

MEET LESZEK KLOSZEWSKI

Leszek (pronounced Lessek) is a Prosthetist at the Burwood Limb Centre and this is his story.

Leszek was born in Warsaw, Poland in 1957

and is the oldest of 3 sons and both his younger brothers remain living in Poland. Leszek's Dad was employed as a scientist in the Polish military specialising in physics and his mother was a doctor. Sadly, his mother passed away in 2014 after a battle

with cancer. Because of his father's employment, the family moved all around Poland so Leszek attended many different schools but after leaving secondary school, he undertook studies at a leading facility for 2 years at the Warsaw Technical Institute where his subjects were physics and applied chemistry. He said that one of his teachers, Professor Kaliski, was the inventor of the "laser".

During his 2nd

year, martial law was declared by the military in this communist country and Leszek, as with many "solidarity" members, was taken to an internment camp where he spent almost a year. Leszek was released but he had no job and was denied re-entry back in to the Technical Institute as they claimed there were no records of him ever attending previously. Higher education in Poland seemed closed to him. Leszek started job training at the Warsaw Rehabilitation Centre in the field of prosthetics. He participated in the innovative project of Professor Marian Weiss which was immediate prosthesis fitting after amputation. During this time in communist Poland, he said that he was constantly under the

watchful eye of the authorities and he was forbidden to travel outside of Poland as he was refused a passport. He had married in 1985 and Leszek had forged contacts with some people from the International Committee of the Red Cross based in Geneva. In 1987, he was offered the opportunity to assist with a prosthetic project of ICRC in war torn Mozambique where many people had suffered limb loss due to accidents



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with Russian landmines. He accepted the role and later, in 1987, his wife joined him there after having given birth to a baby daughter. Leszek said that access to components was extremely difficult and he had to use his creativity to fashion prostheses out of natural products...including making an arm for a patient using an accelerator cable from a motorcycle. Upon leaving Mozambique, Leszek and his family moved to Holland to work for a large prosthetic company based in Arnhem. He said that over the next 25 years, he had 5-6 different roles. He worked in all possible positions related to the profession of "Orthopedisch Instrumentmaker" from technician to production manager. At that time, Poland freed itself from the Russian occupation and the borders to Europe were opened. After the borders were freed up, he would regularly return to Poland to visit with family & friends, a drive of over 1000kms each way but made easier by the famous German autobahns where speed is not an issue. It was about 2007 when he bought land in Poland and started building a house and a prosthetic "atelier" (workshop). His wife chose to stay in The Netherlands and they made a decision to separate. He then met with his current partner, Louisa, around 2010. They had been friends at school but re-connected all those years later. Leszek said that he was well known and highly respected by the amputee community in Holland and he attained a higher level of accreditation by



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completing 4 years of study there before gaining his post graduate diploma from Strathclyde University in Glasgow. In 2008, he started his own company, "Proteza.Com" back in Poland. Patients from Poland, Ukraine and all over Europe started coming to his small "atelier" for individual prosthetic fitting. In 2012, he was involved in an accident which left him with serious injuries and he had to learn to walk again. By 2017, he realised the need to provide another challenge in his life and resigned from the company he had set up and started looking at possibilities of employment overseas. In 2019, he made enquiries with the NZ Artificial Limb Service and was invited to come to NZ in early 2020 whereupon he started working at the Burwood Centre on February 2nd, just before our first lockdown. His partner, Louisa, who had arrived in NZ with Leszek, has had to return to Poland to help look after elderly family members but intends returning to NZ as soon as she is able to.

FAVOURITE FOOD: Ethnic Polish dishes and seafood.

FAVOURITE ACTIVITIES/HOBBIES: Tramping, mountaineering, ice climbing, all outdoor pursuits, alternative medicine and healing.

FAVOURITE MUSIC: Classical & jazz. **FAVOURITE MOVIE:** Out of Africa.

FAVOURITE BOOKS: Enjoys reading biographies and history books.

Leszek admitted that the greatest risk he ever took was to start his own company in Poland given the unstable political environment. He has vast travel experience including ALL of Europe, Africa, The Americas and now NZ is his home. Leszek said

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he gains a lot of satisfaction being hands on with clients and making a difference in their lives by using his experience and creativity to overcome technical challenges.

Leszek said he finds it hard to “comply” as he feels he is an individualist but thoroughly enjoys working with his fellow staff at the Burwood Centre and he does feel proud to be part of the team. He has found the NZ people to be very friendly and accepting and knows that the decision to travel all the way around the world to start this new chapter of his life was the correct one.

