Imagine waking up Christmas morning and realizing you can’t see as well as the day before.

In fact, all you can really see are shapes and colors. Gone is the ability to read the newspaper, write letters or even watch T.V.


The 82-year-old had been battling macular degeneration for the previous three years. He had lost the center vision in his left eye, but was still able to drive, read and write until that fateful day.

“That night when I went to bed I had a long talk with God,” said the retired Presbyterian minister.

Skelley said he pounded on the doors of heaven and asked, “Why me? I’ve been a good pastor.”

After stabilizing the bleeding in his right eye and declaring him legally blind, Skelley’s ophthalmologist referred him to the Weigel Williamson Center for Visual Rehabilitation.

There, he learned how to utilize his remaining vision and found support from people who, like himself, learned to navigate life despite their vision loss.

In working with occupational therapist Evy Katz, there were four volunteers when the Center opened in 2008. That number has now grown to eleven. Some volunteers help answer the phone. Some put together client charts. Some schedule appointments. Some help sell store products. Some conduct client interviews. All make a positive impact!
Dear Friends,

It has been another exciting year of growth and development at the Weigel Williamson Center.

We have started providing low vision rehabilitation services for pediatric clients, helping to identify adaptive equipment that enables them to maximize their success in educational endeavors.

Thanks to support from the Lions (see separate article), we are developing services to assist clients in getting transportation to and from the Center.

We will soon be purchasing a driving simulator system as a result of funding from the Rotary Club of Omaha. The system will allow our occupational therapist to assess driving skills of our low vision clients.

The opportunity remains to support the work of the Center through the Dinsdale Endowment Fund. Such funding assists us in our efforts to continue to provide the time-intensive, in-depth clinical services necessary to meet the needs of those who are struggling with visual impairment.

We appreciate your interest and support,

John D. Shepherd, M.D.
Director

HOW TO MAKE A GIFT

To make a donation to the endowment fund of the Weigel Williamson Center, contact Karen Levin at the University of Nebraska Foundation (402) 502-4921, or klevin@nufoundation.org. Gifts may also be made at www.unmc.edu/lowvision.

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Skelley learned to better utilize the remaining peripheral vision in his eyes. Katz also showed him how to use a CCTV, a machine that can magnify text, pictures and graphics up to 75 times.

With the help of a CCTV at home, Skelley is able to enjoy the newspaper again. But, he said, it is the monthly support group at the Weigel Williamson Center that has pulled him through.

“I’d sit and listen to other people and think, I’ve only dealt with this for a few months. Some of these people have had to deal with this for years and they are living full active lives,” Skelley said.

The support group has given him hope, purpose and peace, he said.

With the help of a liturgist, Skelley continues to preach when called upon, as well as conduct funerals and weddings. He conducts services twice a month at a nursing home in Papillion, and he and his wife have even joined a singing group, the Papillion Singing Seniors.

“I’m finding there are more things I can do than not in spite of my vision loss,” Skelley said.
The conference room at the Weigel Williamson Center is filled to capacity on the third Friday of every month, thanks to the help of members of local Lions clubs. This is the Friday that low vision clients are invited to attend a support group meeting. Many clients would be unable to attend if it weren’t for Lion volunteers who drive them to and from the meeting.

In addition, the Lions are available to bring local clients to their low vision rehabilitation appointments. Recognizing transportation as a major need for clients with low vision, the Lions will soon be extending this valuable transportation service to clients who live in communities outside of the Omaha area.

“We are very grateful for our friends, the Lions,” Dr. Shepherd said. “They identify needs and continue to lend a helping hand.”
Dr. Glenn Dalrymple is one of the Weigel Williamson Center’s strongest supporters. His enthusiasm for the Center is a result of both his satisfaction as a client and compassion as a doctor.

Dalrymple has spent his life helping others. As a radiologist, he served in the air force, worked in private practice, was a professor and faculty member at three medical universities and, even after retirement, a hospital volunteer. It was his knowledge and experience that led him to a self-diagnosis of macular degeneration in 1998.

“Being diagnosed can be a scary thing,” Dalrymple says. “But one must have a very positive attitude. And if you work at it, you can counteract a lot and learn how to do things that will help allow you to see again.”

That’s exactly what Dalrymple does as a client at the Center. He works at seeing again through rehabilitation, learns how to use tools to help cope with the disease and encourages other clients with his positive attitude.

Dalrymple recognizes the importance of the Center and the significance of the services it provides, which is why he shares his resources. Recently, he donated a Kindle (an electronic book) and an iPad so that the Center can demonstrate the value of such tools to low vision clients in their efforts to maximize their ability to read.

Dalrymple continues to make financial gifts to the Center, as well. Such gifts are critical to its ongoing operation and continued success in providing services to clients.

When asked why he feels so strongly about supporting the Center and its clients, Dalrymple replies with a laugh, “I’m a doctor, that’s what we do.”