

MADE IN
AUSTRALIA

Made in Australia
by Chris Kennedy

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"There are two kinds of people in this world son..."



OIL LAMP
BOOKS

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Chris Kennedy is a well known Australian film maker. He has written, directed and produced four feature films.

His best known movie "Doing Time for Patsy Cline" opened the Sydney Film Festival, won the Australian Writer's Guild Award for best original film script, and won the San Diego Film Festival Award for best original screenplay. It also received three Film Critics Circle of Australia Awards.

His movie 'A Man's Gotta Do' won the audience-vote Zenith Award at the Montreal Film Festival.

Chris has twice received Australian Film Institute nominations for best original screenplay, and won numerous other writing and film making awards, both in Australia and overseas.

He lives in Sydney with his wife and three children.

This is his first novel.

Praise for 'Doing Time for Patsy Cline'

"Kennedy has crafted a film as restless, funny and full of yearning as the open roads of Australia itself.

Near the end, it is startlingly powerful."

Toronto Globe and Mail

The audience was stamping its feet!"

City Magazine

"*Doing Time For Patsy Cline* will steal your heart".

Suzanne Weiss, *Contemporary World Cinema*

"FANTASTIC, UPLIFTING, EXQUISITELY SHOT AND BEAUTIFULLY CRAFTED."

Honi Soit, *Sydney University*

"Keeps the audience guessing until the last satisfying moment."

Independent Film Journal

"There's a strong Australian quality to the humour. It's dry, ironic and never takes itself too seriously.

A WONDERFULLY ENTERTAINING, CLEVERLY MADE FILM. GO SEE IT ... YOU WONT BE DISAPPOINTED!"

Peter Thompson, *TCN 9 Sunday Show*

"The great strength of Kennedy's third feature is the way he expertly weaves fact and fiction."

Barbara Creed, *The Age*

"The cleverest thing about *Doing Time For Patsy Cline* is that, as with lots of relationships, it's really two things at once. The film you watch, and then the one you understand...when it's all over".

Ruth Hessey, *Metro Section, Sydney Morning Herald*

Doing Time For Patsy Cline is a deceptively richly layered film, its seemingly simple structure belying the depth and subtlety of its subject matter. It is, more properly, three interwoven films (or rather at least three interwoven films).

Ben Goldsmith, *The Review*

Movies by Chris Kennedy

GLASS

THIS WON'T HURT A BIT

DOING TIME FOR PATSY CLINE

A MAN'S GOTTA DO

Made In Australia



Chris Kennedy

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www.oilragproductions.com

This book is a work of fiction and, except in the case of historical fact, any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

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*"The irascible Max O'Bannion
is a character I'd be delighted
to play. Complex, devious,
loyal, flawed, scheming, lovable,
infuriating and courageous...
what more could you want?"*

John Howard
(*'SeaChange' ... 'All Saints'*)

CHAPTER 1

'Asiatics can't swim...!' The voice echoed in Max O'Bannion's head and woke him from a deep sleep.

His mind was playing tricks on him.

The rear of the aeroplane smelled of oil and new uniforms.

Max unclipped his seatbelt and twisted slowly in the canvas seat.

Sunset was gone, leaving a red pencil-edge on the horizon. The window of the RAAF Hercules was the size of a porthole and down below, various islands of some place, probably Asia, were scattered across the ocean.

The propellers looked to be spinning too slowly but obviously they weren't. It was what they call an optical illusion.

Anyway, four lazy propellers keeping two hundred tons of scrap metal in the air... how was that possible...?

Mr Simkins in Physics had tried to explain it to the class; a blackboard with chalk drawings of aeroplane wings and arrows for what he called vectors of forces, none of which made much sense to Max.

The thought of Simkins in his baggy trousers reminded him of Homebush Boys High and the school reminded him of his suburb and the suburb reminded him of his street and his street reminded him of his house and always it came back to the same thing.

His father.

In his mind's eye, Max only saw his old man, George O'Bannion, in one place. On the front verandah, talking to his mates.

'Asiatics can't swim!'

George O'Bannion said stuff like that quite often. He always called Asians Asiatics, without malice.

'You can't say that,' Max remembered himself calling out from the kitchen.

He was about thirteen years old at that stage and his voice had begun to break. It had a gentle fog-horn quality.

'I can say whatever I like,' his dad would yell back. 'Asiatics can't swim!'

'No... the word Asiatics. It's bad grammar. It's not a word. It's not in the dictionary.'

'What is it then, if it's not a word...?' George would raise his eyebrows to amuse his mates.

'I don't know. 'Asiatic' is a word; it's an adjective. You can't use it as a noun.'

'I said the word, didn't I?'

'Yeah.'

'And you understood it...?'

'Yeah.'

'So it's a word! It's a term that refers to the Asian race.'

'It doesn't matter if I understood it, if it's not in the dictionary.'

'What would you rather have,' his father would say, '... a word you can understand that's not in the dictionary, or a word that's in the dictionary that you can't understand? The dictionary is full of ridiculous words that people can't understand and never bloody use.'

'What words in particular?' Max would croak.

'Look them up. You're the dictionary expert. More important, how are those sausages coming along?'

'Getting there.'

That was back in the early 60s and George O'Bannion would know, if anyone did, whether Asians could swim or not. He was the most respected swimming coach in the western suburbs of Sydney. He taught a generation of children at his various pools; pools with their peeling paint and lump-rusted hand railings.

Anyway, it was before the days of political correctness when a person had to be careful about what they said about Asiatics. George would have seen political correctness as a form of dishonesty and he hated dishonesty in any form. If you think something, have the guts to say it.

George O'Bannion wasn't built for politics.

George's mates would generally nod a wise nod, sip on their beer or drag on their cigarettes with smiling eyes. Fags they called them; never cigarettes.

Frank Crealey pointed a nicotine-stained finger towards the kitchen. 'That kid of yours will go places. Knowing about adjectives and nouns and stuff.'

'Yeah. And he'll go there soon if he doesn't have more respect for his old man!'

They would all laugh, even Max from the kitchen with his croaky child-man voice. The average night would go that way.

'Show me a Chinese who has won an Olympic gold medal in the pool,' George would say to finish a conversation like that one.

George was a huge man, totally bald long before it was fashionable and every night he would sit on the veranda of his fibro and corrugated iron bungalow with a beer in one hand and a cigarette in the other and talk to his mates until their wives rang up to chase the husbands home. Inside the house, George's son Max would do his homework and cook the evening meal. Mostly meat and three veg, occasionally fish or chicken, sometimes with soup. Max's lamb stew was exceptional according to his father's closest mate Frank Crealey who occasionally stayed for meals. But Max kept lamb stew for special occasions. It was best if you let it simmer all day and young Max had no intention of leaving the gas on all day and risk burning the house down. The house was a box, on a grassy plot without a tree. Near the back fence was a lonely tin shed.

'A house is for keeping the rain off your head,' George used to say. 'A car is just a means of getting from A to B.' They were common expressions. People often said them to pretend their disregard for worldly goods, but George meant it. These days the house in Lidcombe would have been advertised in a colour spread as 'one-for-the-handy-man', or 'a knock-downer', or a 'look-at-the-size-of-the-land', but for them it was their house and Max couldn't remember as a boy any real estate agent ever dropping literature in their mail box. But that was in the 60s.

As his last friend went home George would stub his cigarette on the porch timbers, struggle to his feet and come in for dinner. Max would sometimes get under one arm to help him up.

'And never forget boy – one man's adjective is another man's noun.'

The influx of Italians and Greeks and Lebanese into the surrounding suburbs was killing George's swim-coaching business. He quite liked the 'wogs' but they weren't much interested in swimming. What was worrying George was that the next wave – the Asians – would ruin his trade altogether. Asian kids had even less use for swimming pools or swimming squads or swimming coaches, in those days anyway. George was ready to retire so he took it on the

chin but he didn't like the thought of children who weren't waterproof, no matter whether they were "I-ties" or Asians or Arabs or whatever they were.

In years to come, when he was well and truly grown up – middle aged even – Max thought of George after the Boxing Day Tsunami of 2004 and imagined what George would have said. 'If Asiatics were better swimmers, hundreds of thousands of them wouldn't be dead now. There were lots of Australians on holidays in Thailand and how many of them got drowned..?'

Old George didn't live to see the Chinese women win twelve out of the sixteen gold medals at the 1994 World Championships in Rome but he would have explained it by branding them drug cheats. And they were.

They were taking dihydrotestosterone. Max memorised the word and dropped it into conversation every now and again, dihydrotestosterone and he watched people's eyes; the way their expression changed slightly and they listened more closely to what he had to say after that. Instant respect. It was just a trick he'd learned years before. At school. A kid who always comes bottom of his class learns tricks.

Max occasionally wondered about those Chinese swimmers. The gold medal winners from 1994. Especially the girl with no waist and those V-shoulders like a stealth bomber. Was she OK? Did she have medical problems and hair in all the wrong places? Had she managed to have children? Or had she collapsed quietly in some Chinese village like Flo Jo, with a death notice that never made it into the newspapers?

He would never forget Flo Jo... Mate! What could a teenage boy say about Flo Jo – Florence Joiner? With her red fingernails and nut skin and silk knickers cut from the American flag? Running world record after world record. Sex on legs. And then Flo Jo dropped dead in 1998 at the age of 38 from a heart seizure at her home in Mission Viejo in California. Funny how he could remember facts like that... Pity that back then they never had any school exams on sporting knowledge.

Anyway, when he was fifteen years old, Max locked himself in his bedroom and for three weeks studied secretly until midnight. He sorted his adverbs from his adjectives and for once didn't come last in his class. He gave his father the school report which said

things like 'much improved' and 'turned the corner' and watched his father's body language. He waited for George's chest to puff out but it didn't puff out. Not the way his chest had puffed out when Max had won his first state junior swimming title. George just read the report, gave a grudging nod, tossed it onto the mantelpiece and told young Max he better get to bed. Told him that a swimmer needs his sleep.

For Max, those nights in the kitchen, with old George and his mates out the window on the veranda were the best.

Sausages and onions in the fry pan; science homework finished but mostly wrong; the telephone ringing off the hook; some wife enquiring after some old bloke who hadn't finished his beer yet and his father speaking so loud they could hear him streets away. And laughing!

George had a laugh that could make the windows shake. The scientist who decided that cholesterol was bad for a person obviously never ate sausages and onions on buttered rolls with George and Max O'Bannion, father and son, on the back veranda in the mid 60s.

Most nights hidden away in the kitchen Max would sneak a cigarette for himself and a beer too, even from the age of twelve or younger. His father didn't mind him drinking so much, as long as he drank Reschs, which wasn't a problem since the fridge only ever held Reschs. But if George caught Max smoking he'd go right off.

'A swimmer's lungs are his fuel tank, you stupid little bugger,' he'd say as he clipped him across the ear. 'Treat them accordingly.'

And that's the way the nights used to go, generally topped off with a final statement on the night's proceedings, like...

'And Africans can't swim either. Look at the record book. They can run but they can't swim and no amount of coaching's going to get them there.'

At a rundown Municipal swimming pool, a bald, overweight, sixty year old swimming coach squints at the sky and dreams of his only son representing Australia in the Olympic Games... And so begins the compelling and hilarious story of Max O'Bannion; a father, a veteran, a swim coach – and a real character!

Based around true events, this epic tale spans three decades and three continents. Full of love and loss and mayhem, *Made In Australia* is guaranteed to make you laugh and make you cry. If ever a book proves that blood is not always thicker than (chlorinated) water, this is it!

Critical acclaim for Chris Kennedy's movies.

"Doing Time for Patsy Cline"

"A spirited, funny, heartfelt yarn. Beautiful script and direction. A Bloody Bottler!" Peter Castaldi, JJJFM.

"A multi-layered psychological comedy which says more about Australia than we've seen in a long time." Ruth Hessey, Sydney Morning Herald (Metro)

"This Won't Hurt a Bit"

"Arguably the wittiest Australian film yet made. See it urgently, see it often, take your dentist!" Bob Ellis, Encore Magazine.

"A Man's Gotta Do"

"A standout! Basil Fawty meets Tony Soprano." Variety Magazine.

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