About my eyes

Left is brown, right is green, and it took me about fifteen years to stop looking at the floor in pictures.

OCT 19 – 25, 2026

5 MIN READ

People ask about my eyes a lot, so I figured I'd finally just write it all down in one place. Not the funny stuff, the actual story. Where they came from, and what it was like growing up with them.

If you don't know, one of my eyes is dark brown and the other one is green. Left is brown, right is green. It's called heterochromia. Which sounds like a disease, and that's kind of the whole problem with it, honestly. The name is scarier than the thing.

. . .

Here's the thing in plain words, the way a doctor finally explained it to my mom. The color of your eyes is just pigment. Brown eyes have a lot of it. Green and blue eyes have less. Usually both eyes get the same amount. Mine didn't. The right one just got less, and that's it. That's the whole mystery. I was born like that, it doesn't hurt, it doesn't change how I see. I've had my eyes checked more times than anyone I know and the answer is always the same. They're fine. They just don't match.

My mom has her own explanation, which I like better. Her eyes are brown. My dad's are green, really green, like bottle glass. So she says I just got one from each of them, like I couldn't pick a side. When I was little I used to cover one eye and say "now I'm Mom," then switch and say "now I'm Dad." They thought it was the funniest thing in the world. I kept it up for about a year.

. . .

When I was a baby though, nobody was calm about it. It wasn't really obvious at first. Babies' eyes change color for a while, so my mom thought maybe it would even out. Then I was like six months old and it was very clear it wasn't going to.

She told me about it once, years later, at the kitchen table. How she took me to the pediatrician, and the pediatrician sent us to an eye specialist, and then there was a second specialist in a building with a parking garage she still talks about because she got lost in it twice. She'd been reading things. So she was scared. Like, really scared, for months.

They did all the tests. Lights in my eyes, drops, a doctor with cold hands, apparently, she remembers the cold hands. And at the end of it the doctor just said, he's healthy, it's one of those things. She said she cried in the car in the parking garage. Then she went and got lost in it again.

I didn't know any of that until I was in high school. I think about it sometimes. Her sitting with a baby she was worried about, reading stuff she didn't understand. And then it turned out to just be my face.

• • •

Growing up it was harder. Not in a dramatic way. Just in the normal little ways that pile up.

Kids called me a cat. That was the big one. Some kid would meow at me in the hallway and a couple others would laugh. In fourth grade someone decided I was an alien and that lasted most of the year. I was already a shy kid. It's hard when the first thing anyone notices about you is something you didn't pick and can't really cover up.

So I looked down. In class, in hallways, mostly in pictures. My mom has this stack of school photos in a shoebox where I'm looking at something just past the camera. Every single year, kindergarten through like eighth grade. One year the photographer told me to look right into the lens and I did, and that's the only one where you can really see it, and I hated it so much I hid my copy in the back of a drawer. My mom found it and framed it. That's the kind of mom she is.

. . .

In middle school I begged for contacts. Colored ones, brown, so they'd match. I had it all planned out.

She said no. Not even a long no. She just said "one day you'll be glad you have them." I slammed my bedroom door so hard a picture fell off the wall in the hallway. I told her she didn't understand anything. I was thirteen, I said that kind of thing a lot.

She never brought it up again. She didn't need to, I guess.

. . .

It didn't change all at once. It was slow, like most things. High school was a little better. People got busier with their own stuff.

The moment I actually remember was in college. I was in a figure drawing class, second year, sitting next to a girl named Sarah who always had charcoal all over her hands. One day before class started she just turned to me and asked if she could sketch my eyes. Not me, just the eyes. For a project.

I said yes before I could think about it. She sat across from me for maybe twenty minutes, looking at me really carefully, the way people usually don't because it's rude. And it didn't feel rude. It felt like she was just paying attention. Afterward she showed me the page. Two eyes, really close up, and she'd done the green one with this pale grey and left a little white for the light. It wasn't perfect. But I looked at it and thought, oh. That's kind of nice, actually.

Nothing happened with Sarah, for the record. She moved to Chicago. But I still think about that page.

· · ·

Now I mostly don't think about it. I'm still a little shy if someone stares for too long. I'll laugh, look away, say something dumb. But it's my face. It's been there the whole time.

I called my mom last week and told her I was writing about this. She got quiet for a second and then said "so are you glad yet?" I said yeah, Mom. I'm glad. She said "I told you." Of course she did.

— Shay

Thanks for reading. There are more of these on my site, one every couple of weeks.