

# Poems, Prayers, Prosthetics; An Adventure

by Cale Kenney

Not many people have the misfortune, or privilege, however you feel about it, to own and operate an artificial appendage. But those of us who do, through design or default, are privy to a few "different" experiences in life that can sometimes fall into the category of humorous. Or to the more pristine soul, morbidly funny to hilarious.

For us, prosthetics is not just another dirty word, nor a dirty profession, just an expensive and tongue-tripping name for that counterfeit "thing" that we strap onto our otherwise healthy bodies to take the place of that one, two or more fleshly outgrowths called limbs that we have somehow managed to lose in our lifetimes. Or temporarily misplace, if you believe the Christian Scientists that it all comes back to you.

"Is that a sprain?" an innocent young man asked me in Aspen one crisp winter night as I hobbled gracefully on the ice on my crutches.

"No, it's a sponge," I retorted, only to have the joke lost in his ignorance. How many people know that the latest in cosmesis of the prosthesis is the endoskeletal modular, an artificial leg made of sculpted foam on the outside and a steel tubular skeleton inside?

"What's wrong with your leg, darlin'?" another brave and curious soul asked me one day in a bar at Steamboat Springs last summer.

"Nothing. I hope," I responded dramatically.

"This thing cost \$2,400. Can't afford to break it."

"Oh, I'm soooooo sorry," he prostrated himself before me and begged me to forgive him for thinking the least.

"Don't be sorry," my quick friend Laura admonished. "Buy us a round of drinks and you'll be even." Always directly proportionate to the amount of respect and compassion your friends have for you is the amount of quipping advantage they'll take of your traumatic personal loss.

"Our one limb on foot in the grave aren't things precarious enough that you don't have to cup your ear every day to that inevitable questioning reminder, "What are you doing on crutches?"

"Motorcycle," I used to answer. This response, however true, proved unsatisfactory after a while as it usually invited further questioning of the gory details, or worse yet, somebody else's gory details. "My (uncle, cousin, brother, best friend, old boyfriend—you fill in the blanks) was in a motorcycle accident once." Sure, I can relate, but rather than bring up the past, I like to be current.

"Feel my thigh," I tell them in the saloons when a suave, debonair young man wants to know what's wrong with my leg. If they dare do that, they usually have the fortitude to sit through a small discourse on Bar Room Prosthetics, 101. And you know the guy has passed the course, when you turn the other cheek, in my case hard plastic, and they don't knock you on the side of the head for breaking the tips of their fingers on your bionic bun. What's good for the goose, can be painful for the gander.

But you know you're with a real smooth guy when he says, "You do more for a prosthesis than some women do for a French bathing suit."

"Crustacean Curves," my friend Fred calls me in reference to my "bucket socket" which is the plastic armadillo skin that wraps around my rib cage like a 19th century corset and supports the weight of the fake leg that is attached on the left side. Sometimes when he's being particularly lecherous he calls me Lobster Lady—soft on the inside, hard on the outside—and threatens to crack me with the biggest pair of nutcrackers known to man and dip me in a 100 pound vat of butter. Now there's a guy with imagination, or loose concepts, at least.

"Cosmesis of the Prosthesis" means that your artificial leg looks good, and like a real leg. It's harder for a woman than a man, because of the curves, but most prosthetists won't even try to make it look good. "Cause they're men and they think it's dumb. Frivolous. I'm lucky my leg man is a radical: he thinks you can have cosmesis without sacrificing functionality.

The only drawback to this is when you almost wish the thing didn't look so real.

One day on the Trailways bus from Amherst to Boston I sat next to a 14-year-old man of the world, the way small for his age, but what he

lacked in physical stature he made up for in bravado.

"Oh, ya. I skip school all the time and ride the bus to Boston. I cruise around the city and pick up new chicks."

"Well, that's great you're such an adventurer," I said and we talked of adventure until I started to get sleepy and ended the conversation by putting my head back and shutting my eyes.

have bringing her in their office and undressing her? Hmpf.

"Carolimb! Caught with our pants down again," I exclaimed to my better half. I picked her up, threw her over my shoulder, knee to foot hanging down my back like a ponytail, and, leaving the whole room wondering if this wasn't part of the handicapped skiers' booth consciousness-raising techniques, I bolted back



"Nothing's wrong with this leg, I hope. The thing cost me \$2,400. I can't afford to break it!"

When I awoke my seatmate was leaning back in ecstasy, mouth agape. I looked down to see him stroking my left thigh in such a slow, sensuous caress that I'm surprised the sponge didn't sizzle and melt. Of course I never felt a thing and was embarrassed. I hate to think what he thought he was doing for me. In retrospect, I think it would have been fun if I could have offered to take it off so he could get to know the object of his affections better.

You know your cosmesis is good, when someone thinks it's real and the leg is not even on you. Like the year I was at the ski show in Boston.

It was a long night with lots of walking. I longed to be a monopod. With one less leg to drag around I could slip through the crowds easier. I took my leg off in the ladies' room, thinking, "she'll be secure in here." I sat her on the stool and locked the door of the stall, and after throwing a skirt on, I climbed out from underneath. My jeans were still on the leg.

When I came back a half hour later, I was panicked. Could I be in the wrong bathroom? Carolimb was gone.

I walked outside and was grabbed by a Hynes Auditorium security guard. "Excuse me Miss, did you lose . . . ah, are you . . . ah . . . missing . . . ah . . ." He started out forcefully and was now faltering.

"Yes!" I was beside myself. "My prosthesis is gone! I'm looking for my leg. I left it in the ladies room and it is gone."

It turned out a washroom matron had fainted when she saw my leg, stretched out, jeans and one shoe, lying on the stall floor. It had apparently fallen off the stool. She thought it was a drug overdose.

So Security marched me to the Head Office, where the big show business people from Ski Magazine, Ski Industries of America and the ski show were hanging out. I played the scene to the hilt. I mean, I was mad. What right did they

to the ladies' room, this time to reunite.

Nah, it's not all fun and games. Sometimes it's sad. Like when you have to get a new one, because your old model doesn't work anymore. You have to throw away that thing that was a part of you for so long, that you had just got used to.

Or, of course, you can make a planter out of it, pawn it, have it bronzed and put on your parents' T.V. set, disassemble the ribcage bucket from the leg and use it for a creative trash receptacle, or have it mounted at your local taxidermist even. Too bad you couldn't trade it in for parts. Now that would be profitable.



## Financing Sought

Project Masters, a public relations firm from Miami, Florida, is conducting an extensive promotional tour to increase financial support of the National Handicapped Ski Championships.

Representatives of the firm are visiting with executives of several large corporations, television stations and newspapers in New York, Atlanta, Dallas, Minneapolis, Chicago and California seeking their support. A segment of NBC's "Real People" filmed at last year's Nationals, and some race film footage, is being shown to the executives to increase their awareness of the skiing championships.

For the second year, Project Masters will also coordinate the production of a race schedule and magazine which covers the National Handicap Championships. Advertising and stories about competitors are being solicited. Any written materials or pictures that could be included in the magazine should be submitted to the Handicap National Promotion Office, 3550 Biscayne Blvd. Suite 500 Miami, Florida 33137.