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Clinical Anaplastologist's Lifelike Prosthetics Change Lives

Clinical Anaplastologist Makes Realistic Prosthetics for Physical Impairments

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"Art is contemplation. It is the pleasure of the mind which searches into nature and which there divines the spirit of which Nature herself is animated."

- Augusté Rodin

Some say that art imitates life. Others say that life imitates art. In Robert Barron's hands, art becomes life. In his clinical anaplastology practice Mr. Barron specializes in creating facial prosthesis for correction of facial defects. His practice is called Custom Prosthetic Designs, Inc., and the website address is www.prosthesis.com.⁴

Mr. Barron works with patients of all ages with defects caused by [congenital conditions](#),⁵ diseases such as [cancer](#),⁶ or physical trauma. [microtia](#),⁷ [artesia](#), [Goldenhar syndrome](#),⁸ and [Treacher Collins Syndrome](#)⁹ are common causes of ear deformity.

Individuals with facial physical differences may suffer physically and psychologically. They endure embarrassment from the stares of people who are curious about their differences. Some, especially children, suffer painful harassment and hurtful comments from others who either intentionally or unintentionally may point out their differences. They may also suffer physical and emotional injury from [bullying in schools](#)¹⁰ and in public. There is a deeply scarring pain that sometimes leads to [severe depression](#),¹¹ hopelessness, or even thoughts of, or attempts at, [suicide](#).¹² Robert Barron's work has been emotionally healing and physically transforming lives for people with physical deformities for over fifteen years.

In the past, options for children and adults with facial deformities were limited. Some lived with the pain without further treatment, retreating into depression or leading lives of isolation. For others, corrective surgery was the only option made available to them. Those seeking reconstructive surgery often endured multiple difficult and painful operations. As with any surgery, a reconstructive surgery carried risks such as life-threatening infection. In many cases, surgery left the patients with little or no improvement in appearance or scars worse than their original deformities.

Failed [reconstructive surgery](#)¹³ happens because surgeons are usually working with distorted anatomy to begin with. The lack of realism is often caused by problems such as insufficient tissue to use for reconstruction, [atrophy](#)¹⁴ of tissue, [scar tissue](#)¹⁵ and color differences in tissues.

Surgery involved significant costs and loss of work or school time. In some cases, patients were unaware that prosthetics were an alternative option and how strikingly realistic they could be.

Clinical anaplastologists such as Robert Barron provide not just a viable option, but a life-changing alternative to corrective surgery. One glance at Robert Barron's work triggers an automatic double take. One finds oneself squinting at it, looking closer, the mind telling itself the prosthetic is not real. But the eye protests, saying of course it is real . . . look closer. The detail



Anaplastologist at Work
Photo Courtesy of
Robert Barron

of the work is a marriage of artistry and science fused by Mr. Barron's natural talents and more than twenty years as a Senior Advanced Disguise Specialist with the Central Intelligence Agency.

Yes, as it turns out, the [CIA](#)¹⁶ really does have agents traipsing about behind other people's faces á la *Mission Impossible*. In a clandestine world where lives depend upon hair-splitting detail and realism, Robert Barron's hands crafted facial appliances are indistinguishable from real human features. Upon his retirement, in 1993, he turned his talents to [prosthetics](#)¹⁷ and helping others to live lives more fully and comfortably by restoring their appearances with striking fidelity.

Mr. Barron's passion for helping others is apparent in the way he talks about his patients. He speaks most fondly of children who have been through emotional physical trauma and enter his office afraid. "I tell them that nothing I do will hurt," he says. Barron takes pride in knowing these kids will go from being teased to becoming a hero to other kids at home. "This time, people will talk about them in a positive way," he says. Barron's attention to detail goes beyond the visual. He works closely with his patients and their doctors to gather detail about their lives to understand how the prosthetic can be designed to benefit them the most. In some instances for example, the design of prosthetic ears can increase a patient's hearing by improving the flow of sound waves into the ear canal and toward the eardrum. Prosthetic ears can be designed to support a patient's glasses.

Construction of a prosthetic ear involves four main steps. An impression is taken and a mirror image is sculpted from clay, and a silicone material is used to create the image, and the prosthetic is tinted to visually blend with the surrounding skin tissue. Mr. Barron models his prosthetics using his patient's anatomy as a model when possible. An ear impression may be taken from the patient's unaffected ear. Models may also be made from photos and with consideration of family characteristics. Mr. Barron typically completes the process in two to three office visits. More complex prosthetic devices may take longer. The creation and fitting of the silicone prosthetic is completely painless and is conducted in a relaxed office environment. In some cases, [medical insurance helps to cover the costs of prosthetics](#).¹⁸

- See more [photos of Mr. Barron's fascinating work](#).¹⁹
- For more information on Robert Barron's practice, visit [www.prosthesis.com](#).²⁰

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