

# See Vista provides insight to naturally improved vision

BY DONNA KASUBA

Jana Vilner of See Vista in Great Barrington teaches people how to improve eyesight naturally by replacing poor vision habits with good vision practices.

"At the very least, you learn about relaxed vision and how to take care of your sight," said Vilner, who teaches her students how to practice correct vision habits for reading, using computers, watching TV, driving, person-to-person communications and other situations.

Vilner claims that over the years, many students of natural vision training have discarded glasses completely or avoided moving into glasses by following the principles of this educational program.

However, since Vilner does not provide eye exams or diagnosis, treatment, or determination of function, she recommends that those who enroll in her classes also have an eye doctor monitor their progress and prescribe lenses if necessary.

Vilner, who started wearing glasses at age 10, credits natural eyesight practices for improving her own vision to the point where she now only wears glasses while driving. "I never found glasses to work very well for me," she said. "It was like looking through a window."

According to Vilner, vision problems which have improved by natural vision education include nearsightedness, astigmatism, farsightedness, "middle-aged" weakening of vision and other conditions.

Her natural eyesight training program, See Vista, is based on the work of several pioneers in the field of natural vision improvement, including Thomas Quackenbush, with whom Vilner studied in Holland. She also attended a two-month training program held in New York City by Robert Lichtman.

See Vista (528-8410), which is offered at the NOAH Center in Great Barrington among other locations, is a seven-week program consisting of weekly two-hour classes conducted in small groups. The fee for the entire program is \$275, which includes support outside of class time and attendance at 12 review classes per year.

## Pioneering work

Vilner, who holds a degree in molecular biology from the City University of New York, was first exposed to the concept of natural vision techniques when she was a young girl. At that time, her

mother, who was a chiropractor, heard about the Bates Method which was formulated by Dr. William Bates, a New York ophthalmologist who was a pioneer in this approach to vision.

During the 1880s, Bates challenged the notion that only a pair of prescription eyeglasses could restore clear vision. While treating his own patients, he found that a person's eyesight fluctuates and is affected by factors such as eye strain, stress and even diet. He sought to get to the root of the problem and discovered that sight can be improved through a program of properly designed eye relaxation techniques. He outlined his research and theories in *Perfect Sight Without Glasses*, originally published in 1920.

Bates' approach has caused some controversy. "Many in the conventional medical establishment discount Bates because he did mistake the role of the lens in seeing," said Vilner. "Still, many of his theories produced

good results. The proof is in the pudding. He corrected his own presbyopia."

Vilner said that Bates' primary contribution was the recognition that vision is primarily a mental process. Vilner contends that on many levels we create our methods of seeing — and often subconsciously create limitations.

"For example, babies and animals don't know that they have eyes, and they move correctly with their mind and their body through the picture that they have all day long," she said. "But we have this cultural psychology that after age 40 vision begins to deteriorate. That is a myth. It is not a fact."

## Awareness and training

Vilner said it is possible to rectify this with awareness and training. "Teach someone who wears glasses what someone who doesn't wear glasses does subconsciously all day long," she explained. This way, she added, "they too can consciously practice the good vision habits and eventually integrate them so that they don't even have to think about them."

According to natural vision theories, mental tension often causes the blur which can accompany anxiety.

"The blur is a correct message from the body that we are experiencing visual stress and dis-health," she said. "Like a stomachache or a headache, the blur is another warning signal. But when the poor vision habits are replaced with good vision habits, healthy

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## See Vista program

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circulation and movement is being brought to the visual system." By relaxation, Vilner said, she is not advocating inactivity but, rather, a shift in movement and mental focus which can release tension and stimulate relaxation.

Vilner has learned a variety of techniques, including sketching, that when practiced regularly can provide benefits for vision. Palming, acupressure points, and self-massage also release chronic tensions held in the eye, neck, and shoulder muscles.

Staring is among the worst vision habits, said Vilner. "When we become anxious, we often fix our gaze on something," she said. "This fixed gaze is like the mecca block, and this also slows down the autonomic, natural, subconscious micro-movements of the eyes. These are called the saccadic vibrations of the eyes, which slow down when we are star-

ing. This can happen from emotional reasons like anxiety, a scare, a shock. My job is to help students break the stare."

Vilner notes that it is incorrect to move only our eyes. We must also point our nose to what we want to see. "That's the physical movement that breaks the stare," Vilner explained. "So we actually move our neck physically because the same poor vision habits that tense the neck muscles also tense the eye muscles."

She points out that everyone's vision fluctuates, but that proper habits and movements can help to improve circulation and restore and maintain the eye's natural balance. She reiterates psychologist T. Ribot's basic tenet that there is no perception without movement.

"All of the sense perceptions work on the basis of movement," Vilner noted. "Sound waves vibrate the eardrum allowing us to hear. So, also, the light receptors of the eye need change. The light receptors cannot function correctly if we're locked in a stare and not moving." ♦