

YOUR EYES

In celebration of World Sight Day 2021, the Trinidad & Tobago Optometrists Association would like to use this opportunity to highlight some of our phenomenal pioneers, whose love for the profession of Optometry will help you to keep **loving your eyes!**

Let's celebrate our rich history by meeting another one of our phenomenal pioneers:

MEET HETTIE JUANITA MEJIAS- DE GANNES

(FCOPTOM, HBM)



TELL US ABOUT YOURSELF- WHERE DID YOU GROW UP, EDUCATION, FAMILY LIFE.

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I was born in San Fernando. I attended primary school there and proceeded to Bishop Anstey High School, Port of Spain as a boarder. My father was a DMO and my mother's parents migrated from South East China.

I met my spouse in Trinidad and have 3 sons and 4 grandchildren.

WHERE DID YOU STUDY OPTOMETRY?

WHAT/ WHO INSPIRED YOU TO BECOME AN OPTOMETRIST?

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I studied optometry in the UK at the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology (UMIST). I also attended MC of Art and had private music lessons. I was awarded a gold medal for piano playing exam and two travel scholarships from UMIST which allowed me to travel extensively in Europe.

Although I was accepted to pursue medicine at Dublin University, my father suggested optometry.

HOW LONG HAVE YOU PRACTICED OPTOMETRY?

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I have been in practice approximately 52 years including 4 years in the UK where I spent 7 months in an optical manufacturing firm and 16 years with the Ministry of Health, Port of Spain. I am currently in private practice.

WHAT/ WHO ENCOURAGED YOU TO SET UP YOUR PRACTICE?

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I was encouraged by a Medical Doctor to start my own practice in a complex he built in St. Augustine.



IMAGE 1: Hettie De Gannes fitting spectacles onto a child in Toco, Trinidad.

WHAT CHANGES HAVE YOU SEEN OVER THE DECADES?

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In the early days there was no public advertising, only word of mouth. Now, there is an abundance of advertising and a mushrooming of practices.

**WHAT /WHO INSPIRED YOU TO SPECIALIZE IN CONTACT
LENSES AND PROSTHETICS?**

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Professor Murchison Callender for contact lenses and Dr. Arthur Namssoo, Senior Ophthalmologist encouraged me to do ocular prosthetics. I was awarded a PAHO fellowship to Moorfields Eye Hospital, London in Advanced Contact Lenses.

WHAT MILESTONES HELPED SHAPED YOU PROFESSIONALLY?

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I had the honour of being mentored by the Senior Hospital Optometrist, Mr. Stephen Dawson, when he went into private practice. The years at the Eye Clinic and Port of Spain General Hospital and last but not least, the selfless support of my family, both biological and non- biological.

DID YOU HOLD ANY PROFESSIONAL POSITIONS?

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I was a Senior Optometrist at the Ministry of Health and pioneered the School Vision Screening programme where I trained 60 persons to carry out the programme for the Ministry of Health. I also wrote a position paper and introduced contact lenses and ocular prosthesis to the clinic.



IMAGE 2: Hettie De Gannes training persons to carry out the programme for the School Vision Screening programme. A total of 69 persons registered and were trained under the Ministry of Health.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO PERSONS INTERESTED IN OPTOMETRY?

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One must have a passion for the profession. Communicate with your peers. Apply your knowledge and skills that you have acquired to better serve mankind, without the expectation of remuneration.

YOU RECEIVED A NATIONAL AWARD FOR YOUR ART- TELL US ABOUT YOUR PASSION FOR ART

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I was awarded a National Award for Culture- Humming Bird Medal. While attending BAHS, I was sponsored by the British Council to attend special Art classes. I was taught by M.P. Alladin who became my mentor. I won the Stamp Design for International Women’s Year, which was printed in two denominations in Trinidad and was judged by the United Nations. The Peoples Republic of China invited me three times. One of my sculptures Bass Mas is situated in the World’s largest Sculpture Park and Eternal Beauty is in a large Industrial Park in North East China. The third visit to China was to participate in an International Sculpture exhibition and Conference. I have arranged music for various steelbands and have played our national instrument for several years. I still do various commissions and art works. I have also judged several competitions including Berger Art Competition, Carnival Mas, Steelband and Calypso competitions.

