

April | May 2015

50something

AUSTRALIA'S WIDEST CIRCULATING OVER-50S

Slice of the Big Apple
Off the Tourist Track

Forever Friends
Where to Find Them

Super Healthy
Fluffy Ricotta Pancakes

Global Mobile
Phone Charges
What You Need to Know

Juris & Lois Greste

On the Fight of their Lives

50something

AUSTRALIA'S WIDEST CIRCULATING OVER-50S MAGAZINE



16 Homecoming Juris and Lois Greste, whose son Peter was falsely imprisoned in an Egyptian jail, are still recovering from their ordeal. Casey-Ann Seaniger visits them at home.

18 Forever Friends Rare as hen's teeth, good friends become increasingly important as we grow older. Liz Davis shares her tips on finding them.

22 Last Rites Paying for a funeral requires careful forward planning, but can be as simple as putting a little money aside each month. Craig Hall explains.

25 Agony Planner Struggling with superannuation, pensions or shares? Colin Lewis answers your questions.

28 The Facts on Prolapse Pelvic organ collapse, which causes incontinence, can happen after menopause. Here's what to do about it.

Epicurean

30 Books & Movies

32 Top Shelf Peruvian textiles have evolved beyond tradition to become an essential part of the new economy, writes Valerie Kirk.

34 Healthy Delicious Personal trainer Michelle Bridges adds low fat options to traditional fare to create meals that are surprisingly nice.

46 Slice of the Big Apple Ditch the tourist guide, scratch a little deeper and you'll love New York, discovers Karen Ransome.

Time Out

39 Tech Spec Travelling with your phone

49 Puzzles

50 The Last Word
Bali Nine

First Up

8 Letters

10 News

12 Executive Diary

13 Working For You

14 Campaigns



18



34



46

Cover: Juris and Lois Krete wait to hear the fate of their journalist son imprisoned in an Egyptian jail, 2014. **Photo:** Fairfax/Dallas Kilponen ©

executive diary

What a difference a year makes.

The message in March and April 2014 was negative that 'these old people' would be an increasing drain on future generations.

Fast forward to 2015 and the *Intergenerational Report* (IGR) has highlighted the importance of retaining Australians in the workplace in the decades ahead – or as the pundits described it 'Joe's grey army' – and voila 'the old people' are part of the solution.

At the same time, and with no coincidence, research commissioned by National Seniors revealed that the economic and social contribution of mature age Australians is \$65.7 billion or about one sixth of current total Commonwealth expenditure.

Whilst a positive attitude to ageing is welcome, the IGR also paints a picture of a very different population in the future.

What has continually focussed my attention in the debate is the simple statistic of the number of people of workforce age (15-64 year olds) falling from 7.3 in 1975 to 4.5 in 2015 to a projected 2.7 in 2055.

The number of worker bees is reducing!

It is hard to imagine what the workplace of 2050 will look like. No doubt the driverless car, so often used as an indicator, will have shifted into top gear by then. Perhaps the extraordinary pulse-less artificial heart which has been revealed recently, is a further example of what lies ahead.

Change, and our adaption to it, is highlighted in two familiar areas. Best described as 'the cheque is less and less in the mail', we have seen drastic reductions in both postal mail and the usage of cheques.

Australians are sending one billion fewer letters per year than they were in 2008. The use of cheques in December 2002 and 2014 shows a 71% drop. Indeed cash is also on the decline with an almost 5% reduction in ATM withdrawals in 2014.

Change is nothing but ever constant and we have survived the introduction of new



Michael O'Neill
CEO National
Seniors

communication and banking trends. Indeed in many ways we have prospered.

Inevitably the debate leads us to the federal budget and the annual round of speculation and proposals.

It is in the interests of all generations – current and future, learning, working, caring and retired –

for the nation's finances to be sustainable and able to withstand the demographic changes, the needs of our people and the inevitable economic shocks and downturns.

Equally central is the need to recognise the kind of society we celebrate but are cautious about investing in, one that has an appropriate safety net that enables people to live with dignity, at whatever age or stage of life.

This is best achieved by increasing productivity (including Joe's army), ensuring employment for all ages, embracing new technology, encouraging migration (as we have for over a century) and investing in the infrastructure and regulatory needs of the nation.

Enabling the productivity and investment to occur will require leadership and discipline around revenue and expenditure by governments at all levels.

Inevitably there will be changes to the taxation, retirement and welfare systems. Fairness will be a catchcry – however defined.

The nation's finances must be sustainable and reflect the environment of the time.

Debate of these changes needs to be open of mind and spirit and respectful. It must involve all parts of society. Ultimately it is not about today or tomorrow but about decades ahead and the legacy we leave to those 2.7 worker bees we expect to be carrying the heavy load.

Michael O'Neill
Chief Executive



Mr Hockey meets Bunnings staff



Treasurer Joe Hockey, National Seniors CEO Michael O'Neill and Age Discrimination Commissioner Susan Ryan

The Older Worker Business Case

- Safeguarding against skills shortages
- Gaining strategic advantage over competitors
- Enhancing brand as an employer of choice
- Responding to a diverse customer base and ensuring diverse perspectives
- Tapping into the networks, experience and corporate knowledge
- Providing mentoring opportunities for younger workers
- Reducing costs due to absenteeism

Treasurer launches older worker toolkit

National Seniors has launched a practical resource for businesses committed to employing older workers. Sarah Saunders reports.

The National Seniors Age Management Toolkit, a practical manual that takes employers through the step-by-step process of retaining and recruiting older workers, was launched by Treasurer Joe Hockey at a Bunnings store in Sydney in February.

Speaking at the launch, Mr Hockey said that Australia's increasing longevity was something to celebrate, and complimented Bunnings on the fact that a quarter of its workforce is aged 50 plus.

"Their very public embrace of a diverse workforce sends a message to every other employer that if you think about removing age discrimination, you can be extremely profitable," he said.

National Seniors chief executive Michael O'Neill agreed.

"Astute employers already know that older workers can bring vital experience and skills to their business, enhance their reputation and boost their bottom line," he said.

Store operations director Michael Schneider pointed out that Bunnings employees spanned six generations, providing learning and mentoring opportunities for everyone.

"Employing older workers is a deliberate strategy which helps us all benefit from the wisdom and character that life experience brings and this delivers a win for customers and a win for everyone in our team".

The launch coincided with the release, in early March, of the highly anticipated fourth *Intergenerational Report* which modelled the impact of demographic change on productivity.

"With the capacity for older Australians to positively contribute to GDP, the Toolkit is an essential and very practical resource for our time," said O'Neill.

Australian Human Rights Commission research suggests that just a five per cent increase in paid employment of people aged 55-plus would add \$48 billion to the economy per annum.

Long term unemployment rates amongst the over-50s are consistently higher than other age groups. While gradually improving, workforce participation rates amongst Australians aged 55 and over are still lower than in countries like New Zealand and Sweden.

Bunnings worker Tony Mepperson, 78, confirmed this in an interview with SBS. "People over 50 really do find it hard because somehow that's the age you're no longer required," he said.

The launch was attended by Age Discrimination Commissioner Susan Ryan; Law Reform Commission President Rosalind Croucher; academics; business representatives; and National Seniors members.

The Age Management Toolkit was written by Dr Ruth Williams of the National Seniors Productive Ageing Centre. Access it at www.nationalseniors.com.au/amt



Mr Hockey is questioned by journalists



The launch was attended by academics, business people and the media



Mature age workers can make businesses profitable, says Mr Hockey

Photo: Mark Calleja/NewsPix ©



Family Affair Dad Juris, brother Andrew and Mum Lois wait for Peter Grete (pictured in TV screen to right) to return

HOMECOMING

War correspondent Peter Grete's harrowing 400 days in, and subsequent release from, an Egyptian jail has been beamed across the globe. But the story of his parents, Juris and Lois, and their unwavering strength and belief, remains largely untold. Casey-Ann Seaniger spoke to them in their Brisbane home.

Juris and Lois Grete are used to seeing their son fly into war zones when everyone else is begging to get the hell out.

What they are not yet used to is the dull ache every time Peter heads off on another assignment.

Their son's life has been dedicated to telling stories. Four years after starting at the BBC in London, Peter was posted to Kabul to cover the emergence of the Taliban, and later, the start of the post 9/11 war. A Peabody Award-winning foreign correspondent, Peter has been covering wars and conflict in Africa and the Middle East since 1991.

December 2013 was no different. Peter had jetted off to Cairo, Egypt to report on the Arab Spring uprising. It was a politically tense time as ordinary Egyptians took to the streets holding mass demonstrations against corruption, torture and injustice.

This was another serious assignment, Juris and Lois thought, but no more dangerous than his postings to Iraq, Afghanistan, Sudan and Somalia. Peter had survived a sniper attack in Mogadishu and hotel bombings in Baghdad and Kabul.

On 29 December 2013, these thoughts were far from their mind as they holidayed at their

bush cottage outside Laidley in southern Queensland. Reflecting on their 52 years of marriage, they talked about how proud they were of their three sons – Peter; Andrew, a cotton farmer; and Mike who works with the police force – and how they wanted to spend more time with their five grandchildren.

They were enjoying winding down; Lois was in a choir, learning to play the piano and volunteering with asylum seekers and refugees, while Juris OAM, an architect and urban designer, was keeping busy reading and writing.

“We were all in tears, just seeing him behind bars and in navy blue as a convicted criminal”

”

Then they received the news that Peter and his two Al Jazeera news colleagues, Egyptian Canadian bureau chief, Mohamed Fahmy, and Egyptian producer, Baher Mohamed, had been arrested in their hotel room on allegations that they were spreading false news and aiding the terrorist

organisation, the Muslim Brotherhood.

Over the next few months, the trial was heard and the prosecutor found no false stories or distorted reporting. On the day of the verdict, 23 June 2014, the mood in Juris and Lois's brick townhouse on Brisbane's Southside was jovial and upbeat.

“We had the fridge full of champagne,” Lois recalls, feeling supremely confident. “It was all sort of excitement plus! We fully expected to be having a party that night.”

Hovering around the computer in their upstairs' study, the couple and their family would learn the verdict via Twitter. The verdict was guilty, with seven years in prison.

"Every second of every day we really believed Peter would be let out. We fully expected to see him walk out that night," Lois says.

Instead of popping the champagne, their minds turned to visiting their jailed journalist son behind bars in one hellish place – Egypt's Tora prison.

"It's depressing, run-down, dirty, dusty and in the desert," Lois describes. "You drive a couple of kilometres long and there are turrets where guards point down at you with their rifles and huge tanks.

"We couldn't speak English there. It was a completely alien, foreign experience in every sense, culturally and physically. The women are in one line and the men in another but I stood in the men's group. Then you wait. And you wait."

Meanwhile a worldwide campaign demanding justice for the Al Jazeera journalists was spreading across the globe, and, finally, in February 2015 after more than 400 days in prison, Egyptian authorities announced Peter would be deported back to Australia while his colleagues still await their fate.

Almost six weeks on, I'm sitting in the couple's home, the soothing sounds of classical music play in the background, but their lightly-spoken voices and tired, almost bruised eyes tell a different story.

"Life is always a risk. You can't put people in glass cages," Lois says, her breath drawn-out and weak.

We talk about the risks journalists take in their efforts to wake people up to the realities of the world and discuss how when journalists are attacked, the truth dies. It is this very cause that Juris now finds himself in: seeking answers to why and how this happened to their son.

What was Peter like as a child?

Lois: He was very inquisitive, a creative little boy, and adventurous. All the traits he probably still has today. He was very aware of other children and of being fair and just. He never liked violence or aggression.

What is Peter's legal status now?

Lois: Peter's legal status is confused and unclear. His lawyers say he needs to be very cautious about his travel as it is not entirely clear what it might mean if he landed in a country that has an extradition treaty with Egypt. He remains a named defendant and could still find himself with a conviction.



Lois and Juris Greste at their home in Brisbane's southside

What do you remember of your first visit to Tora prison?

Lois: That was probably one of the most horrific days. There was a huge amount of tears. We were all in tears, just seeing him behind bars and in navy blue as a convicted criminal.

Juris: To me the bigger impression was the whole experience of visiting the prison. Going through the prison security, the environment, and setting of this high security prison, this mighty fortress. That churned me up more than the relatively momentary experience of seeing Peter in the flesh and seeing he was OK. Never having visited anybody in prison, I found it a wrenching experience.

Those 400 days Peter was in jail – how did you cope day-to-day?

Juris: It is something that takes over your whole life. Everything else stops, obviously you need to eat and sleep but even eating became a struggle. It's relentless and a never ending pressure that's at the back of your mind. You learn to live with everything.

This wasn't the biggest scare you'd had with Peter though, was it?

Lois: No, but it was one of the biggest. The other one was when Kate Peyton was killed in Somalia and Peter was with her. Kate was Peter's producer and they had gone out on a story and this was when Somalia was in a pretty bad situation. We turned on the radio news as we did every morning and we heard a BBC journalist had been killed in Mogadishu. No name. We knew it could only be Peter or Kate. Juris just kept repeating 'it's not Peter, it's not Peter'. It was a sniper bullet that got her in the back. She got hit, he didn't. They were coming out of their hotel in Mogadishu. Peter did first aid on the spot, but four hours later she died.

You received an enormous outpouring of support from people knitting scarves and writing letters. During that time, how much did it mean to you?

Lois: Oh, it hugely mattered. We know it hugely mattered to Peter too because when he had down days he would go to those letters and he knew he was being supported outside. This helped him come out of the despair.

Juris: In any difficult situation it is of tremendous help to know that you are not alone, no matter what it is. The concept of doing your journalistic job is something thousands of people felt worth upholding made us feel that it's worth fighting on and it made Peter worth fighting on.

Was freedom of the press something you felt strongly about before Peter's incarceration or is the cause more important now?

Juris: I don't want anyone to have an experience like what we've had but it takes an experience like this to come to grips with how important freedom of the press is. You see, when everybody spins everything, being able to go to some source where there is a greater objectivity becomes more important every day: the right to know what is really happening.

Is everything still raw or have you begun moving on?

Lois: I think we are moving on. I don't know if we'll ever be quite the same.

Juris: The reality is that while Peter's life is in a stage of transition, so too is ours. The thing is, our lives will never be the same as they were 14 months ago... but I've already let some things go.

And is that letting go because part of you knows that Peter may go back to a war zone?

Juris: Look, once a parent, always a parent. You're always worrying. But we do believe everybody has to make their own decisions. The most important thing in life is that you choose what you want to do and enjoy it. It's not even a parent's right to persuade them otherwise. We have never tried to put any obstacles in their way. We live with it if he decides to go to a war zone again.

From all of this, what you have learnt about life, yourselves and the human spirit?

Juris: The human spirit is infinitely adaptable; resilience is something we don't realise until it's tested. And also, life is very unfair and unjust. Very, very unfair. ■

“ We live with it if he decides to go to a war zone again ”



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Cindy Gibbons
Travel Manager, National Seniors Travel

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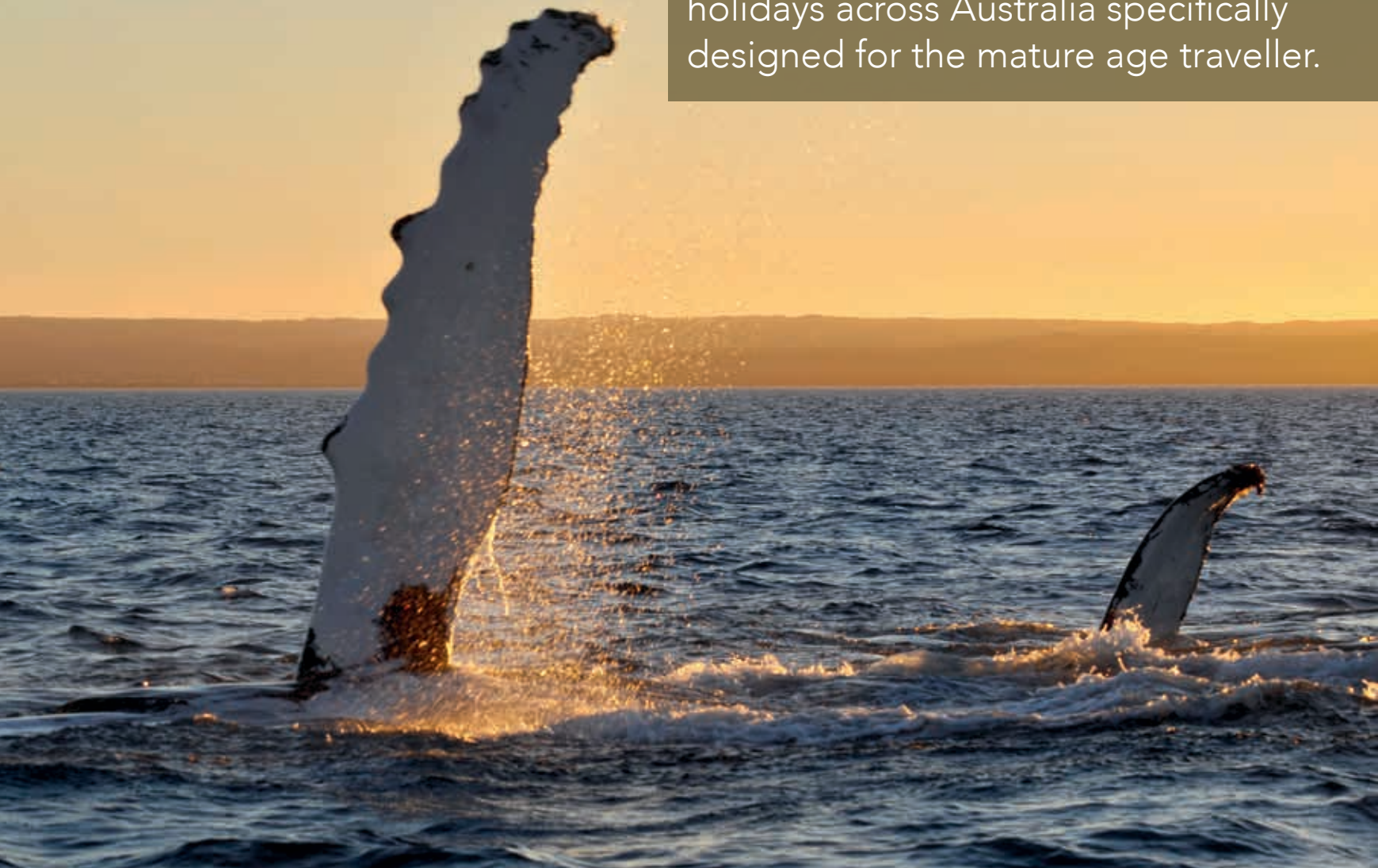
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*Main image: Whale watching, Exmouth WA
Top: View from Natures Window, Kalbarri WA
Insert left: Wildflowers, Kalbarri WA
Insert centre: On tour at Kata Tjuta ("The Olgas")
Insert right: Boarding the coach in Uluru*

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The Last Word

time out

The media has been transfixed by the plight of the two Australians sentenced to death by firing squad in Indonesia for the possession, and attempted trafficking, of heroin. The efforts to have the Indonesian President commute their sentence and save these young men from facing a firing squad have occupied news, talk-back and commentary and hence our lounge rooms for what seems forever! It also is taking the time of the Foreign Minister in particular as well as the Prime Minister.

It was similar during the trial and incarceration period of Schapelle Corby. I was disappointed with the amount of media coverage this received and I was concerned that this young woman, convicted of drug trafficking cannabis, would end up making a small fortune by the sale of her story to the media. Ill-gotten reward sticks in my craw!

The commentary from a range of sources who have visited Andrew Chan and Myuran Sukumaran while inmates of Kerobokan prison indicates they have been rehabilitated and in fact have provided skills, support and guidance to other inmates. This appears to be the case being put by the young men's legal team and guides the diplomacy efforts of the Australian Government. The Government, supported by the opposition and others, are also endeavouring to influence the Indonesian Government about the futility of the death penalty.

One thing I have noted in commentary on this case is the apparent galvanisation of Australian opinion against the death penalty. There are, no doubt, those who still believe that serious crimes should be punished by death, but I believe time is tempering this opinion.

The Indonesian Government on the other hand is keen to stop the trafficking of drugs through and within their country. The numbers afflicted by drug dependency within Indonesia are enormous and this hideous crime is destroying the lives of thousands and impacting on their health and justice system.

Given the dilemma Indonesia is experiencing with the curse of drugs, it is little wonder that President Joko Widodo is unwilling to deny clemency to any person convicted of drug trafficking. It must be said he has maintained consistency in his application of the law of his country when the same fate as hangs over the two Australians for having on their person more than 8 kilograms of heroin, also hangs over another man from Ghana for the possession of 50 grams of the same drug.

This case is testing the diplomacy skills of our Government. They must respect the sovereign right of Indonesia to enforce the laws of their country, while at the same time endeavouring to influence Indonesia apropos Australia's viewpoint of the death penalty.

Currently the rewards for traffickers who don't get caught are too great and hence people take the risk in an endeavour to reap them. It is absolute stupidity and all travellers are given ample warning in their travel documents that the trafficking of illegal substances could result in the death penalty. It also lacks any morality as their actions impact negatively on the lives of hundreds, if not thousands of others, including their loved ones.

One can't help but feel for the families of these young men who will have to live with the consequences arising from their stupidity or desire to get rich quickly.

The 'Bali 9' story has occupied our airwaves now since April 2005 – exactly 10 years. Let's hope, whatever the outcome, the loved ones of the young men reach peace; that others contemplating similar acts learn from this incident; that Governments are guided in the development of policy and legislation, concentrating on grassroots reasons for this trade rather than dealing with the consequences of it; and relationships with our nearest neighbour are protected through thoughtful diplomacy.

David Carvosso
Chairman
National Seniors Australia

