

YOUR EYES

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

MEET
JOYCE ALI



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

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I was born in St Augustine and grew up in Woodbrook with my parents.
I went to St Crispin EC, Tranquility and then Bishops Anstey.

**WHERE DID YOU STUDY OPTOMETRY?
WHAT/ WHO INSPIRED YOU TO BECOME AN OPTOMETRIST?**

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At age 18 I left Trinidad to study optometry at Manchester University in England and spent 4 years there. I travelled by ship as everybody did. The ticket cost \$480 in those days.

A family friend of my father's, Mrs Cynthia Scott-Patrick-Bertie, suggested I do optometry instead of medicine, which I never regretted because it was at Manchester University that I met Basharat. We got married 3 weeks after I came back to Trinidad from qualifying in Manchester.

HOW LONG HAVE YOU PRACTICED OPTOMETRY?

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I practiced 56 years, from 1961 to 2017.

WHAT/ WHO ENCOURAGED YOU TO SET UP YOUR PRACTICE?

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When I came back to Trinidad in 1957, there were no jobs on offer. Back then, people in general were not so eye conscious and did not feel that eye care was such an important thing. So after 3 years, I decided to set up my own practice in 1961 in Point Fortin. My father helped me to buy the equipment. I was nervous then. There was no one to help or give advice. Sometimes I would call Imperial Optical for guidance on the lenses. I used to prescribe exercises for squints but I never fitted contact lenses. There were those who were already doing it and were better at it than me.

When we moved to Port of Spain, Imperial Optical offered me a job to examine there. I worked there with Roslyn Maillard for thirteen years. After this, I branched into a partnership for 1 year, then set up on my own again.

Having my own practice gave me the freedom to do things I wanted done and to do them the way I preferred them to be done. It was much more comfortable.

WHAT WAS OPTOMETRY LIKE WHEN YOU WERE A STUDENT AND THEN AS A QUALIFIED OPTOMETRIST IN TRINIDAD?

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I did not know much about optometry before I went. As a student, the equipment was simple so you understood how things worked. Now-a-days the equipment is different, easier to use, you just press a button. There is a lot less physical energy but more knowledge and so you are better able to make decisions.

WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN NOT PRACTICING OPTOMETRY??

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I retired in 2017 to be at home with my husband to whom I have been married for over 63 years, to care for him through his health challenges.

WHAT CHANGES HAVE YOU SEEN OVER THE DECADES?

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Patient care was the primary focus but money seems to be most important now. Also, we never advertised. The quality of your work was enough of an advertisement and this is how we always worked.

WHAT MILESTONES HELPED SHAPED YOU PROFESSIONALLY?

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Consistent hard work and building up of experience shaped me professionally. I always enjoyed meeting the people who came into the practice, they often had a story to tell. I enjoyed that interaction and learned from them and some have remained firm friends.

DID YOU HOLD ANY PROFESSIONAL POSITIONS?

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No. I had my home and family to see about, my husband and 2 daughters. I also had my practice to look after and I was pursuing the piano. I did beyond Grade 8.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO PERSONS INTERESTED IN OPTOMETRY?

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Ask yourself if you are the type of person who enjoys taking care of people, especially the older ones. We all need special care and understanding as we get older.