

the reactor

By Paul Azevedo



The picture the editor sticks above this piece shows a hefty pair of framed milk bottle bottoms. They're not there to create an intellectual image. I need them if I want to cross a busy street safely on a cloudy day.

With glasses, I make my living by working with small type, proofreading and doing other detail work. I take glasses for granted. I've worn them since I was 12. I probably could have used them when I was five.

EYESIGHT wasn't a problem to me when I was a small boy. At least I never thought about it. My assumption was that I saw as well as anyone. Sure, I was clumsy. Sure, I got a little dizzy at times. (No one had ever discussed eyestrain with me.) Sure, I couldn't hit a baseball. When you've gone for years in elementary school without once hitting a baseball, THAT'S A PROBLEM. But eyesight? No.

I criticized magazines. They weren't true-to-life. "Life" carried pictures so sharp and colorfully bright that they were untrue to the "real" world. At least I thought that the world was the way I saw it, and was badly distorted by magazines which showed it overbright and over-sharp.

Then the day came. Mother said, "Tell me what time it is." I looked at the clock across the room. It was normal. That is, it was a blur. No one else could see the time of day on a clock face 10 feet away either, could they?

We went to the optometrist's office. There were those darned distorted magazines in the waiting room, so unrealistic—so much sharper and clearer than real life.

I SAT IN the front window, casually noted the dull red and yellow blur of the National Dollar Stores sign across the street.

My turn came. The optometrist put a lens holder in place. Then he started to try out various lenses.

"What happened?" All of a sudden, the world I was so used to was gone forever. The world was really vivid and sharp. The National Dollar Store sign was beautiful. It almost screamed, it was so brilliantly red and brightly gold, sparkling in the sun, shiny and sharp.

I was 12. The memory is vivid. The magazines were right. Their world exists, but I had not known it.

If your children seem to have problems, maybe they can't see. Have their eyes checked. If they are preschoolers, there are free Amblyopia (lazy eye) checks available.

Maybe your child's bright, clear outlook on the world depends on two chunks of milk bottle glass in a plastic frame. Mine did.