

BIZARRE JOB 1.3: WINDOWS TO THE SOUL?

Name: Beryl Carvalho

Age: Unavailable at time of going to press

Occupation: Ocularist - Artificial eye technician

When did you realise you wanted to become an ocularist?

And what made you choose this job?

I worked for an optometrist as a receptionist/assistant and "saw" this as a stepping stone to making eyes. It became something I just had to do.

Do you make a comfortable living?

Yes. A single eye can cost up to R5000. We make one eye a day.

Describe the process involved in making a new eye for somebody?

We specialize in custom-made artificial eyes – individually designed for each client. We take a jelly like impression to get the shape and size of the eye socket. From there we hand paint the iris (pupil) and cure an acrylic which we copy from the white of the patient's eye. Then we copy the veins – done with a polyester thread - and lastly place a layer of clear plastic over the eye so that it shines and has a 'life' of its own.

What is the most rewarding and unrewarding thing involved in your job?

It's rewarding to see the appreciation from a client who likes what we've done for them. It's unrewarding when you have to deal with an eye that just won't fit, no matter what you do.

Describe the most bizarre way someone has lost their eye?

An old man we once knew sneezed his eye out. That's the most bizarre, although we also know of a young girl who was sitting casually swinging her jersey around and the zip caught her in the eye and yanked her eye out.

Do you ever feel like you're being watched?

Yes – in my dreams. When I first started I used to have this dream about a million eyes circling around me, watching me. It was quite horrendous.

Have you ever been tempted to play practical jokes on people using the eyes?

Yes – often. We've put eyes in coffee cups and ice cubes. Recently we were asked to send an optometrist a sample eye. He specifically wanted a brown one. When we sent the envelope we marked it 'body parts' and we covered it in fake blood, leaking all over the place. We have also made eyes for people with the SA flag in the pupil, and one old man even wanted a hole drilled in his pupil so he could hang a chain from his eye to his ear, attached to his ear-ring.

