

POINT OF VIEW

BIG health story

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

Peering at me intently, Betty, my 92-year-old mum, had a confused look on her face.

'Why are you wearing those dark glasses?' she asked. It was September 2019, and I was visiting Mum in a dementia care home.

Despite often being confused, this time, Mum was on the ball – it was dark out, and I was wearing sunglasses.

'How are you feeling?' I asked, changing the subject.

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

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

It all started back 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 nausea. There was

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

I'd 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 disappear.

Terrified, I saw my doctor.

And after running tests, I was given devastating news.

'You have uveitic glaucoma,' my doctor said.

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

It meant my vision would never improve – in fact, it meant I was going blind in that eye.

Devastated, I burst into tears.

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

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

My surgeon, Mr Nitin Anand, drained my eye so it would function, but unfortunately, there was nothing he could do to save my vision.

'This procedure is cosmetic, to keep your eye looking as normal as possible,' I was told.

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

After that, I struggled. Being blind in one eye, I had no depth perception.

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

With Jayl's support, though, I adjusted. I soon



Jayl supported me throughout

Looking to the future

My optic nerve was severely damaged

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

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

Seeing 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, Mr Nitin managed to save my vision, but it had been a close call.

'You were 24 hours away from losing your sight entirely,' he said.

It was terrifying.

Since then, I've had to have 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 still wear my sunglasses every day, which often brings 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.

And when your vision is

impaired, your hearing becomes better, so things seem louder – not what 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 believe whatever curves life throws, we should make the best out of a situation.

I'm so grateful to Mr Anand for saving my vision.

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 Niki's website at www.glaucomarize.org.**

FACT FILE

Glaucoma is the world's second leading cause of blindness, affecting nearly half a million people in the UK alone. Fight For Sight is a charity dedicated to 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. Visit www.fightforsight.org.uk.



It was caused by trauma