MANAGING MEGA-FIRES
REMARKABLE REVEREND INDEED!
I write as an alumnus, a former senior student of St Andrew’s College and as a minister of the Presbyterian Church of Australia who, while supporting women’s ordination to both ministry and eldership, did not support Rev Peter Cameron when he was rightly charged by the Presbytery of Sydney with breach of the church’s subordinate standard the Westminster Confession of Faith.

Rev Dr Cameron was not charged because he supported the ordination of women to the ministry but because he publicly advocated the denial of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as the supreme standard of faith and practice.

Hence Ian Edwards (SAM, Letters June 2013) is incorrect to claim that Rev Dr Cameron was charged with heresy because he stated “that there was no theologically sound reason why women and homosexuals should not be ordained to the ministry”.

It is worth noting that after Dr Cameron’s departure, the College Council under the leadership of the late Rev Doug Murray and with Dr Bill Porges as principal, was able to transform itself from a male-only bastion to its current and much happier co-educational status.

Rev Peter Dunstan (BSc ’80 Dip Hort Sc ’81 BD ’87)
Annandale NSW

BIRD RIGHTS AND WONGS
The picture of a pigeon drew my eyes to read the article “Birds In The Organ Loft” (SAM June 2013) which was about the misadventure of a pigeon that fell into one of the organ pipes and became trapped. The author then went on with suggested solutions which included “letting the bird die of starvation before pulling out the bits” which surely was “not desirable”. I thought the obvious reason behind that would be such action is cruel as it would cause a great deal of suffering to the bird.

However, to my surprise I then read “especially in the freshly-cleaned organ”. I was bewildered. So it was unacceptable for the bird to die of starvation because the organ was freshly cleaned, not because of the welfare of the animal? I cannot believe this appeared in a publication for the educated, let alone an institution with the oldest vet school in Australia.

Eva Tang (BVSc ’09)
Peakhurst NSW

CORRECTION
The article about Ann Macintosh (SAM March 2013) has a photo of the subject, with a man beside her, taken in Prague. The caption says the man was her husband. In fact, the man is Professor Raymond Dart.

ANGKOR’S UNCERTAIN FUTURE
I must congratulate SAM on publishing its exclusive article “How Sydney Discovered the Lost City of Angkor” (SAM June 2013). I also offer my congratulations to the intrepid Sydney alumni, including Professor Roland Fletcher, Robert Christie and all who assisted them in their research.

I have always had a particular interest in Angkor and had the good fortune to visit it in 1968, well before the horrors of Pol Pot, and the pillaging and destruction of the ancient sites which sadly accompanied that period of anarchy.

As well as being a magical place to visit, it was also strangely eerie because, for most of the week we spent there, it seemed there was no one else in Angkor other than us. It is astonishing now to see how much of Angkor’s solitary tranquility has been lost to tourism. I suppose that it is inevitable that people will want to see Angkor Wat and the surrounding buildings but I feel that so much more will be lost to the ravenous jaws of commercial tourism if care is not taken.

Brian Millett (MA ’77)
Yass NSW

LETTERS ONLINE
Full versions of letters are available online.
sydney.edu.au/sam/regulars
SAM is launching the very first iPad edition of the Sydney Alumni Magazine. Over the past few years the revolution in digital technology has enriched the potential of magazine publishing in ways we could not have imagined even five years ago. SAM recognises that reading habits and tastes are changing in response to the exciting possibilities offered by new publishing formats such as the digital tablet.

Each print edition of SAM from now on will have an iPad version (which is free), with an exciting array of extra features – photos, video, audio and more – for you to download and consume at your leisure.

**HOW TO ACCESS THE iPad EDITION**

1. Make sure you are connected to wi-fi internet.
2. Head to the Apple app store and download the SAM app.
3. This may take up to 5 or 6 minutes, which is typical of all iPad apps. You do not need to wait while it downloads. Feel free to go and attend to other tasks while the app is downloading.
4. Once the app has finished downloading, you do not need to be connected to the internet to read the SAM iPad edition. All of the content will now be on your iPad. (CONFIRM)

**EXCLUSIVE iPad CONTENT FOR OCTOBER**

Each iPad edition of SAM will feature exclusive content. In this first edition, we present:

- **VIDEO** A message from the Vice-Chancellor in Mandarin
- **VIDEO** Film reviewer David Stratton talks about his life in cinema
- **PHOTOS** 40 photos from the SAM alumni travel photo competition
- **VIDEO** Guided tour of the Fisher Library exhibition on the history of anaesthesia
- **VIDEO SERIES SYDNEY STORIES**: Events that shaped the University and Australia

We hope you enjoy the SAM iPad, and encourage you to tell us about your iPad experience. Let us know what you think at alumni.office@sydney.edu.au or the app store.

Michael Visontay
Editor
In a recent article for the *Chronicle of Higher Education* I argued the need for research "quality" and "excellence" to be used as predominant measures of the value of publicly-funded research. Following the global financial crisis, governments worldwide are striving to balance budgets and there is a risk they will prioritise short-term 'impact' over research excellence in funding decisions.

I firmly believe short-term impact measurements can be overestimated and that longer-term impact from investment in quality research can be grossly underestimated. It has been my overwhelming experience at Oxford and at our University that where excellence and quality research are nurtured, impact follows.

However, even with our record of transformational research we need to continually evolve to provide the right conditions to support research excellence.

As articulated in our Strategic Plan, while our researchers are free to follow whatever line of enquiry they choose, a strategic investment focus could help us open new frontiers of knowledge and support new collaborations to optimise the impact of our research excellence. An integrated approach supported by improved governance arrangements, encouragement of cross-disciplinary activity, and career development measures will enhance our ability to invest in research projects of national, regional and international importance.

In line with this vision, in June the University released its Health and Medical Research Strategic Review. Chaired by Mr Peter Wills AC, it considered changes to the sector in Australia and globally, such as the shift towards large-scale partnerships and collaborations that address major community health challenges and health care costs. It balanced these against research strengths and examined how we could better support our research enterprise to build scale where needed to quickly seize opportunities and maintain pre-eminence.

The review’s recommendations include the establishment of four strategic priority areas for research collaborations (SPARCs) in health and medical research – obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular disease; cancer; mental health and neuroscience; and infectious diseases. These areas build on our collective research strengths, inspire our researchers and address national and international challenges.

The review also recommends supporting strong partnerships that increase opportunities for translation and commercialisation; placing renewed emphasis on support and training to attract researchers of the highest quality; and enhancing business processes and IT systems to facilitate cross-disciplinary and cross-organisational research.

The creation of the SPARCs, and investment in resources to better enable collaboration will make possible true cross-disciplinary research where different disciplines not only cooperate but also impact each other’s approaches and lead to breakthroughs, and in the development of new methodologies and creation of new knowledge.

To enact the report’s recommendations we are establishing an independently chaired executive steering committee to develop an implementation plan.

The review’s recognition of obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular disease underlines the importance of our major multidisciplinary centre that is inspiration for one of our transformational infrastructure projects – our Charles Perkins Centre Research and Education hub which will open in 2014.

The Charles Perkins Centre is a model for multidisciplinary collaboration and cross-disciplinary research to solve real-world problems and will host researchers from many faculties as well as incorporating innovative, cross-disciplinary spaces that provide greater opportunities for researchers, teaching staff and students to collaborate.

Led by world-renowned biologist researcher Professor Stephen Simpson, its resources and research potential are already attracting world-leading researchers such as nutritional ecologist Professor David Raubenheimer. Last month the federal government announced the Australian Prevention Partnership Centre to be led by Professor Andrew Wilson which will draw on expertise from eight universities. The centre will also house the World Health Organization Collaborating Centre in Physical Activity, Nutrition and Obesity.

Another of the four SPARCs – infectious diseases – emerged from collaboration facilitated by funding under the Sydney Research Networks Scheme. Collaboration went beyond Medicine and Veterinary Science to include the faculties of Arts and Social Sciences and Science. This research will be conducted under the banner of the Marie Bashir Institute for Infectious Diseases and Biosecurity, and will enhance Australia’s and the region’s capacity to address infectious disease outbreaks as well as influence future policy. We are thrilled former chancellor, Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir AC CVO has provided this research.

However, this strategy is not limited to health and medical research. The changes provide a blueprint for support of cross-disciplinary work, including China studies, Southeast Asia studies and our new Sydney Environment Institute. They will bring our people together in new ways to pursue excellence and foster innovation that delivers even greater impact.
SENATOR CARR’S GLOBAL VIEW

On 16 August, former Labor Foreign Minister Senator Bob Carr discussed the government’s foreign policy priorities and achievements so far, and set out his foreign policy vision for the government’s next term, before an audience of scholars, students, members of the public and the media in MacLaurin Hall.

While a protest against the federal government’s asylum seeker policy was staged outside the venue, Senator Carr spoke on a wide range of foreign policy issues, with asylum seekers front centre. He restated the importance of “busting the business model” of people trafficking that now sees 3000 people arriving by boat each month. That figure could double again, he warned.

Once the model has been broken, he said the Rudd Government – if re-elected – would lift the humanitarian intake from 20,000 to 27,000 a year.

Senator Carr admitted to an error over Syria in relation to forging an agreement to ensure guaranteed medical aid, supplies and support for those injured in the fighting. “The mistake was in thinking a medical pact would be easy to arrange. A ceasefire is more important but in the meantime we would try for medical support.

“I could write a book about the frustrations of trying to get a UN agreement on this.”

In other comments during a wide-ranging speech, Senator Carr expressed his reservations with Tony Abbott’s idea of the Anglosphere, an alliance of English-speaking nations. “To have a conservative prime minister talk about the ‘Anglosphere’ would send the wrong message about what sort of nation we are,” Senator Carr added.

Disability action plan launch

The University launched its third Disability Action Plan in August, with speeches by Emeritus Professor Ron McCallum and the Vice-Chancellor Dr Michael Spence.

In launching the plan, Professor McCallum, a former dean of the Law School who is blind, drew on personal experience: “Why do we have a Disability Action Plan? True, we are in a sense required to do so under education standards and to give the plan to the Human Rights Commission pursuant to relevant provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act and Disability Services Act. But why? We’re not doing it just to fulfil legislation. We’re doing it because we as a university community recognise that persons with disability have the same rights and inherent dignity as everyone else. That has been the creed of this University since Wentworth opened it in 1852.

“Let me tell you a story of my entrance to the University of Sydney. In 1991, the first Professorship in Industrial Law for Australia was advertised here at the University of Sydney. We had two children at that stage and a third was in (my wife) Mary’s tummy. I applied. Mary was in between jobs and I thought, “What do I say to them? I’m going to need a little bit of extra help.” There were three of us shortlisted. The other two looked very appointable to me, great scholars. In fact, they have both gone on to have stellar careers.

How was I going to tell them that I needed a synthetic speech program? This was before the Disability Discrimination Act. The head of the committee said, “That’s not a big issue. See you later!” I thought, “Oh, another one I have lost.” But I got the job and I am very honoured to be the first totally blind professor at any university in Australia or New Zealand.

FOR MORE DETAILS sydney.edu.au/eeo/disability_access/dap/introduction.shtml
STUDENTS ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT ALUMNI HOSTS

International students have reported back enthusiastically on the pleasure and benefits they derived from the recent Fun, Fare and Future Alumni dinners. Under the program, alumni host dinners for groups of international and local students to help them network with University alumni and help them integrate into the Australian lifestyle.

Among the repeat hosts this year was the Vice-Chancellor, Michael Spence, who again proved himself an engaging host. “Dinner with the VC was splendid. I don’t know why I was so nervous to start with,” said attendee Anita Trinh. “He was very accommodating and welcoming to all the international students. I made some great contacts that night too and have plans to keep in contact with them.”

Emma Liu echoed her sentiments: “The food was delicious and your family was welcoming. I think we are lucky to have a Vice-Chancellor who is understanding and willing to listen to our voices. Your experience as an international student in the UK also enables you to empathise with the hardship we experience.”

Architect Robert Cahill (BArch ’77 BSc Arch ’74) and his wife Anne hosted a lunch. “Both Anne and I have immensely enjoyed the opportunity to host lunches and meet international students studying at the University. The diversity and experiences of the students make it a real treat to entertain them at our home. It has become a rewarding repeat event on our calendar,” says Robert.

Guest Craig Hayman was equally enthusiastic. “Lunch with Robert and Anne was excellent. They were such kind, accommodating and generous hosts. They made the five of us feel like family, fed us exceptionally well, and opened up to us like old friends. I would be very interested in participating in the future in similar functions.”

Jun Yi Ong: “All of us had a great afternoon. Robert and Anne are really humble and warm people and excellent hosts. It was a good opportunity for me to spend the afternoon chatting with them as well as other schoolmates from diverse cultures and backgrounds.”

Reiner and Julianne Seubert found the experience equally fulfilling when they hosted a group of Veterinary Science students. Reiner (BVSc ’78) has been a fixture at Terrey Hills Animal Hospital for 30 years. “We loved showing the kids the northern beaches and hopefully help them to ‘feel at home’ in Sydney,” he said. “When our son moved to the United States to study some years ago, many people went out of their way to make him feel welcome and comfortable.”

“Reiner and I really enjoyed meeting the girls. We hopped in the car and took them to north head at Manly to see the view to the city, then drove to Long Reef and finally to Palm Beach, and later, a quick tour of the surgery,” said Julianne.

“They seemed to have a fun day too. The kids have so much courage and sense of adventure nowadays; they have the confidence to follow their dreams and get out there and meet people! I wish I had been more like that as a youngster.”

If you want to host a Fun, Fare and Future Alumni dinner, ring Katerina Lusinovska on 61 2 9036 9504 or email alumni.projects@sydney.edu.au
Training future leaders for Australia’s Army Reserve and Citizens Military Forces has been a unique contribution to university life by the Sydney University Regiment (SUR) and its predecessors for over 113 years.

From 2014 SUR will have a new home, when it moves from its current City Road site to the old IXL Garage near Abercrombie Street next to the new business school.

Thousands of university students have completed their military training at the existing depot since 1962, wearing the distinctive black insignia on a red background.

Packing up the history and memorabilia will one of the hardest jobs confronting the SUR team led by Executive Officer and Sydney lawyer Gregory Burn (LLB ’84).

Friends and former SUR colleagues have formed a new SUR alumni group, spearheaded by Tim Castle, Karen Ewels, Paul Simadas, and Kim Turner, with Supreme Court Judge and Major-General, Paul Brereton AM RFD as Patron.

One of the first activities of the group was an inaugural SUR alumni lecture, delivered as part of the University’s Sydney Ideas program, by General David Hurley AC, DSC on the state of the defence forces in the Main Lecture Theatre in August, and also broadcast on the A-Pac channel.

General Hurley, who is now Chief of the Defence Force, has a strong link with SUR, having served as the unit’s Adjutant in the 1980s, and he now holds the post as SUR’s Honorary Colonel. His speech was both interesting and informative.

There is expected to be an inauguration celebration for the new depot next year and all will be welcome - Alumni can make contact and keep up to date with the alumni group through its LinkedIn group.
CAMPUS BUZZES
WITH BUILDING ACTIVITY

The Charles Perkins Centre for the study of obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular disease is due to be finished early next year. When SAM was given a sneak review of work in progress a few months ago, some of the building’s features – such as lecture theatre and an animal storage site in the basement – were well underway.

But the Perkins Centre is just one of a range of other prominent projects underway, including:

• **An upgrade of the Engineering Faculty precinct in Darlington:** More than $25m has been invested into the refurbishment of key teaching spaces, in particular for Electrical Engineering and Project Management. Over the next 18 months the faculty will work on a detailed plan for the refurbishment of existing buildings, creating space for research and providing technology to support teaching.

• **The Australian Institute for Nanoscience** will house a state-of-the-art national nanofabrication facility, providing advanced research capability, in addition to comprehensive research and teaching facilities. It will be located in the School of Physics in Science Road.

• **The Abercrombie precinct redevelopment:** The precinct will contain new facilities for the Business School on the Darlington Campus, including student accommodation. Part of the precinct will also be incorporated in the University’s informal learning space network, which can be used by students from across the University.

• **Other building projects include:**
  
  — the Health Sciences precinct on the Merewether site
  — the Administrative and University services precinct at the City Road/Codrington gateway
  — Medical Health/Nursing/Pharmacy/Dentistry precinct incorporating CPC, Bosch, Blackburn buildings, while retaining the Medical sub-precinct at Mallett Street
  — Agriculture/Vet Sciences/Biological Sciences ‘Live Sciences’ precinct as around Regimental Drive/Parramatta Road
  — Cultural and museum precinct along Science Road (Macleay to Hayden Lawrence)
  — Arts precinct around Griffiths Taylor, John Woolley, Quad and Brennan MacCallum buildings
  — Arts and Social Sciences precinct on City Road


NEW BUSINESS ALUMNI NETWORK

The Vice-Chancellor launched the Business Alumni Network (BAN), on 19 September at the Business School’s new CBD Campus in Castlereagh Street. An initiative of the Business School and the University of Sydney Alumni Council, the BAN has been created to facilitate engagement among the Business School’s current students, graduates, academics and industry partners, and all alumni in the business world.

The BAN initial start-up committee was co-convened by two prominent members of the Business School’s alumni community: Mrs Annie Corlett, President of the University of Sydney Alumni Council, and Mr Charles Littrell, Executive General Manager, Australian Prudential Regulation Authority.

“The official establishment of the Business Alumni Network is one of our key initiatives in 2013,” said Annie Corlett. “I am delighted at the response we have had from the Business School community.”

The BAN AGM was held at the launch. For results, go to sydney.edu.au/business/alumni/network.

MARJORIE JACOBS AO

A memorial service will be held in the Great Hall next month for Professor Emeritus Marjorie Jacobs AO, who was the first female professor of history at the University of Sydney and the second female professor at the university.

In a career at the University spanning four decades (1938-80), Marjorie fought to expand the teaching of Asian history, introducing new courses over the next three decades. She was appointed Associate Professor in 1967, and Professor in 1969, an appointment that was recognised by an Order of Australia in 1989 for her services to education.

The memorial service will be held on 27 November at 2.30pm.
For a week or so in summer—and not even every year—Australians pay close attention to the commanding presence of fire as it rears up from the forest like a vengeful spirit to disturb the heavy comfort of Christmas and holidays. Then it is gone, leaving behind a charred landscape and memories seared into the minds of those exposed to its frightening power.

Sometimes there is an inquiry, which offers sage advice of limited impact once fire has slunk back from whence it sprung.

Life goes on. People forget. Scientists go back to their research and politicians put away the protective clothing they keep camera-ready in summer.

It’s one of the cycles of life in Australia: to drought and flooding rains, we can add fire and forgetting. And it is a cause of grave concern and considerable frustration to Mark Adams, the Dean of Agriculture and Environment at the University of Sydney, one of Australia’s foremost authorities on bushfires.

But forgetting will get harder. The good news is bad news, warns Adams. The frequency of catastrophic bushfires such as the 2009 blazes which claimed 173 lives in Victoria is increasing at a disturbing rate, both fuelled by and fuelling climate change. And human influence, including patterns of internal migration, land management and ideas about environmental protection, are all contributing to an ever-worsening bushfire scenario. Soon, if not already, there won’t be time to forget.

“South East Australia has always had its catastrophic fire events but the research suggests the big ash forest fires, the ones that scare the living daylights out of anyone who gets even close to them, have come in the order of every 50, 100 or 200 years,” explains Adams.

“But now we’ve had them in 1939, 1983 and 2009. That’s getting very short. Many of the scientific community feel that we just have to wait for the next El Nino and we’ll have another one. And the area that is subject to high-intensity wildfire is expanding. Previously, it was pretty much restricted to that southeast corner, particularly around Melbourne. But, as climates change, so do fires. The recent disastrous fires in western NSW remind us the potential for high-intensity bushfire now spreads as far north as Sydney and we are seeing increasingly long fire seasons in parts of Queensland, all the way up to Rockhampton.

“There’s plenty of evidence to say we should be concerned.”

Adams says fire is “the big one”, in terms of coming environmental impacts. “If you want to pick one thing that will change Australia’s biodiversity, it won’t be climate change. It will be fire,” he says. “Major fires are a big, big issue.

“If you are worried about biodiversity, if you are worried about greenhouse gas emissions and if you are worried about changing climates in Australia, then you can’t afford to forget about bushfires.”

Unravelling those three distinct but related threads is a complex scientific task. Bushfires are feeding carbon back into the atmosphere at an as yet unmeasured scale. If the climate scientists are right about CO2 and climate change, then large-scale, high-intensity fires will make the world an even warmer place, ratcheting up the risk of catastrophic fire events in the process.

Adams has outlined the issues, most recently in the journal Forest Ecology and Management in a paper “Mega-fires, tipping points and ecosystem services: Managing forests and woodlands in an uncertain future”.

The biggest threat to Australia’s biodiversity is not climate change but fire, says Mark Adams, who argues that we need a new bushfire strategy—one which deprives fires of fuel.
The answer, which is not an answer that will solve all problems or appeal to everyone, is fire mitigation. “Fuel reduction is not a panacea. Fuel reduction is about having large enough areas, some kilometres wide, that will give you some time when the fire hits them. It slows things down, allows people to get out, allows firefighters to do their job, allows people to call up the aircraft and slow it further. Without large, contiguous areas it won’t help at all. Ten metres over your back fence? Forget it,” says Adams.

“Fuel reduction is the long-term mitigation strategy. It has to be done over large areas and accepted for what it is – a mitigation strategy that will never stop the worst bushfires from happening, but which buys time, can prevent small fires turning into large fires, and protects ecosystems from the most severe effects of bushfires like those in 2009.”

The scale of fuel reduction burns needed to successfully mitigate bushfires poses a major challenge. The 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission (to which Adams provided expert assistance) is the latest and most rigorous inquiry for the past several decades. Key recommendations included a three- to fourfold increase in the area of public land treated for fuel reduction every year. In Victoria, with some 8 million hectares of forest and woodland, that would mean burning almost 400,000 hectares every year. That requires a massive increase in the commitment of manpower and resources – and brings with it uncomfortable and socially disruptive issues such as reduced air quality – that can put the lives of asthma sufferers at risk if not properly managed.

“The problem is equally bad in NSW. As in Victoria, land managers have struggled to treat 100,000 hectares each year,” he says. “NSW has even more forest and woodland than Victoria, though, fortunately, some of it is not as susceptible to fire. Even so, the scale of the problem in NSW has left the politicians and policy makers with their mouths open saying ‘how on earth are we going to pay for it?’.”

But the alternative – horrific events such as 2009 where the damages bill ran well into the billions – will become equally unpalatable, Adams warns. “It is a wicked problem and a very vexed public policy question. It’s a big ticket item in every case.”

Selling the message to the public and policy makers means scientists will need to speak with a clear voice, Adams suggests. The scientific community can speak among itself with fine nuance about fire-regimes and intervals “but when we do we have completely lost the general public who haven’t a clue what we’re talking about”.

“Most of the public understand the flora and fauna are highly adapted to fire. They understand you can use fire to mitigate the worst effects of the biggest, nastiest bushfires. So why the hell don’t we do it?”

“We can’t really afford to lose the public on this one. There is too much dependent on it. We have to try and keep the messages simple. To change behaviour you have to be consistent and constant. You need a very clear message and use it day in, day out.”

Bushfires might be endemic in Australia but it is not unique. Wildfires in the USA are increasing in intensity and frequency and the boreal forests, a vast expanse of spruce and conifer forests in the far north of the Northern Hemisphere, is literally changing before our eyes. Fire activity, says Adams, has doubled in the past 30–40 years, and where conifers stood, deciduous trees have taken over, with obvious impacts on biodiversity.

Adams believes fire on such a scale is making a very significant contribution to our greenhouse gas emissions. He cites the research on the 1997 Indonesian forest fires which assessed its contribution as being equal to almost half the annual global emissions of carbon dioxide.

“Australia can’t afford to go on ignoring the impact of bushfires on our greenhouse gas emissions, he says. “The international literature indicates it. The Canadians get it, the Americans get it and the Europeans get it. The increase in fire frequency and intensity in the boreal forests is a potential disaster. If we are worried about CO2 in the atmosphere we need to worry about the boreal forest and fire because it is changing things at a frenetic pace.”

Fuel reduction is the long-term mitigation strategy. It will never stop the worst bushfires from happening, but it buys time, and can prevent small fires turning into large fires.

Change will require those who understand fire to work with those who don’t. “If you lived in the bush in Australia in the 1920s you knew you were on your own and you had better know what to do in case a fire came,” he reflects. Nowadays, with more people in cities – but also more people on the bush fringe – a whole group of people are exposed to fire but have little knowledge of what to do.

“People who really understand fire used to be 10 or 20 percent of the population; they’re now less than one percent of the population. We’ve lost decades of experience.”

Those people also understood the importance of land management, which reinforces Adams’ commitment to continue pushing a simple message. “Let’s get away from disasters and emergency response and let’s start talking about sound land management: boring, prosaic, land management,” he says.

“Education is my greatest source of optimism for the future – although a bit of spine from some of our politicians would be good too.”

Where there’s smoke...

Where there is fire there is also smoke, and smoke is of great interest to Dr Malcolm Possell of the Faculty of Agriculture and Environment, who is trying to find ways to measure how emissions vary depending on the vegetation and intensity of fire.
DESIGNING FIRE-SAFE HOMES

Douglas Brown’s interest in designing homes with improved bushfire protection is both professional and deeply personal. He owns a bush block and if he doesn’t get the design right, any home he builds on it might not last long.

“My block (in the mid-Blue Mountains) is right next to a power line, at the top of a ridge, surrounded by National Park and with just one road in,” explains Brown, who is currently completing a PhD on the vulnerability of housing in bushfire-prone areas with the Faculty of Architecture, Design and Planning, funded by the support of the Bushfire CRC (research centre) and also supported by the NSW Rural Fire Service.

Brown, who completed a master’s in Sustainable Design in 2010, reckons he is about the best person to design a house for it. He is adamant he does not want to build a bomb shelter and is keenly interested in marrying contemporary living, energy efficiency and improved bushfire performance.

“People are looking at the ability of a house to survive a fire but it also has to be a pleasant place to be in the times when a fire isn’t there,” he observes. “We live in a time when everyone wants the outside to be inside, using large glass doors and windows. But that means a bushfire will come inside too if you are not careful.”

Simple design features can increase the capacity of a house to withstand a bushfire, says Brown. They include metal shutters on windows (which can be incorporated into the walls of new homes); dispensing with gutters to avoid the collection of leaf material; embedding homes into the side of a hill; adding angled metal strips at the junction of verandas and walls; and using sprinkler systems capable of drenching the roof and walls.

Brown is researching which spaces within a home people feel safest in so that future homes can be designed to have increased fire protection in those areas. He also wants to incorporate a separate structure linked to the main house which has even greater fire protection; this could be used as a home office, guest accommodation or a play area for children.

“I am looking at designs which will integrate bunkers into the house in a way which will make it a place people are comfortable with. I want a structure that is totally integrated into the family life of a house,” he says.

“It would really help my research to hear from fellow alumni who have built in bushfire-prone areas and have come up with ideas to reduce ember entry or direct flame contact,” says Brown. douglas.brown@sydney.edu.au
FEATURE

A TEACHER WHO CHANGES LIVES

James Curran’s charismatic computer science classes have become the stuff of legend.

Students in James Curran’s classes at the National Computer Science School quickly discover they can’t sit in the back row and hope to fly under the radar. From the very first week, he commits the names of every student to memory, even in groups of up to 70, ensuring no-one is ever anonymous.

Each year, he also memorises the names of all 90 students at the NCSS, an outreach program for teenagers that he runs with his partner, astrophysicist Dr Tara Murphy. When the students arrive and meet him for the first time, he likes to greet each one by name as if they’re an old friend.

“University teaching can be very impersonal,” says Associate Professor Curran, Director of the NCSS and ARC Research Fellow, speaking from his cluttered office in the School of Information Technologies (the day we meet it’s decorated in an under the sea theme, as part of an annual prank played by his honours students).

“Getting a personal connection is what makes the difference.” By adopting that approach, he has made a remarkable impact on the lives of his students over the past decade, helping hundreds of them to realise their dreams.

It’s at the NCSS that many students encounter Curran, a researcher in computational linguistics, for the first time. Originally established in 1996 by Professor Judy Kay and Associate Professor Bob Kummerfeld, the NCSS has evolved into an important launching pad for budding Australian programmers. A packed week of intensive classes and mentoring from industry experts culminates in a gruelling ‘all nighter’ that has become legendary. From dusk until dawn, students lock themselves away to build their own social networking site from scratch – while eating their way through an enormous stack of pizzas that reaches to the ceiling.
“It’s almost always a life-changing event for everyone who goes,” says Tim Dawborn, a PhD student of Associate Professor Curran and an alumnus of the NCSS who now tutors there. “They’re often the only person who’s interested in computer science in their school, and they realise there are other people who are like them.”

Sasha Bermeister, a tutor at the NCSS, says the event was a pivotal turning point in her young life. “I was the only person in my school who could fix the printers,” she says. “I always felt like the odd one out, especially being the only girl in my ICT class.” Not knowing any women who were programmers, she says, made her doubt her aspirations: “I thought, was that even possible for me?”

When she got to the NCSS, Associate Professor Curran introduced her to successful women in programming who became her role models. He also took the time to sit down with her one-on-one to help map out a career path. Recently, the 21-year-old was offered a graduate position at Google.

Many of those who attend the summer school meet Associate Professor Curran again in his lectures at the University of Sydney, which have the same high intensity as the NCSS. His first-year course in advanced informatics is described by those who complete it as one of their most difficult courses at the University. Associate Professor Curran is unapologetic: “One of the biggest mistakes we can make is to assume students aren’t capable,” he says. “You gain students’ respect by challenging them and making them think.”

His charismatic style of teaching goes a long way towards keeping students engaged during complex lectures. For much of the time, he writes programming code live at front of the class, while asking questions and soliciting ideas that get incorporated into the program. “It’s less of a rehearsed lecture and more of an interactive performance,” says Nicky Ringland, another of Professor Curran’s PhD students.

He makes a point of encouraging interjections and will often disrupt the lecture himself with impromptu quizzes designed to keep students on their toes (favourite questions include “How many piano tuners are there in Sydney?” and “How much does the Harbour Bridge weigh?”). When students struggle, Curran is there to offer advice and pastoral care. His support is tailored to the needs of each individual, from tight deadlines for students who need structure to encouraging emails for students who are feeling discouraged. “You have to work out what they’re passionate about and find a way for them to explore those things,” he says. “I love to see students who don’t think they can do something and by the end of the degree prove to them that they can.” His name for graduation day, he adds, is “I Told You So Day”.

Recently, Curran has set his sights on helping even more young programmers achieve their goals by lobbying for programming to be taught at school. Even if children have no intention of entering the IT industry, he argues that they still need to understand the underlying principles of the computer code that pervades nearly every aspect of modern life. “We teach kids about the planets, but how many are going to become astronomers?” he says. “There’s a combination of knowledge you have because it’s part of the basis of our community.”

Teaching programming in schools will also boost Australia’s future economic prosperity, says the researcher, who sits on the committee that is writing the new national digital technology curriculum for primary and high school students. Most importantly of all, he says, it will give more students the opportunity to find a job they love: “I do all this because I’m interested in people,” he says.

All his outreach, teaching and research, as well as his duties as a father since the birth of his son last year, leave him “constantly teetering on the edge of chaos”, Curran says. Luckily, many of his former students have started to take up the slack by sharing the burden of mentoring, tutoring and organising outreach for young people. Last year, there were 50 applications for just 20 tutor positions at the NCSS. His students have also taken charge of his highly successful NCSS Challenge initiative, which taught over 4000 young people the programming language Python last year.

“It makes me sad not to be needed, but that’s the way it should be,” he smiles. “When you get to the point that the people at the end of the pipeline care whether there are more people coming into the pipeline, I can drop out.”

I love to see students who don’t think they can do something and prove to them that they can.

When searching for information online, we often face the problem of distinguishing between two different things with the same name. For example, there’s both an Australian and an American broadcaster named ABC, and searching for one gives us results for the other.

James Curran understands more than most the confusion that can arise from identical names: he is often mistaken for another Associate Professor at the University of Sydney also named James Curran, who works in the Department of History. Appropriately, then, his research focuses on teaching computers how to cope with these ambiguities in language in order to deliver us exactly the information we’re looking for.

In a joint project with the Capital Markets Cooperative Research Centre and Fairfax Media, Curran has developed a web application called Zoom which can identify and track all the stories in the Fairfax newspaper archives involving a particular person or topic. It relies on his team’s natural language processing software not only to distinguish between different subjects with the same name but also to know when the same subject goes by many different names.

“Ultimately, what we are trying to do is build systems that are a better version of Google or [voice-activated iPhone application] Siri,” he explains. “The aim is that you can actually get the answer that you’re asking for as opposed to just a set of documents that contain the key words you’re interested in.”

ZOOMING WITH LANGUAGE
Peter Davidson’s childhood illness and life experiences make his gifts to the University as poignant as they are generous.

There is something poignant when Peter Davidson explains that occasionally he is overwhelmed to the point of tears, a side effect of childhood polio.

Whether his tears are a consequence of polio or not, as we sit in his home above a plateau on Sydney’s northern beaches, with breathtaking views of the Narrabeen Lakes below, it’s unfair to attribute all the tears to polio. His life stories as an adult are equally moving.

Peter is 82 and was originally to support the University of Sydney, his alma mater, through a bequest. But he recently decided instead to give the majority of his gift, which will amount to about $5 million, to the University during his lifetime.

However, the objects of his philanthropic gift will remain the same: supporting a postgraduate scholarship at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music (to be called the Peter Davidson Scholarship); children’s health programs of the Sydney Medical School, including ChIPS (Chronic Illness Peer Support), and the Sydney Medical School with another scholarship to be called the Peter and Suzanne Davidson Scholarship/Research Program.

Peter is also bequeathing a painting by the noted Australian artist Sir William Dobell to the University.

Peter’s link with the University’s Sydney Children’s Hospital dates back to his early childhood. Born with deformed feet, as a young boy he also suffered from polio. “I had a consultation with a doctor in about 1940, when the war was on, regarding my feet. He made it very clear that I was going to have a hard time and would not be accepted into the army, for instance.”

“The message was received loud and clear by my mother and me.”

Peter went to Albury Grammar School when he was 12 and even though
boarding school is traditionally the place young boys go to be pushed, because of his disabilities this didn't happen. “I was the one kid they didn’t push.

“It was a major mistake. I was the kid who didn’t have to do anything. I didn’t have to play sports, for instance, and I was just the kid to take advantage of that and I was allowed to opt out of anything.

“I gave up violin lessons. Had I been at home I think my mother would have put her foot down on that one. I needed a lot more pushing than I got away from home.”

I didn’t marry until I was 52 because I decided at 18 I had had a pretty rough childhood and I wouldn’t have children, since that wouldn’t be fair.

Peter went to the University of Sydney, studying economics, and then went on to work for the Overseas Telecommunications Commission, later part of Telstra. He consciously chose to avoid marriage, deciding not to have children so there was no risk his foot deformity could be passed on, although age is a marvellous leveller. At 82, he is more nimble and light footed than many of his mates, whose incapacities from later in life now overshadow his.

“I didn’t have a girlfriend when I was young, I didn’t marry until I was 52 because I decided at 18 I had had a pretty rough childhood and I wouldn’t have children, since that wouldn’t be fair,” he says.

Polio continues to have an impact throughout life, sometimes with late effects. As a result, Peter has continued his consultations with Sydney University medical experts.

“My medical bequests are to do with all these things. I mean I’m here today because of very, very good medical support.”

Despite having no children Peter is very conscious of what it costs to raise a child. So he contributes financially and involves himself in the lives of a local family. “They don’t have either of their grandfathers, so I’m their adopted grandfather.”

Peter met his wife Suzanne, 15 years younger than him, on the Manly ferry and they conducted their courtship on Sydney Harbour as they were ferried home from work each day over the following year. But the love of his life was snatched away from him by ovarian cancer, in 2008.

“When Sue was alive, I expected her to survive me. But when she died that need disappeared. That was five years ago. Then I began looking in detail at what would be done in my estate. I was convinced that there would be more in the bottom line for the University if I did it now.”

“I was conscious of the rearing of children who have disabilities and the need for support which was not available in my day so that attracted me to the ChIPS program. I started contributing to that program in about 2009 and I have ever since.”

Many of the young participants write to him to let him know how they are going and he gives out a ChIPs related award each year. “I didn’t expect any feedback but I have had surprising feedback from some of the children. Well, they’re adolescents.”

Associate Professor Sue Towns, head of ChIPs explains why Peter is so much loved by the participants. “Due to his experience with chronic disease in his own childhood, Peter has really struck a chord with the young people he so keenly supports. We couldn’t have achieved what we have without his generosity and support.”

Peter’s decision to give to the Conservatorium is similarly motivated. “I was one of the musical kids at school and I was a violinist then. Music was what I really enjoyed. I didn’t pursue the violin but that explains my interest in music. I not only enjoy music, but I enjoy the making of music.”

Professor Karl Kramer, Dean of the Conservatorium, says: “we were honoured and humbled by Peter’s recent decision to endow a postgraduate scholarship. His gift demonstrates a belief in the Con whose vision and purpose is to help aspiring musicians develop their craft and share their passion for music with the community.”

Peter is thrilled to be alive to see his gifts unfold. “To see it happen is wonderful and I’m swamped with invitations. There is a dinner this month hosted by the dean of the Medicine faculty and yesterday’s mail brought me this invitation to a beautiful lunch in the Great Hall. I mean – well, what could be better?”

INSPIRED: THE CAMPAIGN TO SUPPORT THE UNIVERSITY

inspired.sydney.edu.au
Forensic archaeologist Estelle Lazer is an expert on Pompeii. She spends most of her working life locked away in dusty vaults, trying to give ancient civilisations the life they deserve.

Forensic archaeologist Dr Estelle Lazer has spent months at a time researching in the ancient city of Pompeii, crouching on a dusty floor, sifting through piles of bone fragments in semi-darkness with only the dim light from a bicycle lamp for company. Green lizards fall from the ceiling at inopportune moments and huge snakes slither among the skulls.

There is nothing glamorous about Dr Lazer’s passion for bones and it certainly isn’t for the faint-hearted. She was frequently locked for hours on end in ancient buildings by the guards for security reasons! And even longer when they forgot she was there. “I was fine,” she says, waving aside my look of utter horror at the thought.

“Some skulls even had birds nesting in them. There was a whole ecosystem living in there,” she remembers. “I found lots of skeletons of rats and mice among the human remains.”

“My first season was back in 1986 and no-one had been to the site where the bones had been stored for the longest time. The 1980 earthquake had further isolated and cut off access to the site, so the guard and I had to hack our way through thorny brambles and wild fennel with a machete. We had to climb walls and break the locks on rusty gates to gain access to the ancient bathhouse where most of the bones were stored.

“Walking down a dark barrel-vaulted tunnel for the first time was amazing and if you shone a torch, bats would fly out into your face. There was marble from floor to ceiling, sundials, bits of statues – a foot or a hand, and in between, just enough space for the bats to hang! It was fantastic, a bit Indiana Jones with shadows flying up the walls. It was just how you’d imagine archaeology to be.”

Dr Estelle Lazer (BA Hons ’80 PhD ’96)
doesn’t look the type to scale walls and hack through branches. She’s rather petite with a shock of brown curly hair. But, as they say, appearances can be deceptive.

We meet at the British Museum, which is hosting the most important exhibition on Pompeii in almost 40 years: *Life and death in Pompeii and Herculaneum*. Sydney’s involvement in this exhibition is firmly down to Lazer’s expertise and two decades of work at the site. Her book *Resurrecting Pompeii* (Routledge 2009) provides a detailed analysis of her research into the skeletal remains there and she was invited by the curator to give a lecture at the British Museum on this topic. It was booked out. (She reprised the lecture at the University’s Nicolson Museum last month.)

Lazer undertook all her degrees at Sydney. Her undergraduate degree was in archaeology and it was at this time that her interest in human skeletal remains began. She did an apprenticeship at the morgue in Sydney and was then offered the chance to study the material in Pompeii.

“I’d dreamed about Pompeii since I was about eight years old, so getting permission to go and work on the bones was a childhood dream fulfilled. No-one had ever studied the remains in Pompeii before, so I was really lucky to be offered the opportunity.

“My classical and solid background in archaeology from my time at the University really helped me put what I found in Pompeii in a broader context,” explains Lazer.

“That, plus my PhD from the anatomy and histology department gave me a nice combination of rigorous science with rigorous arts. So, I can ask questions which are of interest to classical scholars as well as forensic scientists. And for that I am greatly indebted to my inspirational professor and head of anatomy and histology, Cedric Shorey. He was fantastic and gave me massive moral and practical support throughout the last phases of my PhD. In fact, the anatomy department was really great.”

She explains why most of the bones came to be in the Sarno bathhouse. “Excavation in Pompeii began around 1748 but archaeology as a discipline didn’t exist back then. People were more interested in collecting the artefacts and treasure hunting. Keeping skeletons wasn’t done and bones had no scientific
value at the time. So they just used to throw them in a pile and they were eventually used as theatre props for vignettes.”

In the 18th century, only important dignitaries were allowed to visit Pompeii. To make it more exciting, houses were sometimes re-excavated in their honour. “They’d stage a scene,” Lazer explains, “and cover over an area that had already been dug up, and often drape a skeleton over an amphora for effect. If they were lucky, the guest would be allowed to take home a souvenir, which they had discovered.”

Lazer is very mindful of the impact popular culture has on a site like Pompeii. The richness of the site means it’s tempting to attribute names, meanings and lives onto the skeletons, which is misleading from a scientific viewpoint.

“Pompeii is a destruction site, and its inhabitants weren’t able to remove things, so you find all aspects of life preserved: buildings with stucco decorations, paintings, sculptures and furniture, and the most humble items like dice, tweezers and combs. There are examples of epigraphy and election slogans on the walls, so we can piece together quite a lot.

“The trouble is, people believe we should be able to know much more than we do, and they begin to over-interpret. I think it’s really important to respect the material. Yes, they’re bones and they’re dead, but they were people and they had lives and dreamed and cared about people. I think I have a responsibility to treat them with respect and in my interpretations I show that by not attributing lives and meanings on them that they did not have.”

In her British Museum talk, Lazer also addressed the issue of ethics in archaeology. “We need to ask what is appropriate when researching human remains. In Australia, we’ve had to engage with the Indigenous issue. A lot of Indigenous material was collected without consent and for nefarious purposes. It was used to justify inequality and the treatment of people was appalling at times.

“But Europe has different cultural traditions, and particularly in Italy where there’s a long tradition of displaying people. Seeing your ancestors is your birth right. So in an Italian context, working in Pompeii is not a problem, but you still need to ask that question about what is appropriate.”

The most significant and exciting discovery for Lazer was when she realised that Pompeii’s unique casts still contained the bones. In fact, the first cast to be x-rayed and scanned was in 1994 in Sydney. The famous resin cast was transported in a box in a van across the city to the hospital where it was placed in a scanner at the end of the working day.

“We managed to scan from the feet to the waist,” says Lazer. “The victim held the classic pugilist pose of many of those who died in Pompeii from exposure to extreme heat. That meant the whole cast wouldn’t fit inside. But we found out she was female, aged
Dr Lazer clearly possesses a knack for fulfilling childhood dreams. Her other dream was Antarctica, which she first visited in a small sailing boat in 1984. Her destination was Mawson’s Huts on Cape Denison, the most exposed and windiest ice cap on the planet, situated on the most easterly point of the Australian Antarctic Territory.

This visit in turn led Lazer spending four summer seasons living in tents and using innovative excavation techniques for reaching the artefacts. “I had a fantastic chainsaw operator who very carefully removed ice with a chainsaw. He was able to identify artefacts floating in the clear ice, which we could then remove with finer tools and this enabled us to investigate material left at the site by Sir Douglas Mawson’s team.”

Mawson’s first Antarctic expedition (1911–1914) was hugely significant for Australia in terms of exploration and scientific discovery, and the site is now on the Australian National Heritage list and the Commonwealth Heritage list.

Lazer’s team was tasked with investigating the detritus scattered about this unique site, most of which has remained in situ for nearly a hundred years, with a view to documenting and conserving it. All manner of the men’s lives are visible at the abandoned huts – boots, clothing, a tiny box containing matches, tin cans, wood, as well as cached seals and penguins.

“By studying these artefacts, we can really get a glimpse into what it was like for them in such a harsh environment. The role of archaeology here is to study the evidence they left behind and see if what isn’t written about matches the scientific evidence they did write about.

“And the value of the archaeological evidence is that it not only provides us with information that the Australasian Antarctic Expedition never thought about providing in any form, but it also allows us to test the scientific evidence that they published.” Lazer and her colleagues went on to produce the first glaciological study carried out inside a shed!

People believe we should be able to know much more than we do, and they begin to over-interpret. It’s really important to respect the material.

Welch in the ancient history department, she’s applied for funding from the Australian Research Council to continue studying the remaining casts.

The casts are plaster and very dense, but at the same time, they’re also extremely fragile and can’t be lifted or moved. “The technology to do this kind of imaging hasn’t yet been invented,” says Lazer.

She and Welch want to get medical imaging companies interested in developing a non-invasive technique which will enable this in the future. “The casts are iconic,” says Lazer. “Nowhere else in the world do you get the preserved images of people as they died and nowhere else do you get whole skeletons to work with in this way.

“I’d like to give these people back their lives. I’d like to find out what’s really in there and compare it with what I’ve already found out from the disarticulated bits of skeletons I’ve studied up to now. You see, people have written reams about the casts, they’ve had stories written about them, and about their relationships with each other – and most of it is based on the most spurious evidence.”

Welch’s specialty is epigraphy, so she wants to look at the tombs and their inscriptions to try and disentangle truth from fiction and create a bigger picture of what life would have been like before the AD 79 eruption that cut short the lives of the people of Pompeii.

“The really interesting thing is, when I began working on the bones, no-one wanted to touch that stuff,” says Lazer, “and I was determined to show how much information you could get from a compromised sample, and I found out things that no-one else had. I don’t see it all ending with me. I’ve just scratched the surface. There’s so much more!”

Lazer would ideally like to see an overarching study done on both Pompeii and Herculaneum, to study the differences in terms of population and health. She acknowledges this may not be possible within her own career, but hopefully her enthusiasm will inspire others to carry on her work.

Between 30 and 40, with bad teeth but good bones. She was clutching a purse of money when she died.”

Lazer isn’t done with the bones of Pompeii just yet though. CT scans and x-ray technology could potentially unlock more secrets from the casts and this is where she wants to take her research next. But it’s a big and expensive project. Together with colleague Dr Kathryn Lazer in the ancient history department, she’s applied for funding from the Australian Research Council to continue studying the remaining casts.

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In March we launched the SAM Travel photo competition, themed around ‘People, Places and Nature.’ The response has been overwhelming, both in terms of variety and quality. Here are some of the best entries to date. The competition closes on 1 November, so there is still time to send in your entries. But as you will see from this selection, the standard is very high.

Go to the iPad to see all 40 photos
Facing page: Essaouira, Morocco, 2012, Dr Carolyn Watson (BMusEd ’96 PhD ’13), left: Antelope Slot Canyon, Arizona, 2011, Patricia Burke (BA ’92), below: Gorilla, Taronga Park Zoo, 2013, Suk Min Yoon (BDesArch ’13); bottom: Pride of lions, Serengeti National Park in Tanzania, 2013, Nathan Wright (BArch ’08)
FEATURE

Emeritus Professor Jeremy Davis receives the Alumni Award for Professional Achievement for his far-reaching impact on Australian business and the tertiary sector as a company director, scholar and thought leader.

After winning the University Medal in his economics degree, he went to Stanford University where he graduated with an MBA, coming first in his class, and a Master of Arts in Economics. As a young management consultant at Boston Consulting Group (BCG), he established the firm’s West Coast office and went on to reinvigorate its Paris office. He rose to become BCG’s Vice-President and Director-General for France.

Jeremy then returned to Australia and took up an appointment as the Dean of the UNSW Australian Graduate School of Management in 1980. He became a long-serving member of the UNSW Council and was elected President of the UNSW Academic Board, where he was a force for innovation.

Dr Russell Dickens receives the Alumni Award for Community Achievement in recognition of his landmark efforts to protect Australian wildlife, as well as his 50 years of service to the people of Western Sydney as a veterinarian and in local government.

Russell has been described as the father of koala medicine. In the 1970s, he was one of the first veterinarians in the country to systematically study diseases of the koala and provide advice on their clinical management. His pioneering master’s research laid the foundation for today’s expanding discipline of wildlife medicine.

Russell is a founding board member of the Australian Koala Foundation, where he is an authority on koala research, conservation and policy. His dedication to the welfare of animals, especially the koala, was recognised with a Medal of the Order of Australia in 1992.
JULIE MCKAY (EMBA ’11)

Julie McKay is a joint winner of the Young Alumni Award for Achievement for the outstanding role she has played in Australia’s non-profit sector as an advocate for gender equality, ending violence against women and social inclusion.

Though she initially embarked on a career in banking, Julie quickly realised her true passion lay in working for non-profit organisations. She went on to hold management roles at Homelessness Australia and the White Ribbon Campaign before being hired, aged just 23, as the Executive Director of UNIFEM Australia, now known as UN Women Australia. The organisation now commands a leading voice in the development sector and is a respected adviser to business and government on a range of important gender issues.

MAJOK TULBA (MSW ’09)

Majok Tulba is a joint winner of the Young Alumni Award for Achievement for his internationally recognised achievements as an author as well as his efforts to contribute to global peace. When Majok was nine, Sudanese Armed Forces burnt down his village in what is now South Sudan, killing some of his close family members. Escaping on foot, he spent the next seven years moving between refugee camps before eventually gaining asylum in Australia in 2001, at the age of 16.

Upon arrival in Sydney, Majok had no knowledge of English and could not read or write in his own native tongue, Dinka. He educated himself and won a place in the University’s Faculty of Education and Social Work where he graduated with a Master of Social Work in 2009. Meanwhile, Majok had begun writing stories, partly as a way of dealing with the brutal violence he had witnessed in his country of birth. Over the course of a year and a half, he wrote a novel on the experiences of child soldiers during the Sudanese civil war.

THE 2013 ANNUAL ALUMNI AWARDS

This prestigious awards program recognises outstanding achievements made by alumni locally and internationally.

The University also recognises six recently-graduated students for their achievements, as part of the annual Alumni Awards Program. The Graduate Medals recognise the achievements of undergraduate, master’s by coursework, PhD, International, Indigenous and Sporting graduates.

THE 2013 ALUMNI AWARDS PRESENTATION

Winners of this year’s Alumni Awards and Graduate Medals were presented with their awards by the Vice-Chancellor at a ceremony in the Great Hall on Friday, 27 September. For details, including a video of the presentations, go to sydney.edu.au/alumni/awards
In 2010, UTS academic and filmmaker Gillian Leahy (BA Hons ‘74) accompanied her brother, Terry Leahy (BA Hons ‘71) on a study leave trip to eastern Zimbabwe, to a mountainous region known as Chikukwa, thinking she’d have “a bit of a holiday,” and help film his research. “I thought I might be filming ‘this weed here’, and ‘that plant there’,” she laughs.

Dr Terry Leahy, senior lecturer in Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Newcastle, who has been researching food security and sustainable agriculture in Africa for the past 10 years, had become somewhat disillusioned by his experiences visiting development projects over the years: “They had very little impact at all, and folded up for all sorts of reasons.”

When he heard about an “incredibly successful” project at an international permaculture gathering in Malawi in 2009, Terry was intrigued. “There was a set of representatives from Chikukwa, presenting about the CELUCT project,” he says, “and it looked really amazing.”

CELUCT (Chikukwa Ecological Land Use Community Trust) “has totally transformed the lives of the 7000 people who live in the six Chikukwa clan villages,” Gillian explains. Just over 20 years ago, the area was one of eroded, treeless landscapes, failing crops and silted springs. Despite a high rainfall, the people could not feed themselves and were malnourished. Nowadays, however, the villages present a very different scene, with flourishing food gardens, livestock, fishponds, woodlots, and thriving people.

“CELUCT were really keen for me to come,” Gillian explains, “but they didn’t tell us what their plans were.” It was to be no holiday. “When we got
there, they had a 10-day shooting schedule ready for us, with four interviews 30–60 minutes apart, every day.” While the schedule was unrealistic, and the villagers readily admitted they didn’t know much about filmmaking, they were very glad to see someone who did, and keen to share their success story.

Their story began in 1991, when locals, including German couple Ulli and Eli Westermann, both teachers, and Chester Chituwu, principal of the local primary school, tried to solve a water shortage problem: the springs were drying up. After initial working bees had failed, the villagers contacted a permaculture centre in Harare for advice.

A subsequent workshop concentrated on the use of natural resources especially water flow. Inspired, the villagers organised new working parties to deal with the larger problems: filling gullies with rocks and soil, terracing hillsides, planting trees, building fences to keep livestock out of water catchments, creating swales and planting them with grass to trap soil particles. The farmers also exchanged gardening knowledge and helped each other, and similar groups were organised in all of the six villages.

The results were dramatic. “There was such visible success after a short time that it was just convincing,” says Ulli Westermann. As the terracing reclamation of the hillsides transformed the landscape, the farmers were able to feed their families, sometimes even sell surpluses. CELUCT built a community centre, and the process of knowledge transfer went on. Subgroups were established to train people in permaculture, prevent AIDS and help HIV survivors, promote nutrition, and as a self-help group for women.

**The education of young Leahys**

Terry, who graduated with double Honours in Government and Philosophy, says his student experience at Sydney left an indelible mark on him. “I certainly had some excellent teachers who had a huge influence on my thinking and academic career. The most influential was undoubtedly the Philosophy lecturer George Molnar, who introduced me to thinkers such as Hobbes and Marx. His theory of causal powers and its use to develop an analysis of human nature and ethics had a great influence on my thinking; likewise, his radical libertarian position on political matters and his whole-hearted embrace of feminism.

“I followed George Molnar to become a member of the childcare cooperative that operated out of Glebe in the early 70s and at that time I planted the huge blue gum that you can now still see in Mt Vernon Street. “Professor David Armstrong was also a wonderful lecturer and a very influential thinker. His realist epistemology has informed my sociological analysis from the very beginning.

“The staff in Government were also a great influence. Professor Henry Mayer was a caustic and perceptive intellectual who taught us much about how to construct an argument and pull a piece of writing apart. I met Raewyn (then Bob) Connell for the first time when she/he was lecturing in the Government department then and participating in the Open University project. She has been a long-term influence, someone who, like me, moved from Government into Sociology.

“I was also inspired by such wonderful student leaders as Hall Greenland, Kate Jennings, Jean Curthoys and my sister Gillian Leahy, who was one of the founders of the Women’s Liberation movement in Sydney in the early 70s.”

For her part, Gillian who did Honours in Anthropology, was also active in student politics. “I liked my time at Sydney and was active in student politics. “I loved campus life generally, the library and the front lawn in particular. It was via the Women’s Liberation movement that I got into filmmaking.”

Gillian recalls three lecturers who influenced her – Terry McMullen, in Psychology, and Les Hiatt and Jeremy Beckett from Anthropology. ■
After disputes arose over the use of a vehicle, Eli Westermann returned to Germany for training in conflict resolution. On her return, “she trained a set of people and they trained other people,” says Terry, “and eventually almost 50 people in the six villages were trained in conflict mediation.”

There is a fascinating scene in the film that shows a conflict workshop in action. Despite the hectic filming experience, which Gillian found challenging as this was her first time making a solely digital film (she also needed to train Terry as a sound recorder), she describes it as an amazing experience. “Just to see people pretty happy and well fed, beautiful scenery and lots of productive gardens and... the kids! All the kids look happy,” she says. “Everyone speaks to each other, everyone knows each other, everyone was happy with us being there.”

Gillian and Terry discussed the possibility that perhaps they had stumbled upon a cult. But Terry says interviewing people at random, who had not been chosen for them to talk to, revealed “that everybody was an expert on permaculture; people could explain things about their gardens in terms of permaculture concepts, which are basically sustainable agriculture culture concepts.”

Terry was struck by the fact that this was not top-down development, but villagers copying successful designs and practices from each other. Each village has at least one spring with protective woodland planted around it. The spring is tapped with poly pipes bringing water to a community tank, built by the villagers, supplying water to households.

Woodlots maintain the health of the springs, store and release ground water, prevent erosion and provide fuel and timber. Destructive farming practices, such as burning after harvest, have been replaced with more sustainable methods, thus retaining soil fertility.

Although CELUCT refused donations for the first five years, it has since received intermittent aid funding. The centre now has visitors from all over Zimbabwe coming to learn about permaculture, and a spinoff, TSURO (Towards Sustainable Use of Resources Organisation), is spreading the principles behind the Chikukwa experience to nearby dry-land villages.

While Gillian is now exploring the options for screening The Chikukwa Project on Australian TV, she recognises that CELUCT “wanted us to make an advocacy film that would help them raise money for the centre”. At the same time, she realises “what we’ve made is an excellent development and/or permaculture training film”. Raising money via crowd-funding for post-production, Terry and Gillian were surprised by the generosity of donors.

Eventually almost 50 people in the six villages were trained in conflict mediation.

...
As one of Australia’s most experienced newspaper editors, Peter Fray made a career out of trying to look ahead to tomorrow’s news. But the uncertain future of the 182-year-old newspaper where he spent the bulk of his career prompts a sombre backward glance.

Asked about the challenges facing print media and the *Sydney Morning Herald* – a topic he is asked about frequently these days – he sets aside the journalist’s instinctive cynicism and turns sentimental.

“I cannot conceive of a Sydney without the *Sydney Morning Herald* – I cannot conceive of it.” He pauses and adds: “I do not want to conceive of it.”

Fray, 51, says the loss of the Herald will be a loss for the city. At its best, he says, the newspaper is not merely a “watchdog” but helps to define and add to the character of the city.

He believes print journalism has a future but that newspapers may be limited to weekends as readers rely on a mix of technologies and media for their news. Increasingly, he says, readers will turn to smartphones for their quick news fix and to tablets, televisions and print for longer stories.

“There is still a demand for weekend reading. It’s a great institution – papers such as the Saturday *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Saturday Age* ... I see the mobile handheld device being the future for spot news, and then a combination of technologies where you will get deeper, more immersive information. One of those will be the morphing of our television sets into total news pipelines. That opens up a bunch of new opportunities for journalists and content providers.”

But Fray has no illusions about the difficult future of the print media or the prospect of the newspaper’s imminent demise. Earlier this year, he said in an interview on ABC Radio that the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age* in Melbourne would last another five years. But he now believes it may be sooner. “Five years? ... the Monday-to-Friday newspaper,
I think, might not be around in two years...

“News Limited has always wanted to push the Sydney Morning Herald into the sea in Bondi. I suspect they may get their wish. I think that will be a terrible thing. I have always said this city is big enough for multiple media voices.”

Fray was editor and publisher of the Sydney Morning Herald from 2009 after decades as a reporter – including as London correspondent – and stints editing the Canberra Times and The Sunday Age in Melbourne. His Fairfax career ended last June, just days after the dramatic announcement by the company that it was axing 1900 jobs, closing printing presses in Sydney and Melbourne and shifting its broadsheet newspapers to tabloid formats.

Fray believes the Sydney Morning Herald has a future – both online and possibly in print – but it needs to be clear about what it stands for “on every platform, at every second of the day”.

“There is no denying it has a big audience online, but how does that translate into influence? They are not the same thing. How does the SMH change the debate and challenge what’s going on? How does it stop public officials doing the wrong things by exposing what they’re up to? How does it inspire people?

“The Herald should be for Sydney. It should be deeply tapped into what people are worried about and into the Zeitgeist. It needs to challenge what people are thinking. It is a big goddam city... Newspapers need to challenge what people are thinking. They need to bring down ministers and play a watchdog role, but at the same time the media should be a reflection of the place that you live.”

Fray admits that the challenges for print media are immense and potentially insurmountable, particularly the rising relative cost of print and distribution as circulation drops and readers shift to online.

“It is easy for me to sit here and be an editor in hindsight,” he says.

“I am fully aware of the revenue challenges – of the challenges posed by the social media transition and audiences going everywhere. Everyone gets that the rivers of gold [the streams of revenue from classified advertising] have dried up.”

Fray arrived at journalism – and in Australia – somewhat by accident. He grew up in Swindon, west of London, in a family that was “aspirational working class”. His father worked on the factory floor for British Rail and his mother “made bras for the factory floor for British Rail”.

As a teenager, he worked as a copy kid on the local newspaper, The Evening Advertiser, and encountered a world he found enthralling.

诊 out the role of the media in democracies

Peter Fray began his association with the University of Sydney in 2010, when he was appointed the First Decade Fellow in the Department of Media and Communications while he was still editor-in-chief of the Sydney Morning Herald and the Sun Herald.

His research focussed on the role of the editor and the relationship between the media and audiences, including ways to rebuild the public’s trust in journalism.

“I was preoccupied with trust,” he says. “How do you trust the media? Has the trust relationship broken down?”

Fray says he was angry that the Australian media had been tarnished by the phone hacking scandal in Britain, particularly after the Gillard Government used the scandal to attack local media outlets.

“We don’t operate in the same way as the UK media,” he says. “We don’t go around bribing cops, paying people to tap phones. Labor and Julia Gillard were getting a hammering from the News Limited tabloids and saw the phone tapping as an opportunity to use it as a big stick to basically beat up Murdoch. It was a bad call.”

Fray ended his fellowship with a speech in which he said editors should allow readers to be involved in creating content but should also lead campaigns and push for “measurable change”.

Earlier this year, after leaving Fairfax, Fray was appointed an adjunct professor in the Department of Media and Communications. He will mentor students, research the role of the media in democracies in collaboration with the University’s Institute of Democracy and Human Rights, and work on websites and platforms which will promote the University’s research and harness the expertise of academic staff. He has already begun working with the director of INCUBATE – the University’s entrepreneurial start-up engine – on a political website which will canvass the views of Australian politicians on key issues.

“What you have in the university is an incredible resource,” he says. “But what you don’t always have is a way of taking that resource across into the broader community. I am trying to find a few easy-to-understand, easy-to-use tools that will have Sydney University badging on them and that will make a difference.”

Fray says he also hopes to work with the University’s media students and academics to create a “newsroom” which would focus on specific research and reporting projects.

“I would love to go back into the University and set up a newsroom with a defined project in mind and then draw on the University’s resources,” he says. “It could be something that links the University with the region. The Institute of Democracy and Human Rights is a great place to start – it’s a great bridge between the academy and society.”
but seemingly out of reach. He left school at age 16 and studied farm management in England and then learnt from a fellow student that Australia was offering scholarships to study agriculture in Western Australia. So, at the age of 20, he ended up in the wheat belt in the town of Moorine Rock, a 164-person town about 350 kilometres east of Perth.

“I was a chubby cheeked Pom turning up there in the middle of summer,” he says. “I was not very good with my hands and not very good with machinery. I always had this sneaking suspicion that I was not cut out to be a farmer. As luck would have it – it was really pure luck – the Western Australian [now Curtin] Institute of Technology had just started a degree in rural journalism. Deliverance.”

Fray wrote to the school to request admission, telling the head, Lawrence Apps, now a lifelong friend, that “I can’t do crap with my hands – I keep killing things and setting things on fire”. He was accepted – his first by-line was a story about a rodeo for the Northam Advertiser – and ended up completing his studies at the University of Queensland. He then landed his first job in journalism as the Queensland correspondent for the National Farmer magazine.

“My rounds were tropical fruits, sugar, cattle and social affairs,” he recalls.

Though he covering the Queensland farming scene, he moved to Sydney to follow a girlfriend and found a job at Choice magazine. He lasted less than a day – “my first story to do was 5000 words on electric frying pans” – because he quit after he was contacted in the afternoon and offered a job as rural reporter for the Sydney Morning Herald, then based on Broadway. Incidentally, he points out, he now serves as a non-executive board member of Choice.

“I was not a brilliant writer,” he says. “I don’t think I wanted to be a great writer. I was a late maturer in a career sense. I look at younger journalists – they know so much more than me and have deeper and broader skills… I have gone a long way on curiosity, natural charm and a shitload of luck.”

Since leaving Fairfax, Fray has taken up a position at the University and started a website, PolitiFact Australia, which checks the accuracy of claims by politicians and other prominent Australians and then provides a rating on a “Truth-O-Meter”. It is the first version outside the United States of the Pulitzer Prize-winning website, PolitiFact.com, and has signed media partnership deals with Fairfax for the election campaign and with Channel Seven.

Fray says he hopes to start similar fact-checking sites, either in other countries or as local sites that check claims made outside politics such as in the health sector or the business world.

Despite his concerns about the shaky future of the media – and its struggles to find new sources of revenue – he has not given up on journalism. Having departed the country’s oldest newspaper, he is ready to experiment with new digital projects which, he says, may have a slightly shorter shelf-life.

“There is a great marriage of skills – people like me, grey haired old bastards, who are meeting up with younger people who hopefully can benefit from having grey hairs around but feel at ease and savvy with the digital world,” he says.

“But what you do has to be compelling. The good thing about the digital world is that if you fail, you fail fast.”
The exhibition earlier this year on the history of anaesthesia, held in Fisher Library as part of an international symposium on the subject, provided a fascinating portrait of the evolution of pain management. Using a selection of nearly 200 books published over the last five centuries, it was a joint venture between the library, the source of most of the books, and the Australian Association of Anaesthetists (ASA) which loaned both historic equipment and landmark books from their collection.

As curator of the exhibition, I defined pain in both moral and scientific terms as well as literary and polemical works about narcotic drug use and abuse. Alternative ideas were represented by Mesmer’s publication about animal magnetism, and a collection of Chinese and Western books on acupuncture, were also on show.

The ancient Roman Seneca, whose stoic philosophy taught that pain was character-building, sat alongside his near contemporary Galen, who thought pain was of no benefit to the sufferer. His view was echoed by a polemic in the Lancet magazine deploring the use of chloroform in Queen Victoria’s ‘normal labour’.

Opium is still the sovereign pain relieving drug and there was an array of 16th century herbal, alchemical and medical texts as well as a series of 17th century clinical monographs promoting laudanum as a cure for symptoms ranging from cough and diarrhoea to infertility and melancholy.

Surgical anaesthesia is founded on physiological discoveries about the circulation of the blood and respiration.

Oh, the pain, the pain...

A richly detailed exhibition on the history of anaesthesia reveals shifting attitudes towards pain.
Landmark texts included Harvey’s de Motu Cordis alongside books by his French critic Riolan and his English follower Lower, who performed the first blood transfusion. Laughing gas and ether parties were social phenomena which antedated medical application of the gases by several decades.

The apparatus developed by Davy and Priestley for their scientific study of gases and respiration were modified for use in anaesthesia. Peter Stanbury and Anna Gebels, the curators of the ASA collection, chose examples of historic machines showing how they developed.

Europeans were quick to exploit the pharmacological riches of the New World such as tobacco and quinine. Arrow poisons fascinated them, and the Indians guarded their secret well, but a slim volume by Schombruck describes how it was revealed to him during his explorations of Guinea. It was written long afterwards when he was curator of the Adelaide Botanic Gardens.

Colonial Australian scientists were also interested in the medicinal plants used by indigenous people. Aboriginal people inhaled the smoke of burning duboisia hopwoodiae before ceremonies and also chewed extracts of the leaves.

Joseph Bancroft’s monograph describing the narcotic (or rather cocktail of narcotics) led to the establishment of commercial plantations of the desert shrub which still supply the raw material for the manufacture of scopolamine and atropine. Each book had more than one story to tell.

A polemic in the Lancet magazine deplored the use of chloroform in Queen Victoria’s ‘normal labour’.
In the 1970s, the Footbridge Theatre’s Foyer Cafe was a hotbed of intellectual life the equal of any in Greenwich Village or Paris.

Today cafes are punctuation marks of the city’s narrative, strategically sited. Few, though, are sites of social or political discourse. In the 1960s, however, the University was the site of a cafe whose patrons engaged in challenging and thoughtful discussion over their roasted beans.

Repins Coffee Inn in the CBD, or the Arabian and the Piccolo, both in Kings Cross, were haunts of Bohemians, intellectuals, and artists, but perhaps the most intellectually alive was the cafe in the foyer of the Footbridge Theatre. Some of the most talented and articulate young thinkers and creators in the country, many of whom were destined to have outstanding careers in the arts, journalism or academe, hung out there.

On a typical weekday one might encounter Germaine Greer holding forth on the subject for which she was to become famous; John Bell holding forth on theatre; Robert Hughes on art; or Bob Ellis, just holding forth. Richard Brennan, later a film producer, was a witty raconteur; Judith Rich was later a successful New York journalist; Mungo MacCallum Junior was developing as a political journalist; Jeannie Lewis was a leading folksinger; Frank Moorhouse was publishing his first short stories; Padraic McGuinness was already a brilliant economist; Jim
Baker, a lecturer in Philosophy was a leading figure in the Libertarian Push (inspired by 1920s University lecturer John Anderson); Arthur Dignam was soon to be one of Australia’s most successful actors; Albie Thoms was pioneering alternative cinema.

Richard Neville edited the satirical Oz Magazine; Laurie Oakes was later to be the country’s best known political reporter; Clive James was investing his talent in his conversation; Ken Horler would become a highly successful lawyer; Michael Wilding would later be Professor of English at the University; Liz Fell was building her academic career; Johnny Allen was creating left wing theatre; Richard Walsh would rise to be the Publisher of Consolidated Press; and I was commencing my career as the founder of Australian experimental theatre.

The conversation was often intense, frequently funny, invariably satirical, occasionally fractious, and regularly iconoclastic. It was also democratic, with lecturers and students sitting together, arguing and joking.

Many cultural and social developments which are now taken for granted were new, exciting and infectious. The Pill had liberated sexual mores. The New Left had liberated sexual mores. The New Left was, still, new. Censorship was loosening. Clothing styles were being revolutionised, and in the arts, modernism was giving way to postmodernism. So, why at Sydney University, and not in, say, Darlinghurst or Balmain? Perhaps because universities are, necessarily, hotbeds of intellectual ferment and cutting-edge ideas.

While the talk was in full swing in the cafe, in the theatre of which it was the foyer the latest nouvelle vague films from Europe, such as those of Bergman or Fellini, were being screened, long before there was an SBS. The venerable Sydney University Dramatic Society, led by Albie Thoms, was staging challenging new European plays. Albie organised the visit to Sydney, in 1964, of Fernando Arrabal, a leading European author of the famous Absurdist antiwar play Picnic on the Battlefield.

Those who were there retain many memories: Germaine castigating a law student for his chauvinism; a theatre set which I built collapsing during a performance; political demonstrations in the city and on campus, by the cafe’s habitués; fierce verbal battles over trifles; or a naked male student leaping from a female student’s high window when her lover showed up.

GERMAIN GREER to speak on her new book: 27 October, 4.30pm, in the Great Hall
sydney.edu.au/sydney_ideas/lectures/2013/germaine_greer.shtml
1930s

ASTLEY BOSTON (BA ’34 DipEd ’35) was born in Broken Hill in May 1913, the second of three daughters. Her parents settled in Dulwich Hill after years of travelling. Astley went to Sydney Girls High School and then the University of Sydney where she graduated with a BA and then became a teacher (schools unknown). She married Alf Harvey and they had a son. Her husband joined the RAAF and was killed in Germany, and Astley remarried after the war. Astley returned to teaching in the 1960s and taught at Summer Hill primary school. She has four granddaughters and two grandsons, six great granddaughters and three great grandsons.

1970s

NADIA WHEATLEY (BA ’71), historian, author, Honorary Associate and Artist-in-Residence in the Faculty of Education and Social Work last year, has just published another history book, Australians All (Allen & Unwin). Featuring 80 mini-biographies, the book encompasses the history of our continent from the Ice Age to the Apology, from the arrival of the First Fleet to the Mabo Judgement. Brief accounts of the lives of real young Australians open up this chronological narrative. Some of the subjects of the biographies have become nationally or even internationally famous. Others were legends in their own families and communities.

BRUCE AULD (BScAgr ’67 MScAgr ’70 PhD ’75) has recently published his fourth book, A Traveller’s Flora, designed, in part, to increase public interest in the plant sciences. The book describes and illustrates common and conspicuous plants around south-east Australia. The book includes an introduction to botany: how plants are named and classified, and how they grow. Bruce has worked as a Research Scientist and Consultant for the NSW and Australian governments and the United Nations. He has also been an adjunct professor, Sydney University, visiting professor, Kyoto University and is currently Adjunct Professor of Plant Ecology at Charles Sturt University. He is developing a national online database of risk management assessments of exotic invasive plants.

AMY MERRIMAN (BCom ’99) is Group Managing Director of the Jupiter Management group, a constellation away from the Yass property where she grew up, and from there to school at Ascham. Amy launched her first company at the age of 23 and it now forms part of the Jupiter group – a cluster of niche companies in event management. After graduating with her Commerce degree, Amy travelled through Africa with two school friends before landing in England to find work. A brief visit to France, where she was invited to the polo at Deauville, led to work with an event management company in the UK. In 2001 Amy returned to Australia to establish an event management company of her own.

1990s

JAMES ECCLES (DipMus ’99) and OLLIE MILLER (BMus ’00) are two of the contemporary-classical string quartet The NOISE, which performed the world premiere of seven new Australian string quartets at the Cell Block Theatre in the National Art School in Darlinghurst earlier this month. Eccles, who plays the viola, and Miller the cello, teamed up with violinists Veronique Serret and Mirabai Peart in 2008 when the four musicians started having regular jam sessions in a terrace house in Darlinghurst after classical concerts and gigs. The NOISE plays anything from jazz to classical, with a heavy emphasis on improvisation, including special effects pedals.

2000s

SUSAN ADAMS (PhD Med ’02) has just released her first book of poetry, Beside Rivers (Island Press). After gaining her PhD in Medicine, Dr Adams worked as an ARC Research Associate in the School of Biological Sciences and in the Cell and Reproductive Biological Laboratory, Discipline of Anatomy and Histology at the University. Her main area of research was in establishing cellular biomarkers for embryo implantation in both humans and reptiles. Many of the pieces in her poetry book have been inspired from the environment of her home life on Dangar Island surrounded by the beautiful Hawkesbury River, north of Sydney. Several of the poems have received awards in National and International competitions. She has been published in nine countries and three languages.
RENDEZVOUS WITH DESTINY
Michael Fullilove
Viking $29.99
Franklin D Roosevelt appointed five extraordinary men to be his eyes and ears at strategic moments in the development of World War II in Britain, and to relay first-hand accounts of Britain’s preparedness to fight against the superior German offensive. Through author Michael Fullilove (BA ’94), we gain a new insight into the wartime Anglo-American relationship by following these American envoys on their missions.

Harry Hopkins, Wendell Willkie, Bill Donovan, Sumner Welles and Averell Harriman were very different personalities. In common, they were charismatic, highly accomplished, diplomatic and astute. From rich or poor backgrounds, they were all well connected, greatly respected and admired in Great Britain. In their separate correspondences to FDR these men all spoke highly of Winston Churchill as a most remarkable statesman and convivial host.

There is still much to learn about World War II and the tales of these extraordinary men are well worth the telling.

PETE R HALL ARCHITECT
The Phantom of the Opera House
Peter Webber
The Watermark Press $25
It’s possible to make a single decision in one’s life that overshadows every other. Peter Hall hesitantly agreed to take on the completion of the Sydney Opera House in the wake of Joern Utzon’s departure. Never mind that he completed a huge body of work during his lifetime. His Opera House interiors are still what people talk about, and controversy abounds.

Hall transformed the Opera House from a shell into a usable space, albeit a different one. He weathered politics, financial blowouts, construction challenges, personal difficulties and more, to realise the completion of a national icon. Yet he remained virtually unknown, and was only formally acknowledged for his part in the Opera House’s construction at the RAIA 25 Year Award in 2006, a decade after his death.

Author Peter Webber (BA ’54, DipTCPlan ’59, MTCPlan ’68) was at university with Hall, and trod similar architectural paths, occasionally coming into contact with his contemporary. Webber has shown us an energetic, creative and productive man, who adored his five children from two marriages, and also had a passion for prestige cars, sport, art, music, good food and malt whiskey. As well as uncovering many of Hall’s other projects, he has clarified details surrounding the Opera House project, and not before time, has set the record straight.

MY MOTHER, MY FATHER
Edited by Susan Wyndham
Allen & Unwin $29.99
More and more baby boomers are becoming orphans. Just because a parent dies after a long and fruitful life, it does not lessen the pain for the adult child. It was such an experience which gave editor Susan Wyndham (BA ’81) the idea for this compilation. It contains powerful and personal reflections about the complex relationship of parent and child. It looks at regret, joy, fear, guilt, rivalry, anger and mortality. It also brings sorrow right into the spotlight.

Fourteen writers, including Wyndham, relate their experiences and feelings at the most vulnerable moments of their lives. David Marr took notes while his sister, who was a doctor, had the more hands-on role. Thomas Keneally struggled with self worth and parent expectations. Nikki Barrowclough lost a mother and brother in quick succession. The Rice siblings played scrabble at their dying mother’s bedside. Kathryn Heyman flew across the world in time for the funeral of a father she barely knew. Linda Neil went to Paris where she slowly climbed back out of a long period of grief.

Each author’s style is different. There is sublime poetry, clear observation, brittle and evasive expression, unexpected humour, and throughout, a wealth of emotion which is neither mawkish nor affected. It’s a privilege to share these moments, because we’ve been there too.
FRIDAY 18 OCTOBER
Sydney Law School Class of 1973 Reunion
Jubilee Room, Parliament House, Sydney, 6 – 8pm

TUESDAY 22 OCTOBER
Pharmacy Dean’s Reception, Dubbo
Two Doors Tapas and Wine Bar, 6 – 8pm
Annual regional alumni reception for the Faculty of Pharmacy

WEDNESDAY 23 OCTOBER
Beijing Alumni Reception
The Kerry Hotel, 1 Guanghua Road, Chaoyang District, 7 – 9pm
Reception for all alumni based in China

FRIDAY 25 OCTOBER
Canberra Alumni Drinks
The Brassey, Barton, 6 – 8pm
Regular networking drinks for Canberra-based alumni

SATURDAY 26 OCTOBER
Dentistry Reunion Dinner, Class of 1993
The Australian Golf Club, Sydney, 6 – 11.30pm
With guest speaker Dr Peter Dayman

SUNDAY 27 OCTOBER
The Australian Boat Race 2013
The Yarra River and ‘Zinc’, Federation Square, Melbourne
Annual rowing race between Sydney and Melbourne University Boat Clubs

TUESDAY 29 OCTOBER
Sydney China Business Forum 2013
Sydney Town Hall, 8.30am – 5pm forum, 7 – 10pm gala dinner
The theme of this year’s one-day forum will be sustainability, with a particular focus on energy, transport, agribusiness and water

THURSDAY 31 OCTOBER
Insights inaugural lecture series
Nicholson Museum and General Lecture Theatre 1, 5.30 – 7.15pm
Peter Hiscock, Tom Austen Brown Professor of Australian Archaeology, speaking on ‘Coming to Australia: The First Migration of Humans to Australia and its Global Significance’.

THURSDAY 7 NOVEMBER
Faculty of Engineering and Information Technologies Alumni Awards Reception
Level 5, School of Information Technologies Building, 6 – 8pm
Join us at this cocktail reception hosted by the Dean, as the Award winners share their unique stories

FRIDAY 8 NOVEMBER
Sydney Medical School Class of 1954 Alumni Reunion Lunch
The Royal Sydney Golf Club, 12 – 2pm

SATURDAY 9 NOVEMBER
Sydney Medical School Class of 1978 Reunion Dinner
The Great Hall, 6.30 – 11pm

SATURDAY 16 NOVEMBER
Sydney Medical School Class of 1986 Alumni Reunion Dinner
The Holme Building, 6.30 – 11pm

THURSDAY 21 NOVEMBER
Connect Over Cocktails
Business School CBD Campus, Level 17, 133 Castlereagh Street, Sydney, 6 – 8pm
Business School Alumni Networking Reception with guest speaker Julie McKay

FRIDAY 25 NOVEMBER
“Animalia” Faculty of Veterinary Science fundraising dinner
Doltone House, Hyde Park, Sydney, 6 – 8pm

FRIDAY 25 NOVEMBER
Sydney College of the Arts Alumni Recognition Ceremony
The Great Hall and Kirkbride, 4 – 8pm

KEEP UP TO DATE
There’s always lots going on in and around the University – too much to fit it all in here! So stay up to date with alumni events and more via our online event calendar – sydney.edu.au/events
You can also keep in touch via our alumni pages – sydney.edu.au/alumni.
Also, make sure that we have your latest contact details (you can do this online at sydney.edu.au/stayconnected) so that you receive our monthly eSydney email newsletter, as well as invitations to events in your local area.
Ph +61 2 9036 9222. Email alumni.office@sydney.edu.au

ALUMNI REUNIONS
There are numerous alumni reunions being held throughout the year. Please visit the event pages at sydney.edu.au/alumni for more information. If you would like help arranging your own reunion, contact us at events.assistant@sydney.edu.au
Meredith Owen moved to Sydney from her home in Dartmouth, Canada to begin a postgraduate Bachelor of Dentistry in 2006 and became involved as a volunteer in her first year, when she was elected Academic Representative for the Sydney University Dental Undergraduates Association. She went on to serve as Vice President in her third year and President in her fourth.

For Meredith, volunteering is all about the connections. Whether it facilitates a stronger connection to the University, a new group of friends, or peers from all over the country, volunteering is about making a place for yourself while you’re studying, and having a lasting impact on your faculty and its students.

“University is more than just the degree you get at the end,” says Owen. “I met so many friends, and built my own support network here, and that was the best part of it,” she says. “Connecting with everyone made me feel more a part of the community and connected to the University, especially because in Dentistry, we’re not on campus all the time, so it really made me feel a lot more connected to what’s going on.”

In 2007, Owen teamed up with two dental students from the Universities of Adelaide and Western Australia to establish the Australian Dental Students Association, which organises a national conference for dental students every year. Students from all across Australia are brought together over a week of lectures, gadget displays, pub crawls and cocktail parties, and since graduating, Owen has watched it flourish on its own.

“It’s this opportunity to establish your own organisations, and in a way your own legacies, that she counts as one of the most exciting aspects of student volunteering.

“The best part about student organisations is there’s a continual influx of new people coming in. People are very flexible, and they’re open to change and new ideas, and that’s why it makes it more open to more types of people,” she says. “And the good thing about university too, is you can start your own committee. I’ve heard of people who started committees in their own faculties because they didn’t have one. You can get funding from the USU, it’s as easy as that.”

As part of her third-year elective, Owen also spent time doing volunteer dentistry in Laos with an organisation called Tooth Aid. “It was pretty awesome. We stayed in the villages, so we got to know all the chiefs and everyone in the community. In terms of what the dental health is for the average person in a developing country, it’s definitely an eye-opener,” she says. “It offers another perspective.”

Since graduating in 2009, Owen has been working as a dentist in private practices around Sydney and in rural areas, and returns to the Faculty of Dentistry as a clinical educator one day a week. As a former President of the Dentistry Alumni Society of the University of Sydney (2012), her focus is now on connecting Sydney alumni with current students, through events such as cocktail parties, hosting events in conjunction with faculty rugby games, and the Women in Dentistry Evening, which brings together dentistry students with working female dentists.

“I think being an alumnus is really important,” she says. “We’re trying really hard to have some joint events with the students. Just so they know we’re there, so they know that it’s something that they can be a part of, and to urge them to become active members. Because that’s what keeps an organisation going, the new graduates coming in.”

Like most volunteers you’ll meet, Owen is thoroughly pragmatic about fitting in all of her commitments, and seems to thrive on it. “You just have to fit it all in. Go to bed early, and get your things done,” she says. “It’s a good busy.”