

December 2014 | January 2015

50 something

AUSTRALIA'S WIDEST CIRCULATING OVER-50S MAGAZINE

Turkish Delight Pavlova

Exotic Summer Pudding

Thing of Legend

Bradman's Invincibles

The Dogs Don't Talk!

Staying Sane in Retirement

Asset Rich, Cash Poor

Making Your Home Pay

Russell Crowe

"Working with Ridley is like holding the paints for Titian"

executive diary

I pen this with the rumble of the G20 in full flight and a huge focus on the goals of the world's most powerful. 2014 has been a global year. It has reinforced how connected and impacted we are by events across the world. It has also been a year of conflict, terror and distress for ordinary men, women and children – for world citizens everywhere.



Michael O'Neill
CEO National Seniors Australia

The unfolding catastrophe that the ebola virus is to countries in West Africa and the potential threat to citizens elsewhere, has been belatedly recognised. The humanitarian and other implications for the world from ebola are of huge proportions. Indeed, Sir Bob Geldof dusting off the vocal chords to rally the music world for aid reinforces both the seriousness and the global connection.

The disappearance of Malaysian Airlines flight 370 and the shooting down of MH17 caused great distress to families across the globe including in this country.

The gruesome spectacle of extreme violence by ISIS fighters in Syria and Iraq has appalled all and seen the spread of 'lone wolf' home-grown terror to western countries. This is disturbing for all – and intended to be so by the perpetrators.

The wash-up of the G20 Summit will occur over time and with consideration of the detail and achievability of the commitments. The proposed economic growth targets provide encouragement but as has been evident domestically, the implementation of policy changes to achieve the targets remains the key.

Our government's intentions around budget reform have been subsumed by a combination of limited policy preparation, ineffective communication and dealing with a difficult and diverse cross bench.

The Opposition pretence that there is no need for budget reform as well as the associated desire for revenge for the actions during their term in power, have not contributed positively to the debate.

No it has not been a year of positives. 'But next season' he cried, 'get ready for next season!'

There is optimism that free trade deals secured by the government with China and Korea and

an agreement with Japan will deliver benefits to the Australian economy in the years ahead, which is good for all including the over-50s. Securing the future economic security of the nation rests on our presence in international markets.

Domestically, the New Year will likely see the release of the latest Intergenerational Report. It will provide an opportunity for the national leadership to provide more informed analysis and hopefully progress from blaming the nation's trouble on ageing to acknowledging that with any challenge comes opportunity.

For National Seniors, 2015 will be important as it undertakes planning for the decade ahead. This will be significant as a period of successful consolidation and foundation gives way to a more bold and visionary future for the organisation. There will be opportunities for members to contribute thoughts about what their organisation should be doing in the decade ahead. Details will appear in the magazine and on the website from early in the New Year.

In the spirit of optimism and with the season of Christmas, I close with an extract from Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*.

"I will honour Christmas in my heart and try to keep it all the year, I will live in the Past, the Present and the Future. The Spirits of all Three shall survive within me..."

That time again!

As a National Seniors member, you may have received an invitation to participate in our annual Social Survey. National Seniors is seeking to understand more about the experiences, intentions and attitudes of the over-50s across issues ranging from finance and health to wellbeing. Your responses will provide vital insights into those things that are important to you both now and into the future. If you've received the survey, we encourage you to have your say.



Calling grandparents

The University of New South Wales, with National Seniors' support, is running an online survey for grandparents who provide regular care for their grandchildren, and who are currently employed, or have been employed in the last five years. The researchers are keen to hear your views about caring for your grandchild, the impacts on your life, and how you think grandparents who are providing childcare can be better supported. The survey will shed light on how caring affects the employment decisions of grandparents and how communities and governments can support their caregiving role. The survey takes 15 minutes to complete www.surveys.unsw.edu.au/f/159455/6ccf/



The Midas Touch

With a string of hugely successful movies and a champion football team under his belt, Russell Crowe is trying his hand at directing. Sarah Saunders catches up with him.

I'm at a Gold Coast movie convention, as one of only two media outlets granted an interview with Russell Crowe who has flown in to promote his new film *The Water Diviner*. I've been waiting an hour-and-a-half for the Foxtel crew to wind up, and the publicity girls are nervously checking their watches as the shadows lengthen.

"He's flying back home to Sydney this afternoon," one explains.

"What time is his flight?" I ask. They look at me as if I should know. "He's got his own plane".

Ah, that's right. It's easy to forget that Russell – who hangs out at rugby league games in trackies, and whose reputation for brawling earned him a spot on the American cartoon *South Park* some years ago – is a MEGA movie star.

All up, without sequels or franchises, Crowe's films are said to have raked in almost \$4 billion at the box office and attracted a string of Academy, Golden Globe and BAFTA nominations and awards. Think *Gladiator*, *A Beautiful Mind*, *The Insider*, *Cinderella Man* and *American Gangster*. Even blockbuster film director Ridley Scott described him as one of the world's top three actors, in an interview with *50 something*.

At home, this father of two is respected for putting his own money, time and effort into one of Australia's founding rugby league clubs, the South Sydney Rabbitohs (est. 1908) as it teetered on the brink of collapse. Eight years later it sits at the very top of the league ladder following its first grand final win in four decades.

Now, as Russell Crowe makes his directorial debut this Christmas, the question on everyone's lips is: Just how far can the Midas touch go?

Tell us about *The Water Diviner*.

The movie is set mainly in 1919. It's about a father who has waved off three sons to war, and all three get shot on the same day in August 1915, the Battle of Lone Pine. The grief drives his wife insane. So he finds himself alone and he decides to fulfill a promise, to go across the world and retrieve the bones of his sons.

What were the challenges of being on the other side of the camera?

It was a very natural, easy transition. I first started working in front of the camera in 1970 at the age of 6, I've played leading roles in feature films for 25 years and I've worked with many directors from Ridley Scott to Peter Weir and Michael Mann. I know the language that actors require to be spoken in; I know the language that film crews talk in. I've been on so many film sets, in so many situations and part of so much problem-solving that it's the time for me to do this sort of thing now.

What are the lessons from *Gallipoli* and are they just as relevant today?

Gallipoli is a big part of our culture. I'm as proud as the next person of the sacrifices made on our behalf back then but I look at it now – I'm 50 years old, I have two sons of my own, and would I be the man who pats his kids on their backs and encourages them to go off to war? I'm afraid I'm not that person. The romance goes out of war the moment you step on the battlefield. *The Water Diviner* is unapologetically anti-war. Pro-Australian. Anti-war.

You have an incredible body of work. What are you most proud of?

In terms of complete movies, my favourites would be *Cinderella Man* and *A Beautiful Mind*. But in terms of movies I've enjoyed making, I love being on sets with Ridley Scott. I've worked with him five times and I'd do it 50 times more. I love being his lieutenant on a film, I love solving problems with him and I love sitting back at the end of the day and laughing about how ridiculously difficult something we just achieved was. He's a great artist. It's like holding the paints for Titian.

When he says:

"We need more blue in here", I say "Yeah, I can do that for you mate!"

But really in my life, I'm most proud of my children. They make me happy in a deeper place, far more than anything I've done in a film.

If your sons [now aged 10 and 7] wanted to act, what advice would you give them?

They both want to. But we have a policy, Danielle and I, where if it's really important to them, it will still be important to them when they're older. I also want them to see it as a calling. Not just something they can do. The other day, my eldest said: "The thing is dad, I've got this thing I could do, and this thing I could do, but you know, I'm lucky because I've always got acting to fall back on". I was like, you really have no idea how that quite works!

A Sydney newspaper noted that following the Rabbitohs' 2014 grand final win you let the players take the glory alone, despite your role in the club's survival. The sense is you've mellowed, left that bad boy reputation behind and finally come home.

Funnily enough, I never really left. I'm not one of those people that went over there and became a pseudo American. I've always been of the mindset that this is where I live and I commute. Sometimes it's a particularly long commute but I've never wanted to lose touch with my home base. I know a lot of people who've gone over to Los Angeles and they've stayed and settled down, and I can see that in their work. I never wanted to be that actor.

You know you're getting somewhere in Australia when every man and his dog calls you by the same nickname. So I'm Rusty to everybody whether they know me or not. Nobody's ever asked me, but I hate that name. But now it brings a smile to my face when people say it.

Part of that whole bad boy reputation thing is that I wouldn't fill in the gaps for people. I would do my work and I would do the press required for my job and then I'd come home and live a very private life. But there's a demand for stories and when you're not going to help them, they make them up.



“ would I be the man who pats his kids on their backs and encourages them to go off to war? ”

In England they printed that I'd rung the Australian Museum and told them I'd donate my brain upon my death to science so it could be examined. The English loved that one.

You turned 50 this year. Did you celebrate?

Not really. I was working in Pittsburg, it was a wet night and a couple of friends flew in without telling me they were coming. We found a Mexican restaurant. The guys who had come to visit me were both musicians so they put on a bit of a show for the restaurant staff. Then I went home early and got up for work the next day.

And life just goes on...

Yeah, at some point, when I've got my family around me, we might dedicate a night to marking it. But I've just never been good with birthdays. I don't care. In fact, up until 47 I was completely happy with my age. When I turned 48, I looked at it on a piece of paper and went: "Ooh that looks lumpy". 47 had a bit a swing to it. But 48 looked lumpy so now I care even less about birthdays.

What does the Rabbitohs' win this year mean to you?

A large part of the whole adventure with South Sydney was to bring the club back to what it meant to me when I was a kid.

When I was 7 years old they won the grand final and I remember feeling more confident about my own crazy dreams because my local football team were the champions. If you'd asked me then when I was 7, would it be 43 years between then and the next time, that would have been inconceivable to me.

Here's this team who were not only down on their luck, they were thrown out of the competition... and they came back, and they came last, three times in four seasons. I said at the time to Peter Holmes a Court: "This will be a thankless task. But the difference we could make in this community will be vast if we can start turning this team from being hopeless into being competitive; from competitive to dominant; and, all the gods willing, into champions".

Over the course of the nine years, as we re-set the new club, we also set what the club meant in the community. We started a charity called Souths Cares. We have a range of programs where we focus mainly on helping kids complete their education and indigenous kids compete in the workforce.

In 2006 when we took over we only had 3,000 members – we now have 30,000. On grand final night 83,833 attended, a record for ANZ stadium in that configuration; and 4.65 million watched on TV – one million more than the AFL.

You were born in New Zealand and spent some of your childhood there...

I got to Sydney in 1968, when I was four.

So, Bledisloe Cup – who do you back?

I still go for the All Blacks. It's terrible isn't it! I have great affection for the Wallabies, and I always wish them success but following the All Blacks goes back to an 8 inch, black-and-white TV screen and my dad waking me up at 2 o'clock in the morning to sit with him under a blanket, have a cup of tea and watch a football game.

How will you spend Christmas?

Christmas day will probably be in Sydney. But as soon as I get time I'll go to the bush. It's the single great joy of my life outside my kids. ■

The Water Diviner opens in Australian cinemas on December 26

The triumph of dance

Surviving polio and persecution, Russian-born woman Tanya Pearson arrived in Australia in 1950 hoping for a new life. More than 60 years later she's handing the Sydney City Youth Ballet reins over to the next generation. Rosemary Desmond reports.



Tanya during the swinging sixties



Tanya performing in *The Four Seasons* under the training of Raissa Kouznetsova

Russian-born Tatiana Schaefer once opened the wrong door on her way to a physiotherapist and found her future – in the magical world of ballet. In the German city of Heidelberg, the young Tatiana had been seeking treatment for weakness in her right leg – many years later diagnosed as polio – at physio sessions held in part of a local theatre. But the lure of a ballet company rehearsing *Swan Lake* led her to skip the physio, hide from view in the theatre and let the dance transport her away from the harsh reality of her young life.

Born near Moscow in 1937, Tatiana had been sent to an orphanage with her baby sister Nellie after her father abandoned the family and her mother Anna entered a sanatorium in the Crimea, Ukraine, to recover from diphtheria. Her grandparents – whose surname was Jakubenka – only heard about the family’s plight after Nellie died from malnutrition in the orphanage and brought Anna and Tatiana to live with them at their home near Odessa on the Black Sea coast.

But their happiness was short-lived after Germany invaded Crimea. Tatiana, her mother and grandmother were herded onto a cattle train, without food or water, and taken west. On the day they were taken, Tatiana’s grandfather was at work. They never saw him again.

In Germany, the family was facing a bleak future until a kindly Catholic priest took them into his home in the Black Forest where Anna worked as a housekeeper. Tatiana changed her name to the more Germanic-sounding Erna Schaefer to hide her Russian identity.

The war finished and the family moved to Heidelberg where the multi-lingual Anna worked as a translator until 1950 when they left war-ravaged Europe for Australia. It was then that Tatiana began calling herself Tanya.

“My family wanted to seek a better life in Australia. It had a lot of sunshine and the promise of a future,” says Tanya, now widely known in the ballet industry as “Mrs P”.

She began her ballet studies in Sydney under Raissa Kouznetsova – an original member of the legendary Ballet Russes.

“I started very late – I was 12 years old – but at 17 I won a scholarship to the Borovansky Ballet Academy in Melbourne – and as they say, the rest is history.”

“Tatiana, her mother and grandmother were herded onto a cattle train, without food or water”

Such a brief explanation does not do justice to a career spanning more than 50 years as an acclaimed teacher in her adopted country. But she started her career as a dancer in the late 1950s when *Sunnyside Up* was being produced at HSV 7’s Melbourne studios, taking front of stage when the segment called for classical ballet and towards the back when the dancing style was jazz or modern.

“I’m very much a classicist and it’s the music that made me want to pursue ballet,” she says.

“My favourite composer is Tchaikovsky – obviously – but I like most of the classical composers.”

As if her life had not already been eventful enough, 18 months later she boarded a ship bound for the UK with only £10 in her purse and no return ticket. She found work in musicals, pantomime and in the film *The Life of Fanny Elssler* about an Austrian ballerina of the 19th century.

In London, Tanya met her husband Keith Pearson.

“He was an engineer and he loved classical music but he was not a balletomane...and still isn’t,” she says.



Mrs P with students in 2008

The couple had two sons before returning to Sydney in 1964 and then went on to have two daughters in Australia. As a mother of four, she took on teaching, starting with local students in her home, progressing to renting larger studios and establishing the Northside Ballet Academy, the Tanya Pearson Classical Coaching Academy and the Sydney City Ballet Company with Sir Robert Helpmann as patron.

“If you could see my office, it is full of photographs of my former students who are now principals and soloists with ballet companies all over the world,” she says.



Tanya Pearson and students of the Vaganova School, USSR in 1985

Tanya herself was recognised for her services to the performing arts with the Medal of the Order of Australia.

In 1985, she returned to Russia for the first time.

“It was still under the Communist regime and our dancers had tutus with them and they inspected everything but my daughter (Nicole) was then 13 years old and she loved Russia.”

Next month, Tanya hands over the reins as artistic director of the Sydney City Youth Ballet and the Tanya Pearson Classical Coaching Academy to Lucinda Dunn, a former principal artist with The Australian Ballet for 23 years.

“It’s wonderful because she was my student,” Tanya says. “Next year I will slowly ease down because I’m 77 now.

“But we are producing *Nutcracker* at the end of the year, with the opening night on 16 December, so I am still madly rehearsing everything.”

It was not until she moved to Australia that Tanya discovered the weakness in her right leg was due to undiagnosed polio as a child.

“My right leg never fully recovered,” she says. “It’s shorter, thinner and I wear different sized shoes. I do have some war wounds from my dancing career, mainly because of the state of my leg, but when I am teaching, I forget about pain.”

After her triumph over early adversities, she has some advice for aspiring young dancers.

“It’s very important nowadays not only to be trained technically, but also to have artistry, feeling for the music and the three ‘Ds’ – discipline, desire and dedication.”

Few would argue that Tanya Pearson is not a living example of all three. ■

Five family passes to the Sydney City Youth Ballet’s, The Nutcracker on Tuesday, 16 December at the Glen Street Theatre are up for grabs. Write your name and address on the back of an envelope and send to “50 something ballet competition”, GPO Box 1450, Brisbane, Qld 4001. Entries close 10 December.

Southern Land

Nuclear-free New Zealand takes the lead when it comes to conservation. Touring through the South Island, Casey-Ann Seaniger falls in love with a land that holds its natural beauty dear.



Dunedin's stunning backdrop as seen from Larnach Castle

“ The Maori mantra of *Nga Taonga Tuku Iho O Noa Tupana*, roughly translated to “Treasures left to us by our Ancestors”, seems a force in national decision-making ”



There is something about New Zealand that leaves Aussie travellers in awe of how our Kiwi cousins got it so right.

Within an hour of being on the road in the South Island, the landscapes merge from one stunning scene to the next.

I let my eyes wander into the distance where a moody grey mist descends over the endless, rolling green hills.

We go past an abundance of free-range chook and sheep farms where the animals have hundreds of acres to roam free.

As dusk sets in, I spot a sole, forlorn-looking farmer, hunched over, herding his sheep out of sight.

Quaint old stone farmhouses flicker past the window as we pass vineyards, dense rainforests and waterfalls that thunder to the ground.

There are wind farms and hydro power stations, mountainous green humps, granite cliffs, towering snow-capped peaks and barren gullies.

I am travelling through the South Island by coach with Grand Pacific Tours along with 33 other travellers aged from 40 right up to 80.

We are interested to know how New Zealand became a leader in conservation. The reasons why they have not been lured into over-population or the politics of economic prosperity at any cost may be put down to a few things.

The Maori mantra of *Nga Taonga Tuku Iho O Noa Tupana*, roughly translated to “Treasures left to us by our Ancestors”, seems a force in national decision-making.

The commitment to farming, green-scapes and open spaces in favour of commercial projects is a binding thread linking this community and the tourist dollar.

A government-built nation-wide cycle track and a ruling that toppled trees in national parks cannot be removed or used for profit, are examples of this.

Other reasons may lie in history. New Zealand’s commitment to a clean, green image was signified internationally when it passed strong anti-nuclear laws in 1987.

When the Prime Minister at the time, David Lange, controversially told America it would remain nuclear-free, he said: “It is the price we are prepared to pay.” The story brings approving nods from my fellow travellers.

As we roll into in a new town, the mood on the bus is jovial. Driver Chris warns us to be careful as we troop down the steps of the coach. “Now – watch when you get off – there are hordes of people out there, you might get trampled on,” he yells.

I first notice the deafening silence, then, the ruby-stained wings of a butterfly fluttering above my head in the light spring breeze.

We soon realise Chris’s joke when he explains that the definition of traffic jam over here is considered seeing three cars up ahead.

South Islanders live peacefully, finding solace in salmon and cod fishing. They spend their afternoons enjoying BBQs in the mountains. In winter they grow kale and swedes for stockfeed, and when it’s all eaten, they turn it all over again for summer.

Outside Christchurch, locals have set up salmon farm cafes, which sell wood-smoked Rakaia salmon.

The next day I decide to go on a scenic flight in a glider over New Zealand’s highest mountain, Mt Cook.

Out of the window, I peer down crystal blue glaciers that seem almost close enough to touch. “I’m not flying over the mountains, I’m flying in the mountains,” says the lady beside me.

We later arrive in the historic Victorian town of Oamaru to see some of the best 19th century architecture in New Zealand. We explore museums, shops and galleries, and visit the local cheese factory. We watch a traditional limestone sculptor labouring over his craft. I stumble across a bibliophile’s paradise; a little bookshop selling rare, out-of-print books from all over the world.

It’s not long before I meet Pat from Queensland, doting grandmother and the quintessential first-time traveller – wanting to step outside her comfort zone but not go too far.

After a three-hour international flight, picking up some different coloured currency to pop in her purse and a few days on the road, Pat seems content. “It’s so safe you could swim across here,” she bellows, elbowing me in my side.

We stop off to devour some freshly baked apple and strawberry jam scones at the Glenfalloch Gardens outside of Dunedin where rhododendrons are in full bloom.

“ South Islanders live peacefully, finding solace in salmon and cod fishing ”



Strolling around the historic Victorian town of Oamaru

Outside, an impeccable afternoon sun washes over our skin. We come across a pond where a log covered in thick moss has fallen over the water. Blood orange petals, rich purple azaleas and magnolias float peacefully, letting off a glittering reflection. If fairies existed, they would live here.

“ If fairies existed, they would live here ”

Back on the road, our driver offers up another quirky tale.

“The guy in this town...” says Chris... “Well, he used to sell possum meat pies but he got in trouble from the government so now he gives ’em away for a \$4 donation.”

On my final night we board one of the last original coal-fired passenger steamships, the 1912 vintage *TSS Earnslaw*.

As we cruise to dinner at sunset in Queenstown, with the opaque

reflection of Lake Wakatipu shimmering in the background, I reflect on the last seven days.

We have had plenty to do. We visited the turquoise waters of Lake Tekapo, the glorious sights of Milford Sound and the glow-worm caves in Te Anau. In Dunedin we skulled whisky with

a Scotsman at a traditional Haggis ceremony and visited the nearby Larnach Castle.

Once at the Walter Peak High Country Farm house, we chow down on a gourmet BBQ. No one eats alone, and our bellies are full.

A fellow passenger, Kevin, travelling with his wife Val, remarks “We now wonder why it took us 40 years to go to a country a mere three hours away which gave us so much joy.”



Bagpipes, kilts, whisky and haggis – a traditional Scottish evening in Dunedin

It’s a sentiment shared.

At almost midnight on the cruise back to Queenstown, the pianist begins to play his last song for the evening, the classic farewell poem written by Robert Burns, *Auld Lang Syne*.

The melody casts a spell over the ship, and as we bid goodbye to new friends, it seems a fitting final song for this exact moment, depicting a wonderful, timeless trip that we’ve shared together. ■

The writer travelled as a guest on part of Grand Pacific Tours’ 16-Day Highlights of New Zealand Tour.

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