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Stories of Eye Loss:

Personal perspectives about artificial eyes and recovering from eye loss

Compiled by Paul and Jenny Geelen

ABOUT PAUL AND JENNY GELEN, OCULARISTS

Paul and Jenny Geelen have been custom fitting and manufacturing artificial eyes since 1988. Originally established by Margaret Geelen, today the brother and sister team carry on the family tradition.

Paul and Jenny are highly experienced in all aspects of making prosthetic eyes, including hand-painting and custom fitting artificial eyes to obtain a natural result. In most cases the artificial eye is not noticeable by others in daily life.

Based out of Perth, Western Australia, Paul and Jenny serve clients in Perth and Darwin, as well as Malaysia, Indonesia and the United Arab Emirates.

Both are founding members of the Ocularists Association of Australia.

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INTRODUCTION

We have collected and published these stories for you in the hope that they give comfort and reassurance when facing eye loss.

Our thanks go to those people who, with courage and generosity, have shared their stories so that others know they are not alone.

The stories have been grouped into two sections:

- [Trauma](#)
- [Medical](#)

We wish you well in your journey of recovery.

Our [website](#) contains additional information you might find useful. We'd encourage you to visit it sometime when you are able. Please feel free to write or email us with your thoughts and experiences. You have a special perspective, and we'd be pleased to hear about it.

Paul Geelen Jenny Geelen

STORIES OF EYE LOSS - TRAUMA

[Joel's Story](#)

A freak accident while surfing took young Joel Cooke on an extraordinary journey. In Joel's words - "I Caught A Wave That Changed My Life".

[Alfredo's Story](#)

Cement dust found its way into Alfredo's eye at work, ultimately causing the loss of his eye. Later in life he finds "Not Many People Can Tell".

[David's Story](#)

David McKenna's "Don't Lose Confidence" talks about confidence issues for young males, and how the insights he gained saved his daughter's life.

[Maureen's Story](#)

Maureen Muskett's "It's Alright" tells how two people within the same family can respond very differently to eye loss.

[Tim's Story](#)

Tim was 27 when a surfing accident led to the loss of his eye. For those facing the loss of one eye, Tim suggests you focus on the fact that "You Can Still See".

[Marjorie's Story](#)

At the age of 5, Marjorie lost her eye in an accident on a barbed wire fence. Later in life, she tells that her artificial eye is "Just A Part of Me".

[Ailsa's Story](#)

Ailsa Maley shares her story of "A One Eyed Life", and how a minor gardening incident led to the loss of her eye. She enjoys challenging people to pick which is her artificial eye, and isn't afraid of a good wager.

JOEL COOKE - I CAUGHT A WAVE THAT CHANGED MY LIFE

Well I was up at Lancelin, an hour and a half north of Perth, surfing with a couple of mates. Just a normal day really... when I caught a wave that changed my life. I fell off backwards and the surfboard came up over the wave and hit me straight in the mince pie (my eye). The pointy end went right into the eye. At the time I came up and went to one of my mates and said, "I think I've hurt myself". I didn't realise what had happened. He said, "You better paddle in."

It was a fairly long paddle, about 500 metres. Half way in I put my hand up and felt blood. I was trying to feel if my eye was still there by pushing on my eyelid not knowing that in fact the eye had burst. I cried out to my mate, "Find my eye before the fish eat it!!" By the time I got to the beach another friend had waved down a four-wheel drive. That guy gave me a towel and rushed me to the medical centre. From the medical centre I got an ambulance to Charles Gairdner Hospital.

All this time I was thinking will I ever see again, asking everyone that looked at me "is it bad?" I

had surgery for three hours trying to save my eye. The doctors had to make my eye back into a ball but they still couldn't tell me if I was going to see out of the eye again. Then all I could do was wait and see (pardon the pun). The whole area was so swollen. During those couple of days I was bracing myself for the worst, and that was living the rest of my life with one eye.

Once the swelling went down the doctors shone a torch into the eye but I couldn't see anything. Not even any light. I'd damaged the optic nerve too severely. They advised me that removing the eye was probably the best option due to the extent of the damage. I saw Professor Constable, a leading eye doctor around the world. He was my only hope that maybe I could see again. It took him less than ten minutes to tell me that there was no hope. I was devastated, I remember sitting in a wheelchair in the waiting room waiting to go back to my ward, crying to myself. I just couldn't stop.

Professor Constable was concerned the other eye might go in sympathy. It was a very slim chance but trying to deal with having lost sight out of one eye was bad enough but now the other could die as well. I didn't know what to do. He said surgery should happen within twelve days to avoid this. The next day I had the surgery and the eye was removed and the grieving process began.

My parents flew over from Melbourne. My girlfriend and my mates didn't leave my side but it was like I'd lost a good friend. I didn't really know how I was going to look after the operation, everyone kept telling me how good artificial eyes look these days. I kept thinking it's easy to say when it's not you. I'd had to wear an eye patch for four weeks.

Once the bandages did come off and the swelling went down from my fractured cheekbone I looked exactly the same but with a red eye I couldn't see out of. I was relieved that my face looked the same and wasn't all smashed up. The doctors did a wonderful job but the little conformer shell kept falling out.

They had to stitch my eyelid together for four weeks to keep the conformer in while it did its job. This was the most painful time, putting the needle into the eyelid so the doctors could stitch it up. That night the conformer fell out again, so I had to go and get that same needle all over again. Was it ever going to end?

About eight weeks later and after my conformer did stay in I met Paul and Jenny. They started making my prosthesis and helping me come to terms with my loss. Reading and hearing stories about other people's eye loss helped. I started to understand that your life could be exactly the same as what it was only now you've got one eye.

Getting the new eye was exciting. When Paul put it in for the first time I closed both my eyes and looked in the mirror. When I opened them, it was like the past couple of months were a dream because I looked no different.

I was still coming to terms with not seeing out of it and having to look at myself with an eye instead of a red dot. I was happy again. I felt like the whole accident was over and my luck was changing.

I knew life would go on but I was nervous about driving, using power tools and if I could stay in my trade. It has been almost a year now and I still get angry and ask why it happened to me. What did I do to deserve this? I think this to myself but I know you can't live like that because there is no answer.

Every night I turn on the news and hear about someone else's horrible day and think that life with one eye isn't so bad. One thing that I'm still dealing with is the fact that my eye will never be the same. Having had my eye removed, I know I'll never be able to look through that eye again.

Sometimes when you are walking around people might notice. You do wonder what they think of you or what you really do look like and I feel like I have to explain what happened. Sometimes though when I am telling my story to strangers I feel I'm just sooking but I think it does help. It helps by just the reaction of everyone. The more

people you meet, the more comfortable you become with yourself.

I've been surfing again, not on the same board. I tried to once but there were just too many bad memories. I've been snorkelling and swimming nearly everyday and have no problems with my eye. I was with my girlfriend at the time and we are still together. I still go to the pub and out to meet other people. To other blokes going through this I want them to know that girls still come up to you and want to talk to you. It doesn't make you unattractive.

It is coming up to about a year since my accident. Looking back on the last ten months and I can see how much I have moved on and got back into my normal life. I know that life will keep getting better with each day. Even when I do get angry and upset about the accident I know over time things will get better.

ALFREDO VIGOLO - NOT MANY PEOPLE CAN TELL

I lost my eye in 1964. I used to do cement work. There were stairs on the side of a building with scaffolding. We were working there with dry cement. The wind blew some into my eye. I went to a doctor who gave me some drops but they didn't work. Then he sent me to an eye specialist at Royal Perth Hospital.

They operated straight away. I was there for three weeks. I could only see a little light. Then I was put back in hospital for another six weeks. Then there was another operation and nine weeks in hospital. They used a lot of steam treatment. They didn't want me to move. My eye still wasn't much good.

A specialist I went to see recommended a specialist in Melbourne. A friend collected some money so I could fly to see this professor in Melbourne. He said, "It's not much good. You are

young, we'll try". The operation took eight and a half hours and involved several skin grafts. On Saturday, a day or so after the operation I went home to Perth. The operation did no good, I eventually lost the eye.

I had a young family. During my recovery I had to stay home and look after the baby. My wife had to go out to work. There was no workers compensation - it wasn't my boss' fault. Anyway there was no help.

After a few months I went back to the same job with the same company. I was blind in that eye for thirty-five years before my doctor recommended I have the eye removed. The eye would dry out and cause me a lot of pain.

It's all right having an artificial eye. I feel better. Not many people can tell. It's better. I thank Paul and his sister. They do a good job.

DAVID MCKENNA – DON'T LOSE CONFIDENCE

I was seventeen when I lost my eye. A bit of metal got stuck in it. I thought I'd got it all out. I went to sleep and in the morning my sight was blurry. I had to wait six hours in emergency. They kept me in hospital but I started losing sight. They got the metal out. I still had the puncture wound that got infected. I started getting better but then things changed. I lost my sight and the eye started to look different.

My family were disappointed and angry that I stuffed my eye up. They were angry I went to sleep and didn't go to the hospital straight away. I felt angry with myself too. I couldn't believe it at first but then it sank in. I just thought I'd get a contact lens. I didn't do much about it and then I went to jail. I asked to see the eye doctors but that didn't happen. It is only now I am going to get a scleral lens to make it look ok again.

In jail people thought I couldn't play sport. I didn't get picked because I've got one eye. They thought I'd be no good for the team. Now I am included and I do play. I just won Most Valuable Player

award in the football. At first I was pretty wary. I didn't want to get my head taken off. I played off the ball for a while. In basketball I got hit in the good eye. That stopped me playing for a bit. I still drive although I've lost my licence at the moment. I'm a pretty good driver.

At the time I lost my eye I was with a girlfriend and she didn't seem to care. I think because she was with me before it happened. My kids look at me funny. My older boy, he used to say, "Dad got a sore eye". My little girl she's two and she is starting to look at me funny. That's why I wanted to get my eye fixed so the kids don't look at me funny.

You lose a lot of confidence when you lose vision in one eye. Sometimes when people are angry, they know it's my weakness, they have a go at me – they say I'm ugly. At times I felt that way. I don't believe it about myself now.

The experience of losing the eye has made me respond to medical things differently.

One morning I went to pick up my baby daughter. I could tell straight away things weren't right. She wasn't crying as she normally would.

I took her straight to hospital. She had meningococcal and was in hospital for three weeks. The hospital told me that getting there so quick made a difference to how things turned out. She is fine now.

If I had any advice for a young bloke about to lose his eye I'd say don't lose confidence or self-esteem.

Don't worry. Be yourself and you'll come to grips with it.

MAUREEN MUSKETT - IT'S ALRIGHT

I lost my eye as a child in the bombing of London in 1940. I woke up in a cot with my hands tied to the rails. As a result of this experience I had an incredible fear of the bomb sirens and feeling restricted in any way.

I did play up as a child. I didn't wear the eye to school so I could be sent home.

The teachers wouldn't teach me to read until Year Two, as they were worried about eyestrain. It was only when my younger sister started to read that I protested and insisted on being taught. My younger sister was very protective of me during those school years and still is.

I didn't meet anyone else with an artificial eye until I was an adult. I was very honest with people when I met them. If I noticed that people were studying the eye I just told them. "That is my war wound". It was never an issue after that.

I didn't need glasses until I was forty-something. I had to strain to read the bus numbers. My

husband had to pick me up from some obscure places a couple of times. I ended up at Takapuna on the north shore of Auckland three times. Finally he suggested I should have an eye test. I was very upset when I found out I needed glasses.

My father was diagnosed with cancer behind the eye when he was 57. He was very upset when he found out he was going to lose his eye. He went through a bad depression for one year. My advice to him was, don't worry!

He used to hide behind dark glasses. It took him about three years until he would leave the dark glasses off. It was pretty funny – someone wearing dark glasses in the winter in England. We were very different in this respect – I was more upset about having to wear glasses than having to wear a glass eye. Toward the end of his life, when he had six weeks to live, I went home to see my father. By then he was used to the glass eye and he found it hilarious that we both had artificial eyes. We could laugh about it then. I told him, "See, I told you it was alright!"

TIM CARTLEDGE - YOU CAN STILL SEE

I was 27 and I was bored one day so I rode to the beach for a surf. I was going to borrow my mate's board. I grabbed it and walked down to Trigg Point. It was small surf of only about two feet. I caught a little wave and rode it in and jumped off and then popped my head up through the waves. Then bang the board went straight into my eye. I hadn't felt any pull on the leg rope so I'd thought I was safe to come up. It might have even been someone else's board. I really don't know.

My eyelid jammed shut. I didn't realise what had happened. I walked up the beach with my hand over my eye. A girl came up to me, she was a nurse. She took me to the doctor. He tried to open the eye but it hurt too much. Then I went to Charlie Gardiner's Hospital. They put me under a general anaesthetic so they could look at it. I had two operations when they tried to fix it by putting the retina back in. Doctors shone lights in but I couldn't see anything.

The doctor told me that there was a possibility the other eye might go out in sympathy so I should have this injured eye removed. I had the operation and stayed in hospital for a week and then I went home. I had a little plastic see through prosthesis for a while and then I came in and saw Margaret Geelen.

I found it difficult to adjust to single sight - being able to judge distances. It took about five years to get used to it. I am worried now about losing the other one when I go surfing. It took me fifteen years to go back surfing but I am now learning to surf again. I haven't got any pointy bits on my board.

Most people don't know I have an artificial eye. They might think I've got a lazy eye or something. If I tell people they say, "Oh really I didn't know."

If I was talking to someone facing eye loss I think I'd say focus on the fact that you can still see. You haven't lost all your vision - that is the good thing.

MARJORY PITCHERS - JUST A PART OF ME

You know I've only ever known one other person with an artificial eye. I was about five and a half when I lost my eye. We were living near Albany. (Rural town South-west Western Australia) I was walking hand in hand with friends. Some barbed wire that held a gate closed, flicked back and hooked my eye out.

My father ran three miles to borrow a car to take me to Albany Hospital. Then I spent three months in Fremantle Hospital. Attempts to get the eye to heal failed and they removed it.

A man came to Fremantle Hospital with a box of eyes and fitted me with a new eye. That was Mr Buckeridge. It was horrible growing up with an artificial eye back then. People said unkind things. I said it was alright but it wasn't. Eventually I let the teasing wash over me.

I married in 1941 and the day after my wedding my husband went off to war. I only saw him for a day in the next five years. I conceived a child from that reunion. By then I had left Katanning and went to live with my sister in Narrogin. After

the war my husband and I settled back in Katanning as that was his hometown. We had two more children.

I had a glass eye at this time that was made by Mr Schaler who came over from the eastern states. He made me two eyes. The first one was successful. The second one exploded in the socket and split in two pieces. People who'd worked with me for ten years were amazed - they'd never realised the eye wasn't mine.

I never told people I had an artificial eye. I didn't see any reason to. It was just a part of me. If you grow up with something it doesn't seem to matter as much as it does if you lose an eye later in life. My friend lost her eye in an accident as an elderly person. She told me she feels half blind. I've never felt that because I've never known any different.

I was a keen sports person. I ran and did highjump. I was good at both of them. Later I took up croquet instead of bowls. I had to practice day after day. Eventually I was President

of the Katanning Croquet Association. I also played for the Victoria Park Club for years. Having an artificial eye never stopped me doing anything. Mind you my father did spoil me a bit.

I ran a cafe in Katanning for 14 years. It started out as just a tea and cake place. The boss let me run it my way. The business built up to be the life of the town where everyone met. I ended up with five girls and two casuals. The girls loved working there and knocked back other jobs.

The girls at work knew that I hated spiders. As a joke they used to leave a big plastic spider in the flour bins sometimes. To take revenge I once hid an artificial eye in the cream on a birthday cake. I can still hear the girl screaming. There was no trouble with spiders after that.

I left the café and came to live in Perth when my husband became ill. I made a life for myself here.

Doing voluntary work during the first ten years has made all the difference. I saw people in nursing homes and that helped me to see how fortunate my choices were. When I finally left I received a letter saying-

“It is not every day (or even every decade) that such a wonderful person becomes a part of our lives, not only as a committed volunteer but also as a person who can co-ordinate a kiosk, make desserts for candlelight dinners, make cakes and preserves for market days, actively fundraise, chat with residents and staff and most importantly make “the best sponge cake ever.”

I find Paul (Geelen) a kind sort of person. I told him that I could no longer manage the stairs to his office. He just said, “Well I’ll just come to you.” He didn’t have to do that.

AILSMA MALEY - A ONE-EYED LIFE

The loss of my right eye came about over a long period. I was gardening and the spiky leaf of a Day-lily plant slipped up under my spectacles (that I needed to wear when weeding to see the difference between weeds and plants!) It scratched the cornea.

It didn't start hurting for two days when I went to the chemist and got some "soothing drops". It wasn't very uncomfortable until the third day. I was advised that a corneal ulcer could develop.

The scratch was not bad – it was the bug that got into it that caused the problem. I was in and out of hospital for some time, and the infection eventually returned in spite of eye medications. Sadly there was no improvement.

So I became one of those who have a "One-Eyed View of Life" to quote the title of a book. I had had so long a time dealing with this possibility that the news of enucleation did not have the same effect on me as it might have done with a sudden blinding incident for example.

My surgeon was very compassionate. He told me how necessary the operation was and reassured me about my remaining eye doing a good job in the future. "That's why God gave us two eyes", he said. And this has proved so.

It was great to meet Paul before the operation and to see the photographs he'd brought to the hospital to show me. I walked around like a pirate with a patch over the socket for a few weeks while Paul got busy with the perfect prosthesis you can see today.

Everyone who sees it after hearing my story is amazed. I used to say "It's a dollar to guess, if you get it right, I'll return the \$1. I never ever carried out this little quiz but I always spoke the words. I could have made a lot of money! The most funny thing was that so many people would ask, "Can you see in that eye OK now?"

I have had my artificial eye for three years now and I never cease to thank God for Paul and his dedicated and transforming skills.

STORIES OF EYE LOSS - MEDICAL

- [Loretta's Story](#) Loretta McIntyre was five years old when a specialist visiting her remote community arranged an emergency evacuation to Perth to have her eye removed. Jillian McIntyre, her mother, tells "A Story About Loretta".
- [James' Story](#) James Hargrave describes a teenager's life with an artificial eye - school, sport, friends and questions.
- [Heath's Story](#) Heath Elkington, father of Saskia, talks about coming to terms with his one year old daughter's eye loss.
- [Alan's Story](#) Alan Harrison struggled for a time dealing with the gradual deterioration of his eye. His story "A Changed Outlook" talks about how his outlook changed when he did have his artificial eye fitted.
- [Peter's Story](#) Peter Hackett's "I Can't See You" describes the impact of eye loss in his later years, and his partner Berenice talks of the impact on her.
- [Lars' Story](#) Lars Lindberg suggests "Why Worry?" It's an interesting perspective from an elderly gentleman on the impact of eye loss and a reflection that it could be a lot worse.
- [Mike's Story](#) Mike Murray has contributed his story "Some Thoughts", and he talks about some of the practical aspects of taking care of his remaining eye.
- [Kendall's Story](#) Kendall Vincent's matter of fact story "Don't Stress" about losing an eye as an infant has a humorous angle, and describes an interesting prank.
- [Jean's Story](#) Jean Hartz was a young mother with three children when she was diagnosed with a tumour in her eye. Humour and a matter of fact approach to life helped her deal with her eye loss, as she tells her story in "Keep Busy".

JILLIAN MCINTYRE – A STORY ABOUT LORETTA

The only thing that we noticed was that Loretta's eye was annoying her. It was like there was sand in her eye or a little stone. Then one day she went riding on a bike and ran into a pole. Then her balance started to go. She was tripping over and bumping into people. She was five at the time. We didn't realise she was blind in the left eye.

We are in a very isolated aboriginal community. We were lucky that there was a visiting doctor when the eye was bothering her. It was a pure coincidence that this man was an eye specialist from Princess Margaret Hospital. When they opened up the eye she screamed. The light really hurt her. The nurse thought it was bad conjunctivitis. That is when Rex Anderson told me we had to evacuate Loretta straight away. He said he didn't want to tell me why until we were in Perth.

I noticed then that one pupil was bigger than the other. The specialist cancelled all his other visits and flew with us back to Perth. He told us that it was really urgent. Cancer was the very last thing

on my mind. She was a really normal child. She started crawling and walking on time and all that.

We got down here to PMH and saw Dr Ward on level 4. He suggested we go to the Lions Eye Institute. That's when I got hit with the hard word. It was a tumour that had grown over the eye itself. I kept saying save the eye, save the eye! They said it would be best to remove the whole eye so it wouldn't leak to the brain. They didn't want to take the chance with a sample. It was too risky.

I was devastated. I was in shock. I kept saying, can't you do something else? They kept saying it was the best thing. They had to remove the eye. It was just the two of us in a room. I hugged her. I told her "baby they have to take your eye". Because she is young she just went "ok Mum well let's go."

She had the surgery the very next morning. The worst part was that waiting during theatre. It was hard having to wait that long. At one o'clock in the afternoon she came out with a big bandage

around her head. When they took the bandage off she saw she had one eye and cried. Then she saw the TV and said, “Mum I can still see!” After that it’s like it never really affected her in any way.

I wish I had a camera the day Jenny put in her new eye. She was overjoyed. The look on her face – a smile that touched her ears. It was marvellous. She said, “I’ve got a new eye! I’ve got a new eye!”

Since she lost her eye she’s won a trophy for open running and won a medallion for swimming.

For a girl with one eye she’s achieved a lot. I watch her out in the playground doing everything the other kids do. It is only when I talk about it that I cry. People tell me its good to talk. I still feel that I am not over her losing the eye. It’s the strangest thing that out of my seven children she is the only one with coloured eyes. All the rest are brown. She got blue eyes from my granddad because he had some Irish blood. I don’t think I will ever really get over it.

JAMES HARGRAVE - IT ISN'T A BIG DEAL

I've had an artificial eye since I was four. I had retinoblastoma. The first thing I really remember was when I was about eight or nine in the UK. I went to the hospital to get a new eye. It was weird watching this guy painting an eye that I was going to wear. Now I am used to it. They look at your eye and try and replicate it. I think they do a good job really.

Because it is done so well people tend not to notice it. Other people tell them and then they are really surprised. They try and guess which one it is – some people get it wrong. At school a lot of people ask me to take it out to show them. They ask me to play tricks by putting it in others drinks. I don't do it. Some kids like to wave their hand over my eye as a joke because I can't see them. You get used to that and can feel when it is going to happen. I can feel the heat off the hand on my

face so I can tell they are doing it and that stops the fun.

Having an artificial eye makes judging the ball at sport a little harder. I avoid contact sport. In England we were told to avoid sport where the ball was coming straight at me.

Generally speaking I don't have a problem with the eye because I got it at a young age. I am a teenager, and a boarder at a high school now. I made the decision to tell friends and they told other friends. It isn't a big deal and it isn't a secret.

Sometimes I get out of sport I really don't want to do – that is an advantage. Once when I was at school, I was getting changed in a dormitory and the eye fell out on the bed. So I just showed everybody. Some people were a bit freaked so I just put it back in.

HEATH ELKINGTON - A DAD'S STORY

Saskia was diagnosed a couple of weeks after her first birthday. She went to hospital and had lots of tests. The advice was that they needed to enucleate the eye. It came out pretty quick.

When she was diagnosed I took a couple of months off work. I was lucky that my work could accommodate that. Because of the nature of the cancer it all happened very fast.

It is very difficult at first to come to terms with her losing the eye. These days the eyes are so good. People can't really notice. You worry about people teasing her but that doesn't happen. When

she got her new eye, her "magic" eye, people would say, "which is the real one?"

As a parent your job is to protect the child. In these circumstances to help them involves watching them suffer. You have to watch them go through surgery, needles and being poked and prodded. It's very stressful. It certainly puts other things in perspective.

We made contact with every other family we could find with bilateral retinoblastoma. They were all happy to talk to us and it really helped. We'd be pleased to talk to other people who ring with the same condition.

ALAN HARRISON - A CHANGED OUTLOOK

I lost the sight in my right eye when I was thirty years old due to a retinal bleed - very uncommon at that age. Lucky hey? The eye did not start deteriorating until about five years after the event and gradually turned a sickly blue.

I put up with this image until 2001 when I was referred to Paul Geelen and he attempted to make a cover for the unsightly eye.

Alas it did not work as the old eye was too swollen and it rejected the cover. During the fitting Paul asked why I had retained my natural eye and had not had it removed. I explained that

the specialist I saw when it first happened recommended I keep my natural eye as long as possible.

Paul asking me that question started the cogs working. When the scleral cover rejected I started to go down the track of having it removed and a prosthetic fitted.

I have now finished my treatment as such and am very thankful to Paul and Jenny for being so dedicated to what they do; it has changed my whole outlook on life.

PETER HACKETT - I CAN'T SEE YOU

The first time I noticed there was a problem with the eye was way back in 1942. I travelled from Darwin down to Sydney during the war. I had trouble coping with the glare off the buildings. I thought it was because I had come from tropical vegetation.

I was about forty when I went to get reading glasses. The eye specialist spotted something and before I knew it I was seeing Professor Constable. It was about fifteen years later that I saw him before surgery was necessary. By then I had macular degeneration in both eyes. Now at 84 my vision is about 3%, that is peripheral only. Loss of sight has curtailed our retirement plans, especially travel. That is driving. We still travel by plane, train and boat but I don't see anything.

My wife Berenice has to go with me everywhere except the toilet. The most frustrating thing is not being able to do the basic maintenance around the house. I've got to get someone in for even the simplest of things.

In terms of entertainment the TV is hopeless. I listen to a lot of audiotapes from the Blind Society. I had to give up gardening – I still pot under my wife's supervision.

There was an amusing occasion once when we went to stay with relatives. One of the boys brought his 16-year-old girl friend to meet us. I said to her, "I can't see you but I can use Braille". I made a gesture in her direction with my hands – I didn't touch her. It was a joke. Well she was horrified. It was several years before she would speak to me. Now we laugh about it.

If you've got a melanoma or something – surgery just has to be done. Having the eye out wasn't that much of a trauma because it was better than cancer developing into the head. You just have to accept it. The upside is you don't have to wear reading glasses anymore. It's funny but I still do wear sunglasses for the glare.

Berenice's Story (Peter's Partner)

Under Pressure

As a partner I say, "well Peter has the affliction but I've got the sentence". Anyone that is a carer knows that it is hard work. I'm glad that I am able to do things to help.

The hardest part is not being able to do what I want when I want. I always have to consider someone else. It's affected me with holidays, when your partner can't see it is not very pleasant.

You've got to learn not to just put things down where you want. You've got to put it in the same place each time. You need to be aware all the time.

It puts us both under pressure. I've got to take on all the driving, the accounts and just everyday things. Peter's got no independence. If he wants to do something he needs me to stop what I am doing and help.

I get frustrated that I can't finish my own jobs. It gets tense sometimes. Just as well he is good looking.

LARS LINDBERG – WHY WORRY?

I was born in Sweden in 1927. I worked on the ships all my life. For years I worked in the engine room. Down there they had stokers who shovelled the coal. That was in the old days. Of course now there are steam turbines.

In August this year a melanoma was found at the back of my eye. I didn't want to have my eye out. Who would? And I'm eighty! (Patricia: A trustee was appointed but they didn't come to any meeting.) Eventually the doctors persuaded me because it hadn't spread and it was worth it.

I am still gardening. I do maintenance at the hostel, sweeping paths and that sort of thing. I

read constantly. I read the paper every day. I'd be lost without it. I take it with me everywhere so I don't get bored waiting for doctors and the like. I think boredom is the biggest killer.

Who wouldn't feel down for a bit? It is definitely a loss and an inconvenience. Since I lost the eye I feel worried about what's happening on the side that I can't see. You have to depend more on your hearing on that side than your sight.

I'm better off than if I'd lost my leg. I think, why worry? I've got one foot in the grave anyway. Why worry? I am a lucky man. I am looked after.

MIKE MURRAY - SOME THOUGHTS

For someone who is about to commence the treatment, may I say that that person is about to receive a fantastic, passionate service that is second to none and that he or she should feel very confident about that.

From a personal point, sometimes (in the early stages) one may feel that having an artificial eye is just so detectable, but in fact it is NOT!!! So many of my friends and family find difficulty in deciding which one it is!!

For cleaning purposes, I have found that I only have to take it out and rinse with running water, and this may only be once a month or if I have been gardening or something like that where some dust may be involved.

I am about to get a new set of glasses (as I wear them for reading purposes) and have been scripted for a slightly stronger lens. I have found it a bit of a strain when working at the computer each day. The optician has suggested that I wear glasses all of the time and that the lens should be multi functional. This is protection for that ONE and only asset and multi so I do not have to keep taking them off and putting them back on. Makes sense!

So I might just go for a daring, bright, crazy, stunning set of frames!! I might, I am not sure, I just might ...why not? I mean if you have to wear them all of the time, then why not? I might...I will let you know!

KENDALL VINCENT - DON'T STRESS

I had my eye removed when I was eighteen months old because of chronic fibrosis staphyloma. Mum still feels guilty – like it is something she did. I have never felt that way. It was just one of those things.

I remember as a kid when it was time for a new eye I could tell because it would fall out at school. I actually lost it one day at Ascot Water Playground. I swam around and found it again. Most kids at school didn't know I had an artificial eye. If they did find out they'd say, "what does it look like behind the eye?" A couple of times I showed close friends after school.

Once there was a boy I didn't like. I pretended to take my eye out and drop it in his drink. I actually dropped a ten-cent piece in instead but he was really freaked out. He went all white – it was great.

Turning 18, I discovered a useful advantage in having an artificial eye. I wasn't allowed to drive at night. This meant that when my friends and I headed off to the pub I didn't have to take a turn at skipper. Driving is still a bit interesting with the depth perception thing. Parking can be fun especially because I drive a big four-wheel drive Patrol.

My husband didn't see my eye socket for about five years. This was mainly because I don't take the eye out all that often. When he finally did see it he said, "Is that all?" Like, big deal.

I wear a large scleral lens over my good eye and people often mistake it for the artificial one. I recently met a two year old who had just lost an eye. I told her parents, "Don't stress. The new eye will just be part of her. She won't know any different."

JEAN HARTZ - KEEP BUSY

I was 32 years old, the mother of three small children, when diagnosed with a malignant tumour in my right eye, which had to be removed. Many years have passed since then, but I must say it is possible to live a normal life, doing everything a two-eyed person can do.

Over the years I have driven an ambulance for the almoners of Royal Perth Hospital, cars and buses for Red Cross, driven buses for Rocky Bay Crippled Children, and driven for Meals on Wheels. Also I have been to America to visit family, and have driven consistently over there on the wrong side of the road!

As a younger person I played tennis and golf, - not to any high standard, - nevertheless only having one eye was no deterrent.

It is best if you make sure you don't have time to feel sorry for yourself, keep busy. I think it also helped me at the time that my husband and children would joke and tell me that I was looking with the wrong eye, instead of sitting down and crying about it.

My best advice to anyone losing an eye is get on with your life, visit Paul and Jenny who perform their magic on you, they help you build your confidence, and leave you looking absolutely normal.

In fact my family tell me the last eye which I had made this year is better than my normal one!