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JAY WALKING

Avos and Eye SurgeryBy *Jacqui Zurcher*

Posted Tue, 08 Apr 2003

Just before the avocado hit me on my left eyebrow, I realised what I was doing was very stupid. I must have realised it was stupid before, but at that moment the full weight of my stupidity dawned on me. In confirmation, the avo landed squarely above my eye, bounced off my head and thudded onto the paving.



It was a big avo. It was hard. I had been trying to coax enormous Natal avos down from the upper reaches of a friend's avo tree. There I stood, my eyelid taut and blueing, a small cut on my eyebrow, a slightly cracked giant avo before me and my laser eye surgery two days away.

I had never met anyone with weaker eyes than mine. My contact lenses weighed in at -8.5 and -9.5 . Translated into specs they would have been bullet proof and double-glazed. Still, laser surgery had never appealed.

Mole-like blindness aside, what I knew about the surgery was that they zapped you with a laser while you were awake. This was not thrilling. What if they got the calibration wrong and lasered my brain? It would be more frontal lobe lobotomy than eye surgery. What if I freaked out and jumped off the table in the middle of the procedure and was zombie-eyed for eternity. I had visions of eye surgeons with tranquillising blow darts dragging my part-limp body back onto the operating table and hypnotically ordering me to look into the light. The idea terrified me and I put it off until my poor eyes rejected their over-used, protein covered contact lenses.

A free evaluation session with the eye surgeon was booked after my optometrist assured me I was a perfect candidate. As I sat in the darkened room about to watch the introductory video, I felt brave, but slightly reckless. Like a bungi jumper, but perhaps with more sense and purpose.

My pioneering spirit dropped its bungi cord and plummeted into the unfathomable depths below as soon as I saw the video surgeon peeling back a thin layer of the video patient's cornea. I sat in stunned horror as the rest of

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Leigh Robertson,
Highlife Editor

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the video passed to a gentle narration and soothing music. It is to her credit that the nurse was able to soothe me, perform her tests and illicit a booking for the surgery after assurance that the eye skinning was part of the procedure which had drastically improved recovery time.

woman. She lives in Cape Town and is really chuffed about that.

Two days before the scheduled surgery however, a giant avocado crashed into my forehead. My eyelid puffed and turned purple within an hour. The pharmacist did not believe my story and was unconvinced I would be ready for surgery in two days.

I arrived at the clinic, a bad caricature of Barney the dinosaur, to the horror of staff and patients. The avo was produced, they calmed down and I was deemed fit for surgery. Now my nerves kicked in. Anaesthetic eye drops were all that stood between me, the cornea skinning tool and a super concentrated beam of light.

In the surgery, stress balls were placed in my hands, my head was lined up with the overhead machinery and my swollen eye was winched open. The surgeon was hiding his blow darts and assured me it would all be over in a few minutes. So in a jiffy I would either be a brain dead zombie minus a frontal lobe, or would no longer be visually challenged. The stress balls started to take strain.

The corneal flap slicing tool sucking onto my eye until all vision blacked out was the most unpleasant part of the procedure. Everything went black, then there was a bright light. There was no pain; just discomfort and it might have all been a lot more profound and poetic if I could not smell my own burning cornea.

Back in the now hazy waiting room in less than 20 minutes, I was handed plastic eye patches, saline drops and told to have a good rest. Easier said than done when you have plastic goggles cellotaped to your face.

The next morning I ripped off the goggles and with them microscopic facial hairs. Visions of aggressive facial hair regrowth faded as I gazed around, stupefied by the sheer definition of my cupboard and the small ridges on my curtain rail.

Within two days my eyes were good enough to drive and for nights afterwards I struggled to fall asleep until I realised that I was lying in bed staring at things.

Before the surgery, once I had removed my lenses at night, I was blind and there was no chance of my being distracted by the outline of my bookshelf or the pattern of the burglar bars.

Ten months later, my vision is excellent, the avocado pip has a shrine on top of the fridge and I close my eyes when I want to sleep.


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