

February | March 2014

# 50 something

AUSTRALIA'S WIDEST CIRCULATING OVER-50S MAGAZINE

## **Snow Siren**

Antarctica's Icy Charms

## **Classic Chocolate Mousse**

The French Way

## **Taking Flight**

Sochi's Older Skiers

## **Your Medicines**

Question! Question!  
Question!

## **Setting Up A Business**

All You Need to Know



# Kathy Lette

Why I Rejected George Clooney

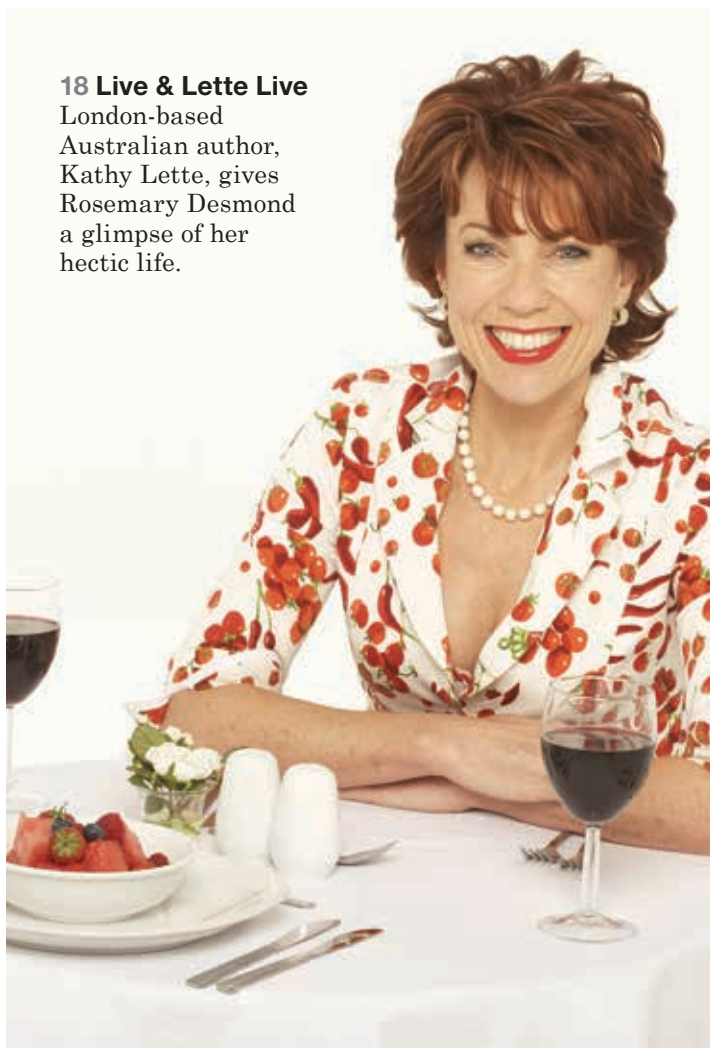


# 50something

AUSTRALIA'S WIDEST CIRCULATING OVER-50S MAGAZINE

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London-based Australian author, Kathy Lette, gives Rosemary Desmond a glimpse of her hectic life.



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This issue is about love. Deep enduring love.

In "First Up", we mark 50 years since Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton first married. In the photograph, Taylor walks the Oscars red carpet wearing a gift from Burton – a 69.42 carat diamond. They met on the set of Cleopatra in 1963. She played the title role and he, her lover Mark Antony. Their marriage lasted ten years. A year after their divorce they remarried. A year later they divorced again. It was, people said, a love too big to last.

For the vivacious Kathy Lette, the love is not for actor George Clooney who she turned down while working as a Hollywood scriptwriter.

It's for her son Julius. On page 18, she tells of her experience raising a son with Asperger's and of the incredible young man he is now.

On page 20, love shines through adversity. Relationship counsellor Sandra Kimble, more used to navigating other couples' lives, generously shares her own story about husband Tom's Alzheimer's diagnosis at only age 63. Suddenly, she says, they were two ordinary people facing extraordinary circumstances.

This Valentine's Day take a moment to honour your own deep enduring love. An exquisite mauve orchid (p37) and a silky chocolate mousse (p38) will inspire.

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contributors



Sandra Kimball has worked in mental health for over 25 years as a therapist, writer and educator in Australia and internationally. She is a relationship counsellor who offers couples retreats in Northern NSW and the author of *Relationships in Our 50's, 60's and Beyond – How Yours Can Survive and Thrive*, available at [www.byrontherapy.com.au](http://www.byrontherapy.com.au)



Mark Clements is head of orchid research at the Centre for Australian National Biodiversity Research at the Australian National Herbarium, in Canberra. His current research includes an orchid recovery plan for two nationally threatened species. He also maintains the Australian Orchid Names Index for all native orchid taxa.



Natasha Maynard, from Brisbane firm CRH Law, completed a Bachelor of Laws and Bachelor of Arts in 2005, and was admitted as a Barrister and Solicitor in New Zealand in 2006 and as a Solicitor in Queensland in 2008. Natasha's practice areas are commercial, property and not-for profit law.



Thomas E. Muller has spent a total of two months in Antarctica, his favourite continent. The 74-year-old retired professor and National Seniors life member explores the far reaches of the Earth, hoping to encourage others to do the same. His adventures are featured on [www.KnowYourEarth.net](http://www.KnowYourEarth.net)



Ian Malin has written for the *Guardian* and *Observer* newspapers for the last 30 years. He is the author of two books, *Mud, Blood and Money*, *English Rugby Goes Professional*; and a history of the England rugby union team. This issue he goes in search of the Winter Olympics' oldest competitor.



*50 something's* Agony Planner scribe is ipac technical services head, Colin Lewis. Colin has over 20 years' experience in superannuation and retirement incomes and has held senior regulatory, consulting and technical roles throughout the financial services industry.

**National Seniors**  
Australia

**Men's business**

Your 58-year-old patient, Vince, should have a cardiology referral for a number of reasons (Doug Lording, "Men's Business", *50 something*, Dec 2013/Jan 2014). His GP should stop him smoking, as smoking is a contributing factor to his erectile dysfunction (ED). He should also be sent to a dietician, but because the ED is presumably caused by vascular disease, he should see a cardiologist, not only to have his blood pressure treated (any elevation of blood pressure should be treated and not ignored, provided the pressure rise is persistent and not just a one off "white coat" hypertension). He should have a full cardiac work up and, depending on the findings by the cardiologist, he may also have an angiogram (dye into the heart blood vessel) to see if he has a blockage of any vessels. Most importantly he must stop smoking.

**Dr Tibor Pietzsch**  
**Townsville Q**

**Family home in the assets test?**

We are concerned the federal government or a lobby group may want to include the family home in an assets test that would seriously disadvantage a large number of people dependent on the Age Pension. This would be an impost not on today's value but later in life as the home increases in value over time.

Often government puts out these suggestions to test public reaction before proceeding. We hope National Seniors looks into this and provides serious opposition on behalf of those currently receiving the pension and those who would be eligible in the future.

**Ian & Sandra Gillies**  
**Angaston SA**

*Ed: National Seniors will oppose any moves to include the family home in the age pension assets test. This is a proposal raised by another interest group in the Commission of Audit submission process. If this is important to you, let us know. Email us at 50something@nationalseniors.com.au*

**Free camping**

Michael Kuilboer (Letters, *50 something*, Dec 2013/Jan 2014) should know that there are grey nomads who avoid caravan parks, their bright lights,

close neighbours, rules and regulations, not because they're miserly.

Free camps allow one to get close to nature, build camp-fires in appropriate places, and enjoy the beauty of the night sky while listening to natural sounds in peace and quiet.

Some people prefer the natural environment, rather than spending their time in a miniature "suburbia", meeting people instead of native fauna. These grey nomads are more likely than their city counterparts to enjoy the environment and treat it with respect.

Don't knock them.

**H Beneke**  
**Banksia Beach Q**

**Enjoy time left**

My experiences tell me that behind Peter Talbot's brief note there is a great deal of pain, bewilderment and a sense of hopelessness ("Letters", *50 something*, Dec 2013/Jan 2014). May Peter and his wife enjoy their time left together. I, too, have experienced the saga of my husband's serious medical situations as a country town resident. This lasted over 11 years and is taking more to describe than a brief letter. A lesson must surely be learnt from these stories.

**Elspeith Hennessy**  
**Broome WA**

**Work and save**

I am nearly 78-years-old and growing tired of the complaining about how hard life is for retirees.

I divorced at 50-plus and had less than \$8000 to see me out. At that age work was scarce, so I went contracting, with no overtime, holiday pay, or penalty rates, just a flat rate per hour.

Over the next 20 years I worked in every state of Australia and also Papua New Guinea, all on contract.

A lot of years were spent in outback mine sites but by working up to 60 hours per week, not buying caravans, boats, current model cars and such, I managed to gradually build up a bank balance.

I put any spare money into properties over a lot of years and by frugal living created my own 'superannuation' at the time the government brought in their compulsory system.

I retired at 71 by realising my assets. I now own my modest home, my car, have more shirts than I will ever wear out and have enough left over, thanks to the pension to have an occasional holiday in a hired motor home.

Life could be a lot worse.

All I can say to those approaching 'that age' is get yourself right out of debt by busting your backside, and don't waste your production on gambling, expensive trips and 'McMansions'.

**JM**  
**Redcliffe Q**



**Pay on time**

I was dismayed and disappointed, to read that “almost 250,000 senior households have been unable to pay their utility bills on time” (‘Bills stack up’, *50 something*, Dec 2013/Jan 2014).

I thought most Centrelink customers would be aware that it costs nothing to get Centrelink to make regular periodic payments to utility providers on your behalf. Just make an appointment and then arrive with your utility bills, including council rates, and, within a few minutes, arrangements will be in place to make payments.

This will not stop people getting bills but when they do arrive the bills will be greatly reduced to the point that after about 12 months many people will receive their accounts and they may be in credit. The other benefit is that pensioners will know that whatever Centrelink deposits in their account is money for their own use after the bills have been paid.

**Kev Cummins**  
**Nowra NSW**

**Expensive coffee**

My week started with a coffee bought at my favourite shop but it turned out to be the most expensive coffee I have ever bought.

I was well known to the shop’s staff, except to the new girl who served me that day.

I went about my daily business until I received a call from my bank to ask if I had been doing my Christmas Shopping online.

I told the bank that the last transaction I made was at the coffee shop.

It turned out that the new girl who served me that day didn’t return my card, instead she went shopping, spending \$6000 in three hours! I nearly fainted. Fortunately, within a week the bank refunded my money and the girl was caught red-handed.

Please keep a close eye on your credit cards as you never know who is serving you.

**Freda Garas**  
**Melrose Park SA**

**Vale David Deans**

I was very sad to read in *50 something* (‘The Last Word’, Dec 2013/Jan 2014) that our former chief executive David Deans had passed away.

I was fortunate to be appointed as Charter President of the Brighton Branch in South Australia of National Seniors Association from 2001 to 2004 and Zone Chair for South Australia from September 2001 until May 2008.

At zone meetings and the AGM, both David Deans and I were early risers and when I went into the dining room, David inevitably invited me to join him for breakfast.

This talented gentleman always gave me confidence in myself and good advice on my duties.

David was a 24/7 hands-on person with National Seniors and I was very sorry when he resigned in 2006 due to ill health.

Many thanks David.

**Ray Edwards**  
**Brighton SA**

**Chatter Blogs****On car industry subsidies...**

“Holden is like any other business, it has to remain viable to exist. I had my own business and if I failed to make a profit it was my responsibility, and I didn’t expect a Government to come to my aid” – **Grimbo**

“If we want to trade internationally we must have something to trade and manufacturing provides that for us. The Government has some serious thinking to do to better place Australia for the future” – **Bob B**

**On a \$6 GP charge...**

“I disagree with this proposal as I see it as the thin end of a wedge. This is a cynical exercise in wealth distribution from the poor to the rich” – **Romaine**

“We have to do something to stop the spiraling cost of health care. \$5 per visit is peanuts” – **Young Val**



*Find the Members’ Forum blog at [www.nationalseniors.com.au](http://www.nationalseniors.com.au)*



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The **Easy Discovery 4** has big raised buttons and large fonts, and a simplified menu with quick access to frequently used phone functions. Its ‘Hear the Number’ function means the phone will speak each number back to you as you type.

**Dr Tibor Pietzsch** wins a **TEAC DVD Micro System** for the letter on page 9.

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*Letters may be edited for brevity and clarity*

We have all seen the consequences of the 'Not In My Backyard' or NIMBY movement. Think of that social or industrial development that has wide community support – as long as it's in someone else's neighbourhood.

I have been reflecting on the NIMBY circumstances that arise in a different context. My reflections were fine-tuned by the many reports about how the Government could manage the financial outlook. Some of the commentary is quite extreme, far removed from human realities.

Much of the reflection has been in the context of the Federal Government's Commission of Audit. Commentators suggest efficiencies can be found in the public service; foreign aid and research budgets; the Coalition's proposed maternity leave scheme; and industry subsidies such as those enjoyed by General Motors Holden. Fees for Medicare-funded GP visits and overseas consular support are being touted as revenue raisers.

This comes not long after 2013 National Seniors membership polling which revealed a strong emphasis on economic management and a sustainable budget. In what's shaping up to be a year of cost-cutting, how do we reconcile better economic management with preserving long-accepted initiatives in areas ranging from health to retirement income?

This is classic NIMBY territory for all interest groups. Industry wants cuts in social areas but demands further deregulation, export development and training support.

Welfare groups want stronger safety nets, and the slashing of industry subsidies and retiree incentives.

Retirees themselves have little capacity to respond to the costs resulting from unforeseen policy changes. Pre retirees want their savings and superannuation outlook maintained. Both groups question measures such as school kids' bonuses and extended maternity leave.

In the fragmented health sector, competing interests will press to protect their patch while pushing reform in other areas. So far, the focus has been on the \$6 GP visit fee with little mention of drug subsidies, the Pharmacy Agreement, the medical colleges, dental services, and state and Commonwealth duplication.

For a new Government the challenge is significant. Unemployment is tipped to trend upwards, exacerbating the pressure on welfare demands. The community wants better economic management but not at the expense of core values such as a fair go and strong safety nets. It will also expect any pain is distributed across society – consumers, business, all age groups and interests. No exceptions.

Finally, cutting expenditure has a role but so too does stimulating economic growth. The lessons from Europe provide a lesson on the need for growth and stimulation.

Now, watch the Nimbians run riot. ■



Michael O'Neill  
CEO National Seniors Australia

## The recent constitutional overhaul has given National Seniors members greater opportunity to contribute to, and influence, the direction of their organisation.

Now, we want to hear from people who would like to be part of this new era.

We need to establish a reformed National Council, an expanded Board Appointments Committee and create a National Policy Congress. Opportunities also exist in our State Policy Advisory Groups. All are central to the success of the organisation.

The over 50s are a diverse group. If you believe your life or professional experience would be valuable to National Seniors, please contact us.

Your contribution, whilst amounting to only several days a year, will be vital to the organisation.

For full position descriptions visit [www.nationalseniors.com.au](http://www.nationalseniors.com.au) or ring Gail (07) 3233 9189 for a printed copy.

Written expressions of interest will be required to assist with the selection process.



David Carvosso  
Chairman

Michael O'Neill  
Chief Executive

**National Seniors**  
Australia





# Live & Lette Live!

A witty and still ‘fiercely proud Australian’, author and girl-about-London-town Kathy Lette, 55, gives Rosemary Desmond a glimpse into her very busy world.



From bored high school dropout to a literary tour de force, Kathy Lette has been turning the book world on its head since *Puberty Blues* burst on the scene in 1979.

She can add to her CV “writer in residence” at London’s Savoy Hotel, as well as the authorship of a number of books, including a water-resistant one designed to be read in the bath.

The often outrageous Kathy once took friend John Mortimer to a lap dance club for his 80th birthday. She has also been photographed meeting the Queen in an outfit screen-printed with corgis.

Kathy, who once turned down a date with a budding American actor named George Clooney, is now married to high profile human rights lawyer Geoffrey Robertson. Together they have a son and a daughter.

I read that you left school at 16 ...why so young?

I’m an autodidact – it means self-taught. I was bored at school. I couldn’t understand why teachers spent the first few years teaching you to talk ...and the rest of the time telling you to shut up. Even though I was an A student, I left straight after my school certificate, much to my mother’s horror. She was a headmistress. But my determination to show her that failure wasn’t the only thing I could be a success at, did prove a strong motivating factor.

How much of *Puberty Blues* is based on your own life experiences?

Surviving one puberty is difficult enough. Well, I’m about to endure my fourth. First there was my real puberty, then the book *Puberty Blues*, then the Bruce Beresford film and now, in my 50s, I’m reliving it all again in the TV mini-series. I recently watched the Beresford movie for the first time in 25 years. It was like watching a home movie. The boys I grew up with disproved the theory of evolution. They were evolving into apes. Yes, they had serious pecs appeal and twinkly eyes, but also a three grunt vocabulary of “na”, “dunno” and “ergggh”. Women were little more than a life support system to a pair of breasts. All we were allowed to do was mind the towel, fetch the Chiko roll and massage male egos. Still, it’s been exciting to have the book reinterpreted for a younger audience. The book and film have achieved cult notoriety. I have lived in London for 23 years and young Aussies still dash up to me in the street gasping “Go get me a Chiko roll and DON’T TAKE A BITE OUT OF IT ON THE WAY OR YOU’RE DROPPED!!”

Why did you turn down a date with George Clooney?

A couple of producers at Columbia Studios had read my novel *Girls’ Night Out* and invited me to Hollywood to work as a staff writer on this very successful sitcom called *The Facts of Life*. One of the female teen characters needed a boyfriend, so we cast this unknown actor called George Clooney. He asked me out. I said no. “I’m a writer,” I said, haughtily. “I don’t go out with actors. They put other people’s words in their mouths...and you never know where they’ve been!” Years later, I’m in London, two babies, covered in vomit, haven’t slept for years...when one of my old writer pals visited me from Hollywood. *ER* was on in the background. “Oh, look at that Doctor Ross,” I sighed. “I could swim through my own drool to get near that love god.” My writer pal looked at me askance. “But that’s George Clooney.

He's the guy we cast in the *Facts of Life*. I lay in the fetal position for two weeks, sobbing.

*The Boy Who Fell to Earth* tackles the subject of autism. Was it difficult for you to write that as the mother of a son diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome?

Two years ago I started writing my 11th comic novel, and suddenly this other book about a single mother raising a child with Asperger's came pouring out. *The Boy Who Fell To Earth*

is a fictional tale – I planned not to mention my personal angle on the story. But then I was asked by a journo, if it

was true that my own son has Asperger's. I was flummoxed. Lying would imply that I was embarrassed about my child and the opposite is true. I am fiercely proud of him. As my son was then 21, I decided to ask his advice. Jules loves the novel and is sure, in his words, 'that it will make people more understanding and less judgmental.' He hopes the book will encourage acceptance of eccentricities, idiosyncrasies and difference. And show 'aspies' in all their quirky, off-beat, brilliant glory.

Mothering a child on the autism spectrum is like trying to put together a giant jigsaw puzzle without the benefit of having a coloured picture on the box. Jules was diagnosed with autism, aged three. All I knew was that it's a lifelong disability characterised by an inability to communicate effectively. I now know that it means not getting a joke, not knowing what to say, then saying the wrong things, being told off but not understanding why, doing your best but still getting it wrong, feeling confused, frightened, out of synch, all day, every day.

Many, many experts, tests and schools later, my son was re-diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome, which is the high functioning end of the autism spectrum. I no longer think there is any such thing as normal and abnormal. Just ordinary and extraordinary. And people with autism are the most interesting, exceptional people. My own son is Wikipedia with a pulse.

Tell me about the episode with Hugh Jackman and your son Julius...

People with autism have no filter. They say whatever they are thinking. This means socially, I sweat more than Paris Hilton doing a Sudoku. For example, Hugh Jackman was at my home for dinner one night and I was flirting for Australia. In my besotted, deluded mind we were both just about to leave our spouses and elope to the Caribbean, when my son, then aged 13, walked in. I leapt up to kiss him, casually commenting that he was growing a moustache. My son gave me a measured, objective once over. 'Well, so are you,' he said, matter-of-factly. I could have deep-fried chips on my cheeks. 'See all the hairs on your top lip? There's millions of them. You have one or two on your chin as well.'

Did your friend John Mortimer enjoy being taken to a lap dance club for his 80th birthday?

What else do you give a man of 80 who has everything? At the very least I knew he'd get a good Rumpole story out of it! The only trouble is, he was myopic so we had to sit right under the pole. John was my best friend. I use to call him my toy boy. But he'd laugh and say "Yes, but it would take me two weeks to get a soft on." I miss him every day.

As another high profile ex-pat, do you still call Australia 'home' or are you more of a 'recycled Australian'?

I'm not really an ex-pat. I went back to Oz five times in 2013 for three or four weeks at a time. And I'm fiercely patriotic. I spend a lot of time on BBC radio and TV defending my beloved homeland. And, as I'm related to a convict from the first and the second fleets, that makes me the crème de la crim! Actually, whenever any Brit is condescending to me about my Australian background, I repeat what my Grandma said when I told her I was leaving to live in London. "Oh, Kath, you can't possibly go and live in England. That's where all those terrible convicts come from!"

Your novels have been translated into several languages, which shows the subjects have universal appeal. That must be pretty satisfying for a writer?

I'm actually in about 17 languages now, which shows you that 'girltalk' is universal! Sadly, the sex war is still raging. I do think it's time to call a truce...starting with blokes negotiating their terms of surrender!

Do you visit Julian Assange in the Ecuadorean Embassy and is Geoffrey still representing him?

I am very fond of Julian. Why shouldn't we know what our government is doing in our name? I do visit him in the Embassy, yes. It's the only place where I don't have to lock up my bike outside, as there are so many police! And yes, Geoff still advises him. When Julian made a cameo appearance in the *Simpsons* 500th episode, JA asked me to write his dialogue. My favourite quip involved the barbecue Julian's cartoon character was preparing for Homer and Marg. Marg asked for the recipe, to which Julian replied "I never reveal my sauces." Not bad at short notice!

I read you have a lamp covered in notes written by such people as Stephen Fry. Are there any other big names on it?

It sounds ridiculous, but it is quite fun, after a few drinks, when people pen their quips for my light. Especially people like Douglas Adams and George Harrison and John Mortimer – who are all so dearly missed. Their wit and wisdom shine on, on my poem light.

I understand your next book has a legal setting. If it is not too soon to reveal, what is the title, when will it be released and did Geoffrey help with some of the legal 'background'?

It's tentatively called *Subpoena Envy*. And yes, Geoff is reading it right now for verisimilitude.

Do you think older women get a raw deal?

I fully intend to have a leopard skin Zimmer frame

Ageing to women is like kryptonite to superman. Show me a woman who is happy with her age and I'll show you the electro-convulsive

therapy scorch marks. The trouble is, women suffer from facial prejudice – we get judged on our looks in a way that men don't.

Do you believe people should grow old "disgracefully"?

Yes! You may only be young once, but you can be immature forever. That's my motto. I fully intend to have a leopard skin Zimmer frame. ■



# Protect yourself and your holiday with travel insurance.



There's nothing more exciting than anticipating the enjoyment and adventure of an upcoming holiday. Whether you're further familiarising yourself with the sights and sounds of Australia, or you're venturing abroad in search of unexplored places, there's no doubt that the prospect of new experiences and unknown marvels is a delightful one.

Often, however, in order to truly enjoy a carefree break away, some planning must be done in advance. There's always passports, spending money and travel documents to account for, technological aids such as phones and laptops to fit into carry-on baggage, and of course decisions to be made over which clothing items to pack.

Along with these pertinent details, however, there is one more significant thing for you to consider: travel insurance. Many people will return from a trip with a number of funny stories about getting lost, language barriers and or other little things that went amiss during their holiday. While most people will encounter minor incidents, should things happen to take a serious turn for the worse, it is important to have the financial support of travel insurance behind you.

Imagine falling ill in a foreign country, losing your luggage, having your possessions stolen, or being subjected to constantly delayed flights – these are all things which could ruin your holiday experience. Luckily, these are also all situations in which travel insurance can come to the rescue. And that's where

National Seniors Insurance comes in. Our travel insurance provides financial support for a range of insured incidents, including lost luggage, emergency medical and dental expenses incurred overseas, as well as the provision of extra flights in the case of a delay or emergency.

We've recently partnered with the experts at Cerberus to bring you insurance cover that is underwritten by certain underwriters at Lloyd's. It includes premium 24/7 emergency assistance and the highest levels of customer support and claims management. Cerberus is well known for sharing our commitment to innovation, value and service, so we think they're a great fit for us here at National Seniors. By purchasing insurance through us, you will also be supporting the advocacy work that we carry out on behalf of more than 200,000 members nationwide. So that's one more very good reason to choose insurance through National Seniors.

Remember – it's always better to be safe than sorry when it comes to matters of health, safety and security while you're travelling. And, with an exclusive discount for National Seniors members and travel cover that has been specially designed with you in mind, we can provide affordable protection for you and your holiday.

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# *DRUM* Beats

True to form, Byron Bay's older residents are moving to their own beat. Casey-Ann Seaniger ventures into Northern NSW to meet members of the local drumming circle.

"I feel alive again," declares Feather, as she strides toward me in a flowing white kaftan.

Upbeat and unreserved, Feather dons a silver halo made out of Christmas tinsel as she floats among a crowd that has gathered at the local community centre to celebrate the last drumming class of the year.

Within seconds, the facilitator, Gareth, strikes the first drum.

The faces around me light up, toes start tapping, and the energy in the theatre is electric as the hypnotic rhythm reverberates through the theatre walls.

Outside, Byron Bay's streets are buzzing with tourists, mostly backpackers and young hippies keen on drinking, drugs and surfing.

But the town is also occupied by a forgotten group, the many elderly people who have called this region home for many years, long before Byron became the holiday mecca it is now.

Over time, older people had become less visible in the community, with many choosing to stay in the sanctuary of their own homes instead of venturing outside.

And it was the local Byron Community Centre, located on the main strip of the town, which noticed the

changing landscape on the streets outside, prompting it to address social isolation amongst the town's older people.

Staff at the community centre had heard about drumming classes making a difference to dementia patients in neighbouring towns' aged care homes.

The centre's community services manager, Cat Seddon, approached the man behind the work in aged care homes, Gareth Jones, to trial the classes at Seniors Week.

They were a hit, and the centre began running regular drumming classes.

Every week around 35 seniors, who have dubbed themselves the 'Byron Elder Beats', gather to mingle, make friends and release their energy through drumming.

Seddon says one of the key goals of the project was to create a more age-friendly, socially inclusive society.

"For many, it's given them a purpose each week because it's not like going to play bingo or lawn bowls.



Feather with drum facilitator, Gareth

toes start tapping,  
and the energy in  
the theatre is electric

"They feel respected. They have been given this activity which has traditionally been viewed as an activity for younger people but it's something they are perfectly capable of doing and they find it really elating and energising.

"Since it started it's been a huge success

and we've had some saying their arthritis has improved; we had another guy who has had a drop in his blood pressure and others who've said it's contributed to a more positive mental health."

Drumming circles for the elderly are rapidly spreading worldwide in forward-thinking organisations like the one in Byron Bay. Therapists have long used music to connect people, particularly the elderly, and, unlike speech, music is processed in multiple areas of the brain. Drumming has also been linked to reducing loneliness and isolation, and nursing homes have reported seeing increased energy levels and morale since drumming became part of the routine.

It's something Gareth can vouch for after seeing remarkable changes in people suffering late-stage dementia.

"As they react to the beat of the drum, you can see more vocal activity, increased eye contact, changes in their facial expressions, their upper body is moving, the blood is flowing into their fingers and you can see their mind is thinking," he says.

After conducting drumming classes to people with a disability, Gareth – who owns his own business Sound Synergy – was inspired to comfort the elderly with what he knew best – music.

"Music is one of the last things your mind holds on to and with even late stage dementia, it (drumming) started working.

"Carers have told me, 'we've never seen that person react, she never joins in, this is the first time we have seen her smiling or anything like that'".

Gareth is paid a modest amount by the community centre to conduct the weekly classes but it is clear he is much more invested in the project.

"My whole idea behind this is to make aged care facilities think about activities that stimulate the mind and body.

"For them, it's an emotional release, they feel free to express themselves."

The drumming circle is just one initiative the community centre is running in an effort to tackle social isolation.

As part of the Byron Healthy Ageing Project, the centre also runs weekly singing groups, free computer training sessions and is documenting local elders' stories on a video blog. One of those sharing her stories is Feather Thompson, a Byron Bay local of 25 years.

Feather knows  
what it is like  
to feel isolated

Feather knows what it is like to feel isolated. After her husband died of bone cancer 15 years ago, she struggled to be social. After five years, she decided it was time to break free and says

drumming has helped soothe the pain.

"The drum has soul, it just speaks to you," she says.

Wendy Saville, 74, from Lennox Head is another singing the praises of the drumming group.

"I just found a whole new life had opened up for me; I couldn't stop smiling". ■





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**National Seniors**  
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# Top of the World

Boasting events like bobsleigh, curling and aerial skiing, Ian Malin goes in search of Sochi's older competitors and finds some true characters of the Winter Olympics.



**Men's Slalom** Prince Hubertus von Hohenlohe, this year's oldest competitor, at the 2010 Winter Olympics

In the Black Sea resort of Sochi the Winter Olympics are about to start with the familiar greeting to the "youth of the world" to come together in the spirit of Baron Pierre de Coubertin. The French aristocrat and founder of the modern Olympic movement would not have imagined that among the competitors in Russia would be a man who, at the opening ceremony, had just passed his 55th birthday.

Hubertus Rudolph von Furstenberg-von Hohenlohe-Langenburg (or Hubertus von Hohenlohe for short) is the name the headline writers on sports pages everywhere have come to dread. Like the French aristocrat de Coubertin, he is from a wealthy family, a German prince of Mexican descent, and he is

Launching yourself into mid-air from the height of Sydney Harbour Bridge may seem foolhardy

about to become the second oldest Winter Olympian in history. Von Hohenlohe will not be standing garlanded on the winners' podium in Sochi. The prince has never finished higher than 26th in 14 Olympic ski races since he first qualified for the 1984 Sarajevo games.

He may be one of sport's eccentrics but eccentricity only carries you so far in the demanding discipline of the Alpine skiing slalom. Yes, there will be

shades of grey on the white slopes of Sochi but the cold fact of most winter sports is that they are tougher than ever for the middle-aged to compete in on the world stage. Even the odd sport of curling, a game first played in medieval Scotland and which features

polished granite stones being slid across a rink towards a target of four concentric circles, is not necessarily the preserve of the fifty-something. Britain's curlers are in their twenties and thirties. Their most high-profile competitor Eve Muirhead. She is 23.

Von Hohenlohe is not alone, though, in his quest to defy *anno domini*. Clyde Getty is aiming to compete for Argentina in aerial freestyle skiing. Getty was born in the United States to Argentinian parents 52 years ago. He is the oldest competing freestyle skier in the world. "Age doesn't matter," is the mantra of Getty but most men 30 years younger would surely cringe at the idea of launching themselves off a terrifyingly high ramp and performing a triple back-flip in mid-air. Getty did his little bit of aerial ballet at the Turin games of 2006 and landed face down in the snow.





Photo: Clive Rose/Getty ©

He got up again to acknowledge the cheers of the crowd who feared the worst. That, eight years on, he is competing again is proof of his raw courage if nothing else.

As is the courage of Noriaki "Kamikaze" Kasai, a 41-year-old Japanese ski jumper who is about to contest his seventh Winter Olympics. Kasai, who has taken part in a record 484 World Cups, says he wants to break more records.

Launching yourself into mid-air from the height of Sydney Harbour Bridge may seem foolhardy for most

middle-aged people happy to watch the Sochi Games from the comfort and warmth of their armchairs but there will always be older competitors for whom the adrenalin rush of winter sports is hard to resist.

My own favourite is another Briton, James Coats, who competed in the skeleton bob at St Moritz in 1948 at the age of 53. Coats was a veteran of the Cresta Run at St Moritz. "She is a powerful and attractive mistress and severe are the rebuffs she will give to even her ardent suitors," said the daredevil and utterly potty baronet. ■

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# The Last Word

time out

For the past two and a half years, the Board of National Seniors Australia has been working to a strategic plan, developed in 2011 to guide the organisation through the years 2012-2015.

Under two of the key priority areas in that plan, the Board was committed to achieving strong governance standards built on transparency, independence and accountability and undertook to refine the structure of the organisation to ensure it supported the achievement of our purpose.

With the direction established in our Strategic Plan, the Board and senior executive reviewed the constitution and members had the opportunity to give feedback on the draft.

This was amended as a result of the feedback and vigorously discussed and debated at the National Council meeting held in late November 2013. The new constitution was put to the vote and accepted at the National Seniors Annual General Meeting held on the 25 November 2013.

What do the changes mean for National Seniors members?

Besides tidying up the constitution legally, the two major changes are:

- The new constitution recognises equally, all members of the organisation. The previous constitution denied members who were not branch attendees, the right to be on the National Council and therefore the right to vote at the AGM. The new constitution gives all financial members an equal right, through an expression of interest process, to nominate and be selected to be part of a more compact National Council comprising the Board plus 10 members. Five of these members will be drawn from geographical areas and will represent not only branches and zones, but all members in those areas.

The National Council has resolved that a consideration in selection for these particular positions will be demonstrating involvement with branches or zones. The other five members will simply be selected on merit – based on their ability to demonstrate knowledge of, and ability to represent, the issues affecting the over-50s.

- The establishment of a National Policy Congress comprising the Board plus Policy Advisory Group Chairs from all States and Territories, together with five representatives of National Council and five members from the general membership, all selected through an expression of interest process.

Expressions of interest will be assessed by a Board Appointments Committee which, under the new constitution, will comprise three members of National Seniors (selected by an expression of interest process) and two directors.

These two major reforms to the governance of National Seniors ensure that we are truly responsive to, and informed by, the diverse needs and expertise of all our members in drawing on their knowledge and their deep understanding of the priorities of over-50s.

On page 14 of this edition, expressions of interest are being sought for the various new governing bodies of our organisation. I urge members with the zeal and demonstrable belief they have a contribution to make in these forums, to take the time to submit an expression of interest as set out in the special insert.

**David Carvosso**  
Chairman  
National Seniors Australia

