

Industry Profile

Les Barnes

Lecturer in Prosthetics and Orthotics at La Trobe University



I have always liked working with my hands and was employed as a boilermaker until I was 28 years old. In 1976 our daughter, Kelly was born without a left hand. I immediately sought a job as a trainee Limb maker and Fitter with the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) at the Repatriation and Artificial Limb Centre (RALAC) in South Melbourne. We had our second daughter (Pan) in 1979.

The DVA provided in-service training and I tried to absorb all the Prosthetic and Orthotic (P&O) knowledge that I could, for Kelly, and for myself. After finishing DVA training, I realized that there was still much that I did not know, so began further P&O study at Lincoln Institute. After graduating the P&O course in 1982, I became a senior tutor at the Lincoln Institute P&O School and was an enthusiastic teacher, always seeking to know more.

I coached Kelly and Pan in swimming and Kelly was a real water baby. Later she became an elite swimmer with a disability competing in both able-bodied and disabled competitions, and I continued to coach her until she was about 14 when she won a Victorian Institute of Sport scholarship. Kelly represented Australia at the Assen world championships, the Barcelona Paralympics, the Commonwealth games in Canada and the Disabled World Championships in Malta. Kelly won medals at all the games.

Lincoln Institute amalgamated with Latrobe University in the late 1980's and I became a P&O Lecturer. In 1993 I gained a Master of Applied Science in P&O by research into the effects of Four Bar Linkage prosthetic knee mechanisms on amputee gait. This research gave me a comprehensive knowledge of prosthetic knee mechanisms and am now one of Australia's experts in the function of prosthetic knee mechanisms.

I like to paint and draw birds and began to draw comic strip wrens of this character called WREN. They were beautifully drawn with funny puffed-up little personalities.

In 1994 I accepted a position as Manager of the P&O Department in the Royal Darwin Hospital. The P&O service was improved by establishing monthly P&O rural clinics in Katherine and Alice Springs. Although having limited resources, the Departmental P&O treatments doubled. Despite the heavy clinical workload, I also established a NT swim school. Within a year, the swim school had over 100 regular swimmers and his kids began to make their mark in NT Swimming competitions and I became a respected Northern Territory swimming coach.

In 1999 Latrobe University asked me to return as a lecturer. I returned to Melbourne and continue to teach P&O with the same passion and enthusiasm I have always had.

Living in Hurstbridge, I began to create sculptures of birds; currawongs, owls, honey-eaters and wrens. The birds created have the same lust for life and exuberant personality of their maker. Since 2002 I have had 2 sculpture exhibitions and regularly sell the birds through the Bridges Gallery in Hurstbridge.

In 2004, I commenced a Professional Doctorate to develop a new prosthetic ankle/foot device for amputees. I am examining in detail the normal foot structure and function as well as the designs of currently available prosthetic feet. The goal is to develop a computer controlled ankle that accommodates footwear and walking surface changes.

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