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# Under The Microscope

This is an inspirational *autobiography* which will delight for generations to come.  
Most importantly, it will encourage young people on a journey of ambition to succeed, to fulfil  
their dreams. PROFESSOR MARIE R BASHIR AC CVO GOVERNOR OF NEW SOUTH WALES

# under the microscope

THE STORY OF AN AUSTRALIAN MEDICAL PIONEER  
PROFESSOR EARL OWEN



VINTAGE



## **Synopsis**

Under the Microscope is the story of an extraordinary man, his many life-changing inventions, and his exceptional life and special friendships. Born into a family of doctors - on the paternal and maternal sides - with a birth defect that no one knew how to treat, Earl Owen was given a dose of radiation before anyone knew what radiation treatment could do to a human body, let alone a newborn baby. Earl Owen's medical parents, aunts and uncles failed to notice that as he grew he walked with a limp and when he was eleven he had an accident in a school race, which left him in hospital for a year enduring a series of excruciating surgeries in an attempt to remedy his damaged bones. Whilst lying in bed alone in a dark basement room in the hospital, he decided he would grow up to be the a new kind of surgeon - one who would deal delicately and carefully with birth defects and would communicate sensitively with patients. When he was discharged from the hospital he took up piano lessons and discovered he was a talented musician. As he came out of his teens, he had to decide whether to pursue a career as a concert pianist or a surgeon. To say this man is a high achiever barely touches on his gifts and talents. He was one of the earliest, most inventive and enterprising pioneers of microsurgery; he designed instruments and microscopes for his operations; he did the first finger replacement on a child (for which he was sacked from the Sydney Children's Hospital, even though it was successful operation); co-led the team that completed the first successful hand transplant (whose recipient turned out to be an ex-con from New Zealand, who had lost his arm in jail); and trained the team that completed the first double-hand transplant. Earl Owen was the first surgeon to be able to reverse vasectomies and complete fallopian tube ligatures (using his microsurgical prowess). And he designed the chairs in the Sydney Opera House! He has done more in his eighty years than most of us could dream of and this book is his story in his words.

## **Book Information**

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## Customer Reviews

After reading this fascinating autobiography of the remarkable Australian microsurgery pioneer, Earl Owen, I looked for further information about him on Wikipedia and was amazed to not find an entry. Had he been a sportsman or a politician he would be a household name, however I had never heard of him before. Born into a family of doctors in 1933, his early life led to his desire to become a caring doctor who specialised in treating children. Born with a huge tumour (a hemangioma) on his leg that no one knew how to treat in the 1930s so they blasted it with their new X-ray machine, damaging the skin and bone and causing lifelong problems for Earl. These days we know it is benign and would have regressed in its own. When he was eleven a slow growing tumour caused by the earlier excessive radiation caused his bone to shatter and he subsequently spent the better part of a year in hospital in traction isolated in a small, dark basement room, undergoing one failed operation after another. It was this experience, where he was lonely and bored and no one explained what was happening to him that made him decide to become a better type of doctor. After his medical degree at the University of Sydney Owen went on to advanced surgical training at London's famous Greater Ormond St Hospital for Children. It was here that he first became interested in microsurgery and went on to design the world's first surgical microscope as well as specialised microsurgical instruments that he had specially made. His description of surgery and hospitals in the 1950s is fascinating as is his description of the birth of microsurgery and his battles to convince older surgeons and hospital heads that the impossible could be done. Upon returning to Sydney, Owen continued to pioneer microsurgery and describes his early research perfecting his technique, his worldwide workshops to teach others his innovative techniques and the clinical breakthroughs. He had many firsts including the first to sew back on a child's severed finger, the first vasectomy reversal and fallopian tube ligation reversal, all procedures we take for granted these days. He was also involved in the first hand transplant, double hand transplant and

face transplant. And just in case you think that isn't enough to get you your own page in Wikipedia, he was an excellent pianist, lectured in Music at the University of Sydney and designed the new chairs in the Sydney Opera House! Owen has a simple writing style and knows how to tell a good story without getting bogged down in medical jargon. It's a great story to tell and I was saddened to read that this remarkable man died in 2014 not long after the publication of his autobiography.

Fabulous story. I had just finished reading "A man who must be Obeid", so the contrast of two men who live in the same city is stark and Earl Owen restores my faith in human beings. I was beginning to think that human nature is inherently weak but some people are strong, have principles, compassion, sensitivity and are wonderful human beings. Let's hope there are other principalled people like Earl to take us into the future and less "grubs" like the filthy, disgraceful, corrupt Obeid family and clan.

A profoundly moving and inspirational biography of a man who, by any standards, was exceptional. A man who was a gifted achiever in many diverse fields.

I enjoy biographies, and found it very interesting that when the surgical instruments he needed were not available he designed his own and found experts to make them. Professor Owen was an extremely gifted person who used his talents for the benefit of others.

Such a life!

What an interesting read of such a pioneering man. From a difficult childhood to a challenging adulthood. I'd thoroughly recommend this.

9/10 as person, 6/10 as writer

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