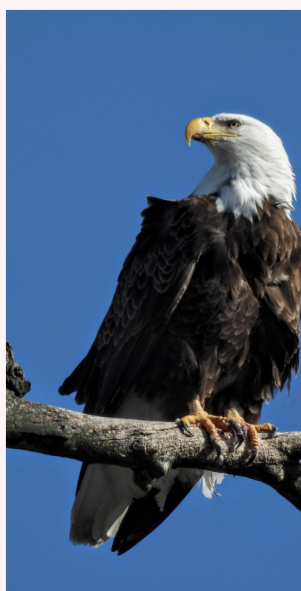


KATEY THE NATURE LADY: A STORY OF SIGHT, SONG, AND SECOND CHANCES

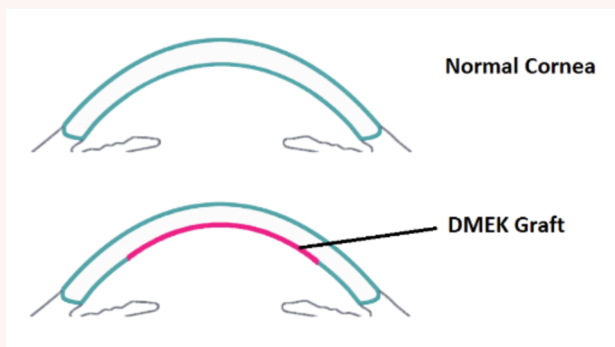


Images (all courtesy of Katey Buster): Katey in Birdsville KY, Bald Eagle, Prothonotary Warbler, and Northern Cardinal

In the late summer of 2021, Katey Buster, an avid birdwatcher and hiking guide, noticed the world around her rapidly blurring and falling out of focus.

Affectionately known to her friends and fellow hikers as, "Katey the Nature Lady," Katey saw that the shapes of the wildflowers she passed every day had become distorted, the fluttering wings of her favorite birds faded into shadows, and her greatest joys in life were quickly slipping away. Her life's purpose was becoming a frustrating obstacle course. Heartsick that she may never again regain her sight, Katey adapted and accepted her vision loss, teaching herself the bird songs and calls of almost every local bird species in Central Kentucky so that she might still have some connection to her greatest love in life: nature. **"I didn't know if I'd ever get the sight back in my right eye,"** she remembers. Though Katey retained vision in her left eye, being legally blind in her right threw off her depth perception and made hiking and bird watching extremely difficult.

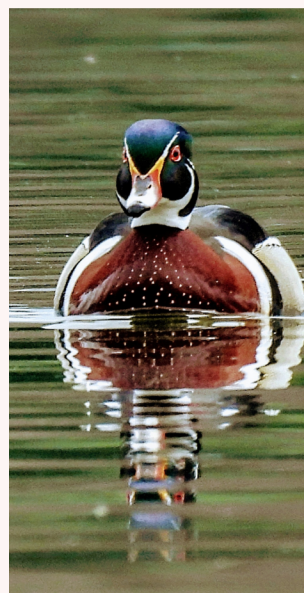
By fall, Katey's Ophthalmologist delivered an explanation for her sudden loss of vision: she was dangerously close to being permanently blind in her right eye due to advanced glaucoma and a damaged cornea. But a glimmer of hope was presented to her- **Katey was eligible for a cornea transplant which would restore some of her vision back to her.** Her physician explained that he would perform a partial transplant procedure called DMEK (Descemet Membrane Endothelial Keratoplasty), which involves a selective removal of the patient's corneal tissue followed by transplantation of donor tissue.



The DMEK procedure involves removing the unhealthy endothelial layer from the back of the cornea and leaving the healthy remainder intact. The donor corneal tissue is then placed into the eye through the small incision and is positioned into place.

Image Courtesy of Mid-Atlantic Cornea Consultants

The idea that someone else's donated tissue could help restore her vision left her stunned and deeply moved. **"I've always signed up to be an organ donor through my driver's licenses,"** she recalls, **"but I never dreamed I would be a recipient of corneal tissue from a donor!"** The surgery took place in December of that year, and the outcome was nothing short of miraculous. As her vision cleared, Katey's world she loved so dearly came back into focus- paths she walked along were navigable once again, and she was able to clearly make out the distinctions between different bird species. During her healing process, Katey thought many times about the precious gift her donor gave to her and how someone could be so generous and kind to others even though they were strangers and would never meet. **To express her gratitude, Katey wrote a letter to her donor's family, letting them know how much she appreciated this act of profound love.**



Images Left to Right (all courtesy of Katey Buster): Short-Eared Owl, Canada Warbler, Eastern Bluebird, Wood Duck

Though Katey still has trouble with her vision due to her glaucoma, she is thankful that she has enough vision to be able to see well peripherally and continue her latest hobby of bird photography. "How lucky I am that it takes just one good eye to see through the camera lens!" she laughs. Through it all, hiking, birdwatching, and bird photography remain central to her healing, giving her purpose, joy, and a reason to step outside each day with hope. Her experience with her cornea transplant has made her a fierce advocate for organ donation and the work of organizations like ours. **"I stand in awe of doctors who restore sight, and of organizations like the Eye Bank of Kentucky who provide gratis cornea tissue for those who can't afford it,"** she says. **"I hope to continue to donate and help organizations like EBKY fund sight-restoring transplants."**

With this second chance and a renewed lease on life, Katey the Nature Lady is back out on the trails, binoculars in one hand, a camera in the other, chasing the call of cardinals and keeping up with the flighty goldfinches. **Her eyes may have changed over the years, but her vision – of a world full of beauty, gratitude, and generosity – has never been clearer.**