

# Baby's Best Glasses

By Jane Kronheim

Many years ago, in the late '80's and early '90's I had a remarkable experience which took place at The Scheppens Eye Research Institute and Retina Associates, in Boston, Massachusetts. At the time, I was a clinical research assistant to Dr. Osamu Katsumi (at their Children's Low Vision Center). We were seeing many children who were coming to receive the medical advice and treatment of Dr. Tatsuo Hirose, a renowned retina specialist. Parents and children were there at the clinic, from throughout the world. Most of the children had become blind or were severely visually impaired due to the unfortunate circumstances surrounding retinopathy of prematurity (once called RLF). Dr. Hirose remained one of the few retina specialists in the world, willing to try to repair the retinas of these children's eyes. Often, after surgery, many of the children required glasses. But they needed very special glasses and therefore, a very special fit. So, just how do you fit extraordinary glasses on such tiny faces and noses? Once again, I was graced with another special set of circumstances. While on a 10 minute break between students in Medford I chanced upon an optical shop right on Medford Square! Much to my amazement, I had discovered an optician who had expanded his optical practice into children's eyewear. I thought to myself: Just wait until I tell the doctors of my discovery.

The following Tuesday, which we called Baby Day at the clinic, I presented a pile of business cards, and a write-up from a local newspaper and this was information that all of the families needed regarding finding a baby's best glasses. Parents from Chili, former Yugoslavia, Italy, Israel, Greece, Canada, and the USA etc. could go and get the information for these glasses immediately. We were all thrilled. Now, almost 10 years later, I have once again re-connected with Dana Cohen, owner of Medford Optical and here are some portions of a newspaper write up on his wonderful optical shop

I've been in business for 15 years, says Dana Cohen, optician/owner of Medford Optical Shop, Medford, Massachusetts. But I only began promoting children's eyewear seven years ago. Where I am now with children's eyewear [a 40 percent segment of Medford's sales] did not happen overnight.

Cohen recognized the need for highlighting children's eyewear because parents constantly complained about the lack of selection for children at other optical retail establishments. At the time, Cohen had approximately 100 frames for children, which he said was more than the inventory carried by other stores in his area.

Since Cohen enjoyed working with children and saw a niche that he could maximize, he decided to develop this market. I bought 200 to 300 children's frames, and I went around to all the pediatric ophthalmologists in the area. It took a while for them to gain confidence in referring to me, but each year [the kid's section] got a little busier.

Last year, Cohen remodeled and devoted the entire right side of his store to children's eyewear. M.O.D.E., Inc., did the redesign according to Cohen's specifications, which emphasized the need for display units to be lower, allowing the children easy access to frames. I wanted the shop to cater to children. The displays are low so a five-year old can browse at his/her own level. There are four display units, and between the frame boards and the ceiling are duratrans, illuminated pictures of children wearing glasses, which he had made from slides supplied from various children's eyewear manufacturers.

To the design, Cohen added long wooden boxes and made them into treasure chests, with décor-matching, custom-upholstered cushions on the lid. After the glasses are dispensed, the child opens a chest for a complimentary toy a stuffed koala bear for younger children or a Frisbee, featuring the store logo, for older kids.

The chests also serve as seating for kids during the dispensing process. I fit them [while they sit] on the treasure chest. I get on my hands and knees and work with them at their level.

The store displays approximately 1,000 frames, 350 of which are children's styles. Cohen added that buying children's frames is more time-consuming than buying adult frames. Because I deal with so many kids under the age of five, I have to be very selective as to what companies I buy from. Now, when I get a call from a sales rep, I know I don't need another vendor for adult frames, but I do ask if they have kids' styles.

Cohen added that he's noticed a definite improvement in children's frames. The product is improving on a monthly basis, especially with glasses for younger kids, where they are cutting the bridge deeper for better fit.

While Cohen thoroughly enjoys working with kids, he does point to the down side: dealing with children who range from brats to the severely handicapped.

Cohen's goal is to become the premier children's eyewear shop in Massachusetts. Already, with referrals from numerous ophthalmologists, Cohen feels he's on this path and has gained a reputation as the children's optician for tougher cases. They think of me when they write a tough prescription.

Cohen once got a unique referral from an ophthalmologist at a Boston hospital. The family was from Nigeria, he recalls, and the child was an infant, born three months premature. The child needed a +26.00 lens.

This spring, a woman in the New Haven, Connecticut area met a mother and two-year old one of Cohen's patients in a grocery store. She admired the child's glasses and inquired as to where they were purchased. The woman called me and asked directions, and she drove three and a half hours to come here. She said that no one could fit her two-year old with glasses. When she saw our children's department, she said, I am in the right store.