

# Get Make-up in Here, Stat!

'ER' team recreates bizarre injuries

by Chris Koseluk

**IF THERE'S ONE THING** *Untold Stories of the ER* has proven over 100-plus episodes, it's that you never know what will come through the doors of a hospital's emergency room. Gunshot wounds, severed limbs, heart attacks, hatchets in the head, worm infestations, tree limbs in the neck, mysterious maladies, even a demonic possession—the show has featured them all. And each new trauma presents the show's make-up artists with a unique challenge.

"There was something different every single day," said **Trudy Parisien**, who served as the key make-up artist during the series' most recent season. "It kept you on your toes."

"Tons of crazy stories ... never the same thing twice," agreed **Brian Hicks**, who created the show's special make-up effects for seasons two, three and four. "From a hook in the eye to a missing arm ... there was one where a girl swallowed a fork and I had to recreate the inside of a mouth."

Currently running on both The Learning Channel and Discovery Fit & Health, *Untold Stories of the ER* is one of cable's hidden treasures. Although the show was once on the verge of cancellation, GRB Entertainment will start shooting a sixth season in August if all goes according to schedule. Credit an appealing format that puts the actual ER doctors on camera, relating their most unusual on-the-job incidents as actors re-enact them.

Hicks learned what he was in for on his very first episode. He had to recreate the aftermath of a car crash in which a metal fence pole went through the chest of the driver before continuing into the back seat and through the leg of another female passenger. Both girls were still attached when they arrived at the ER. The pole was too close to the first girl's heart to be moved without endangering her life.

As it would be very uncomfortable for the two actresses playing the crash victims to remain linked throughout the shoot, Hicks rigged a pole that could be taken apart easily. Starting with a PVC pipe, he painted it to look like a piece of cyclone fence and broke it into sections.

"It helped because it was lightweight," said Hicks, who runs the Burbank-based Lunar Effects. "Our challenge was to attach the girls together and make sure the poles were lined up correctly. We did a lifecast on the girl's shoulder and chest for the first piece and made a Vac-U-Form piece underneath to help hold it. And then we realized that instead of attaching the two pieces to the first

Flesh-eating diseases (FROM TOP), scarring and amputations are all in a day's work for the 'ER' make-up team.



Photos courtesy of Trudy Parisien

girl, it would be best if we attached it to the second girl's leg and had it meet up with a little socket in the first girl's back."

Parisien became an expert at creating bruising and wounds. One of her toughest tasks was creating four different stages of a flesh-eating disease. And then there was the bulging aorta.

"They ended up going over budget with some prosthetic pieces like a forearm and some rotting flesh. I had to basically draw in a bulging aorta," she said. "I couldn't make it look bulging without a prosthetic piece. I think that was the most challenging—to make it look real when it wasn't real."

Realism remains a top priority for the make-up artists who, in addition to Hicks and Parisien, have included **Liz Pisano**, **Michelle Chung**, **Danielle Lyn Saunders** and **Marjorie Wood** at various times throughout the run. Parisien would constantly surf the Internet for reference images. Hicks reveals that, on occasion, he was given photos of the actual victim.

But a great reference source turned out to be the doctors themselves. "Just talking with them really helps to get the story down correctly," said Hicks, whose credits also happen to include the medical comedy *Scrubs*.

"Mostly, it was coloring," said Parisien about the advice the doctors offered. "They'd be like, 'More blue, more blue ... more blue on the lips.' It was things like that."

