

Through My Eyes

Inspired by the Journey of Jillian Duff



Written By
Myiesha J. Duff

Illustrated By
Donald I. Benedict

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To Jillian Rose: You are so strong, brave, and resilient.
You have endured soooo much and continue to persevere
as we progress through this journey together as a family.
Mommy kept her word: You finally have your own book!

Never forget that you are beautifully, fearfully,
and wonderfully created by God to do amazingly
impactful things on Earth!

Mommy and Daddy love you forever!

To Drs. Levy, Tong, Wang, Whitson, and He:
You have all been such an instrumental part
of Jillian's eye health journey.
Thank you for all that you do and have done for her!
To my handsome husband and beautiful children:
I love you so much! Thank you for loving
and appreciating all that makes me...me!

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Inspired by the Journey of Jillian Duff by Myiesha J. Duff.
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The image features a white outline of a pair of glasses centered on a background with a vertical color gradient from light blue at the top to green at the bottom. The lenses of the glasses are filled with a similar gradient. Inside the right lens, there is text.

If you could look through my eyes,
what do you think you would see?

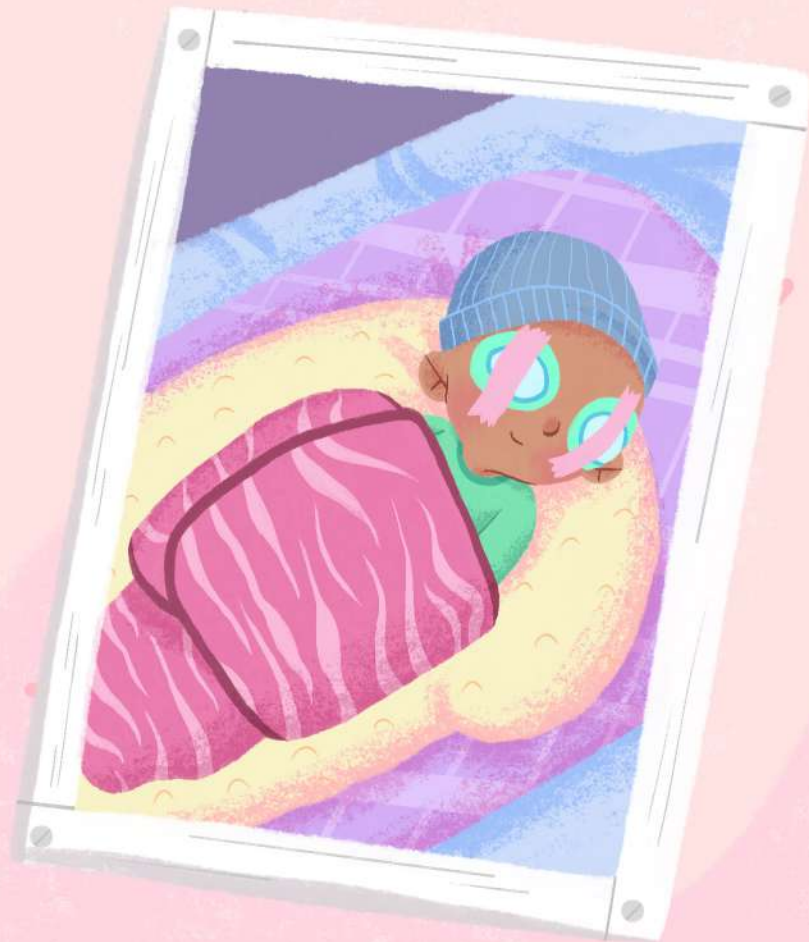
Beautiful flowers?
Leaves on a tree?



Water droplets on a blade of grass?
Or a tiny speck on a clean glass?



All those things are beautiful--
A reflection of God's creativity.
But He did something special
when He made me.







She's so cute!

Oh, my goodness!
Look at her!



It started with a newborn exam at the pediatrician.
My cuteness got a lot of attention.

Then my mommy mentioned my eyes,
and soon the doctor realized
that when she went to look for RED,
she couldn't find it. So she said,



"I think you're going to have to see
another doctor besides me."



Off to see doctor number two;
maybe he'll know what we should do.



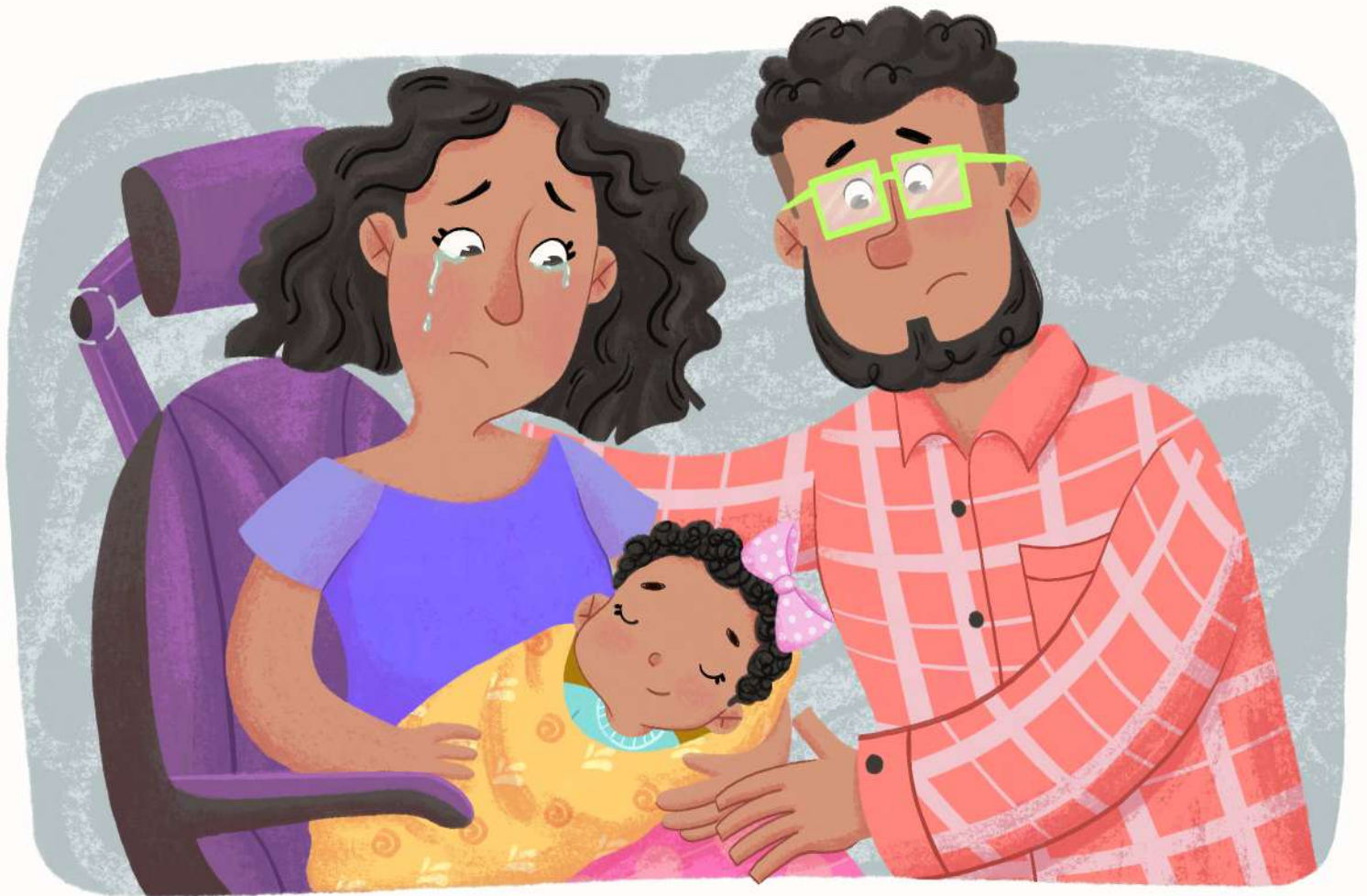


He got a camera and then he said
that he would also look for RED.



He took a picture and
turned it around;
two big white circles
he had found.

My parents were both caught by surprise.
Tears quickly welled up in Mommy's eyes.



The doctor said,

“It’s definitely cataracts.
There’s not much time.
We need to act.”



A cartoon illustration of a man with dark curly hair, a beard, and green-rimmed glasses. He is wearing a red and white plaid shirt and blue pants, sitting on a purple stool. He is in a room with yellow walls, a pink desk with a laptop, a pink dresser, and a pink window. Two speech bubbles are connected by a line, and a text box is at the bottom.

“What is RED?”

My Daddy asked.

“A red reflex?
What is that?”

He explained “the red reflex should reflect the light being shined into my eyes”. So bright!

So now to meet doctor number three,
A specialist in her field you see.





She looked at me so young and small
and promised she would give her all.
To help me would require surgery
Or maybe two or even three.

Trips to the doctor...
I've had plenty.
Difficult discussions...
There's been many.

"Average eye pressure
is between 12-21."


"She has some regrowth in her right eye,
but it's not affecting her vision."

"She needs to patch her right eye
for 2-4 hours each day."

"I think we should
discontinue the contacts."

"I'm going to prescribe her
with two different drops
to help with her eye pressure."

"She's a good candidate for IOLs
if you want to consider them."

A stylized illustration of a woman with dark, wavy hair, wearing a blue top. She has a distressed expression, with her eyes closed and her right hand covering her face. The background is a dark purple with some light purple rays emanating from behind her.

“We’re going to have to place a shunt in her left eye to help her relieve the pressure.”

“Her optic nerve looks good.”

She will need one drop twice a day in both eyes and the other once a night in both eyes.”

“Her eye pressure is a little elevated.”

“She has some unusual inflammation in her eyes.”


Through every one,
Mommy and Daddy were there.





Quietly whispering many heartfelt prayers--
Prayers of healing and restoration
Stamina, peace, and determination.



The background features a light pink and white wavy pattern. Scattered around are several eye-related items: a pink contact lens, a blue eye dropper, a blue patch with white text, a blue and red eye dropper, a blue and red eye patch, a blue and red eye patch, and a blue and red eye patch.

As stories go this is the end,
but there's so much more to tell,
my friend.

So many surgeries, appointments,
contacts and glasses.

Patches, eye pressures, drops,
and long eyelashes.





This journey isn't quite through,
but my mommy says
God wants me to share it with you.

While you go through life being unique,
you must take time to stop and think
that God made only one of you.
Your life, your story, and all that you go through
can encourage someone and help them see
that they too are special, just like you and me!



ABOUT CATARACTS

**Information retrieved from The March of Dimes Website at
<https://www.marchofdimes.org/complications/congenital-cataracts.aspx>*

A congenital cataract is a rare birth defect of the eye that can cause vision problems or blindness. A congenital cataract happens when the lens of the eye is cloudy instead of clear. A baby may have a cataract in one (unilateral) or both eyes (bilateral).

TREATMENTS FOR CATARACTS:

- Surgery
- A new type of lens such as contact lenses, glasses, and/or intraocular lens (IOLs)
- Patch therapy

Babies who have cataract surgery may be at higher risk for developing other eye problems like glaucoma. Glaucoma is a group of diseases that damage the eye's optic nerve. The optic nerve connects the retina to the brain. Glaucoma can lead to vision loss and blindness.



ABOUT JILLIAN ROSE'S JOURNEY:

Jillian was diagnosed with bilateral congenital cataracts when she was one (1) week old by her pediatrician, Dr. Kathryn Levy. She was referred to Dr. Serena Wang for cataract removal surgery at two (2) weeks old. Dr. Wang informed us that if we had waited much longer, she would have started going blind. Due to her weight and the thickness of her cataracts, two surgery dates were scheduled. The first, her left eye, happened when she was five (5) weeks old and the second, her right eye, when she was six (6) weeks old. After the removal surgeries, she was prescribed contacts to allow her to see. However, after a year and a half in contacts, her eyes began to get a hazy film (due to inflammation) over them whenever she wore them and her eye pressures were consistently between 27-35. Average eye pressure range is somewhere between 12-21. She was required to wear glasses and we were referred to Dr. Jess Whitson when her eye pressures reached 40. She was diagnosed with glaucoma. When the prescription eye drops weren't enough to bring the pressures down, a drainage tube was placed in each eye to help relieve the pressure. At the writing of this book, Jillian has had a total of eight (8) surgeries. Her most recent surgeries were the placement of IOLs. Her first contact Rx was +32; however, she now wears progressive lens glasses with +1.5 and +3 bifocals. She no longer needs her eye drops as her eye pressure has regulated itself. Praise God! She adores choosing new frames to match her BIG personality and style. We believe that she will continue on a path of healing and help others through her story.





About the Author

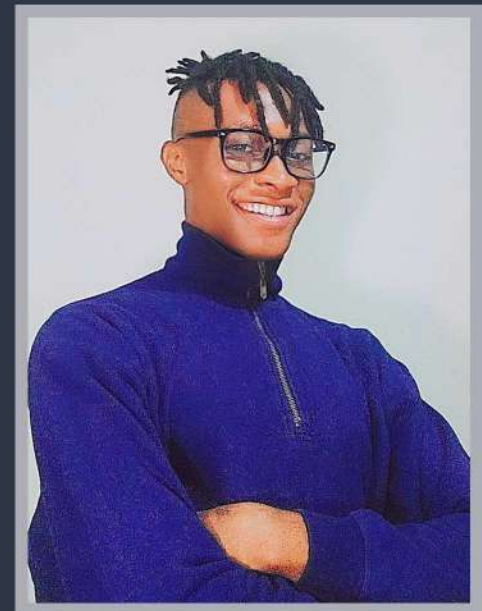
Myiesha J. Duff is a wife, mother of three, actress, elementary school teacher, singer, and songwriter. Adding “published children’s book author” to her list of skills and accomplishments has brought her so much joy and desire to create even more. She’s been writing poems and songs since she was a little girl, so writing books seems to bring everything full circle. After writing a book with her oldest daughter, Jaelle, Jillian Rose requested (multiple times) that Mommy write a book about her. What better way to honor her request than to share the start of their journey and to brag on Jillian’s resilience.

About the Illustrator

Donald Benedict is a talented illustrator who focuses on producing eye-catching images for picture books and cartoons for kids.

He uses his expert use of color and structure to bring concepts to life with a passion for art and a desire to encourage young people to read.

<https://linktr.ee/donnieben.draws>



To Uni and Bilateral Cataract Parents:

YOU ARE BRILLIANTLY STRONGER THAN YOU COULD EVER IMAGINE!

What an honor, privilege, and joy to be able to walk alongside our babies as they explore the world and develop through their eye journey. I can't even begin to mask the hardship and struggle that comes with this role. Every child is unique and being a parent in any regard has its own ups and downs. There are so many nuisances to this experience. You will likely cry, laugh, and also cry while laughing. You will get upset and might wonder why. I don't have the answer to that question, but what I have I offer to you. There is joy in the journey! There are rainbows after the rain. There is peace after and during the pain. Your baby is a miracle and you are NEVER alone. Keep your head up, ask questions, and do your research. Be your child's advocate and trust yourself. You will make mistakes. It's okay. All that we can do is our best with the information that we have. Find trusted medical professionals and teams that will listen to you, take their time to discuss your child's health and their plan of action, take pictures, read with your child, find times to press pause and enjoy life. Find community. We found a couple of groups on Facebook that catered to Congenital Cataract Families: Children with Congenital Cataracts and Cataract Tots (there may be more, but these were ones that we are members of). Listen to their laughter and let it carry you through the waiting room moments. Take videos because one day those moments will be a distant memory and you will get to see how far they have come. You can make it through this. Your baby is more resilient than you could ever imagine. They are more than any diagnosis assigned to them. Speak well to them and over them. They will believe what they hear. Let your words shape their world!

Isaiah 41:10 NIV “Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you; I will help you; I will hold on to you with my righteous right hand.”

Eph. 2:10 AMP “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, so that we would walk in them.”

*We are praying with and for you!
Randall and Myiesha J. Duff*



ABOUT THE BOOK

In *Through My Eyes*, readers are taken on a heartfelt and inspiring journey through the life of Jillian, a young girl born with congenital cataracts and diagnosed with glaucoma.

This poignant account shares a snippet of Jillian's challenges, from multiple surgeries and eye patches to the emotional and physical hurdles faced by her family. Written with empathy and insight, this book offers a beacon of hope and encouragement to parents navigating the complexities of congenital cataracts. Through Jillian's story, *Through My Eyes* assures families that while the path may be daunting, understanding and resilience pave the way to brighter days ahead.

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