The next year, battling a bad flu, I suddenly felt pain in my left eye.

Going to see my doctor right away, I was told I'd developed uveitis in that eye, too.

The pressure in my eye was sky high, and I was rushed to Cheltenham Hospital for emergency surgery.

Thankfully, doctors managed to save my vision, but it had been a close call.

'You were 24 hours away from losing your sight entirely,' one of them said.

It was terrifying. Since then, I've had to have regular eye checks every three months, and so far, I've been OK.

It's really scary, though – I'm always so worried about going completely blind.

I wear my sunglasses every day, often bringing unwanted attention.

And I never told Mum my secret – when she passed away on 4 October last year, I had no regrets about not telling her.

But having this condition can be very isolating.

It's difficult being in crowds

when I can only see on one side.

When your vision is impaired, your hearing becomes better, so everything seems louder – not something you want when you're in a busy place.

As a result, I don't go out as much, which means I don't have much of a social life.

Jayl has since helped me set up a website to help other people with glaucoma and to raise awareness.

I want to help people who are just as lonely as I am, and to encourage them to have regular eye tests.

After my experiences with uveitis, glaucoma, operations, sight loss, medicine routines and changing my lifestyle, I can only use all this to make the way forward more positive.

Visit [www.glaucomarize.org](http://www.glaucomarize.org).

## Fact file

**G**laucoma is the world's second leading cause of blindness, affecting nearly half a million people in the UK.

Fight For Sight is a charity aimed at stopping sight loss through pioneering research.

The science they fund is on the verge of many discoveries that are already changing lives, and with your support, they aim to create a world that everyone can see.

[www.fightforsight.org.uk](http://www.fightforsight.org.uk).

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I didn't want to tell Mum