



**Denise
Valenti**
OD, FAAO

**FRIDAY
FELLOW
Q&A**

Q: Where are you located?

A: Quincy, Massachusetts, United States

Q: What year did you earn your Fellowship?

A: 1985

Q: Where did you earn your doctorate?

A: Southern California College of Optometry

Q: What inspired you to pursue optometry as a career?

A: I was among the first certified gerontologists and the first optometrist to have a gerontology credential. I did an internship at the Oregon Commission for the Blind, and although I was actively recruited to the medical school, I was interested in low vision.

Q: What is your most rewarding patient or professional experience?

A: Having had years of experience doing low vision, there are many. But getting NIH funding for research validated aspects of my skills other than the clinical skills.

Q: How did you become involved with the Academy?

A: I taught the laboratories for several of Frank Brazelton's courses. I wanted to be awarded Fellowship during his presidency.

Q: What has your involvement meant to your career?

A: Given that I have had to pivot my career due to severe genetic chronic illness causing long term disability, the initial networking and relationships helped me transition out of clinical work into research. That gave me the confidence to become part of other groups.

I was the first non-PhD/non-MD OD to serve on the ARVO professional development program committee. The AAO OD/PhD relationships, colleagues that I knew through ARVO, helped me with support as the appointment created chaos and controversy. It did help pave the way for acceptance of optometrists in ARVO.

Q: What is the best part of being an OD?

A: The interaction with patients and now research participants. I specialized in AD and PD. I had one of the first papers on AD and OCT. It was published in NEUROLOGY. This was rewarding. Now I concentrate on cannabis-function and structure of visual system. Much more fun.

Q: Tell us a fun fact about you or an interesting hobby you have?

A: I have significant familial dilated cardiomyopathy muscular dystrophy. Not fun, but I have some outrageous wheelchair mischief stories, some of which my fellow disabled, visually impaired colleagues instigated. A current hobby is figuring out low vision optical aides to harvest weed. Seriously, there are job opportunities.



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