

THE GOLDEN GIRLS

THE MILESTONE OF TURNING 50 DOESN'T HAVE TO BE A MILLSTONE. INSTEAD, IT CAN BE A SOURCE OF CELEBRATION, WRITES JOANNE HAWKINS

WHEN Olympian Lisa Curry turned 50 this year, she declared "50 was the new black". And if you turn on the TV, it seems she may have a point. Everywhere you look, glamorous early fiftysomethings are staring back at you, from Amanda Keller and Lisa Wilkinson to Tracy Grimshaw and Jennifer Keyte. Then there's Jo Hall, Maeve O'Meara, and let's not forget, our very own Prime Minister, who's just about to turn 51. OK, if you want to get picky, you could perhaps argue that things aren't quite so rosy for actors. When was the last time you saw Kerry Armstrong or Sigrid

Thornton on our screens? Armstrong has admitted that since ABC's *Bed of Roses*, she hasn't been on TV because the roles haven't been good enough. And then there's Hollywood, where actresses resort to cosmetic and surgical help to convince us that they are much, much younger than they really are. And who can blame them? Their careers have a tendency to tail off once they pass 45. Take Michelle Pfeiffer who, at 54, is now doing character roles in films such as Tim Burton's *Dark Shadows*. She told the UK edition of *OK!* magazine: "I am not particularly thrilled to be in my 50s, the fact that it tends to be an age that stigmatises women. Turning 50 took some getting used to."

PICTURES MANUELA CIFRA

And don't get us started on 54-year-old Madonna, who seems to be trying to hang on to her pop career by having us believe that she's actually 34. But before you rush out to the pharmacy to buy the latest anti-ageing cream, take heart. You only have to pop in to your local cinema instead to see Australian film *Kath & Kimderella* that is fronted by three women in their early 50s (Jane Turner, Gina Riley and Magda Szubanski). So, is turning 50 quite so bad? *Weekend* interviewed five high-profile fiftysomethings — including Szubanski — and discovered that they're all doing just fine, thank you very much. Perhaps 50 really is the new black, after all...



TOTTIE GOLDSMITH

ACTOR AND SINGER TOTTIE GOLDSMITH CELEBRATED HER 50TH BIRTHDAY LAST MONTH. DIVORCED FROM SKIER STEVEN LEE — WITH WHOM SHE HAS A DAUGHTER LAYLA, 19 — SHE SEES HER SIXTH DECADE AS A TIME OF CHANGE.

FOR someone who always has been known as a bit of a glamour puss, turning 50 could prove a hurdle. But Tottie Goldsmith insists she's fine with her age. Really. "I've got friends who are also turning 50 and they've said, 'Oh my God, aren't you just dreading this?' and I tell them that I am not buying into that. If I really thought about it, and picked up on everyone's fear, it could be difficult because 50 is getting into old. But it's so fine. I still feel 35." That said, Goldsmith is aware of the need to reinvent herself as she gets older. Though she still tours with her band the Chantoozies, she knows that won't last forever. "I am realistic about getting older," she says. "And I'm also realistic that I'm not going to be singing in a girl band when I'm 60 or 70. I'm not a Liza Minnelli or even like my Aunt Olivia (Newton-John) who will still be doing it (as she's gets older) because she's a famous solo artist." To that end, Goldsmith is training to become a celebrant, a career she feels she "can get old with", not to mention give her some financial stability. She's also studying acting and "taking it really seriously" so it will lead to more work. "The roles do drop off a lot (as you get older)," she says, candidly. "I'm in that in-between phase where I'm past the stage of being the sexy woman who gets the guy, but if they want an older woman, they will get an older woman. But I know those roles will come; you just have to weather the storm, which is why I looked outside of the performing arts square and am doing the celebrant course." Another recent change in Goldsmith's life is that she lives alone since daughter Layla moved out this year. After an initial blip ("Of course, after she first went, I went into her room and did the crying thing"), she is now relishing her freedom. "I realised that the apartment was tidy and if I wanted to have beans on toast for dinner, I could," she says, and laughs. "Now we have a beautiful relationship where we hang out together without the nagging." All in all, Goldsmith's pretty happy with her lot. "I think I'm looking pretty damn fine for 50," she says, with a smile. After a battle with chronic fatigue syndrome in her early 40s, she tries to be as healthy as possible by eating organically, meditating and seeing her shrink. "I look after my health," she says. "I don't eat pesticides. If you look in my fridge, it is the purest stuff. I swear it looks after your body." However, she admits to some chemical help in the anti-ageing department. "I have had a little bit of Botox around my eyes but that's all I do," she confesses. "I do feel guilty about it because I wanted to fully embrace getting older, but I weakened." Goldsmith's dream is to open an upmarket B&B in the country and grow veggies there. But she won't do it by herself. "I think that would be too lonely. I know I'm going to meet someone. My aunt met (husband) John (Easterling) when she was 59 and he's her deepest love. She's my inspiration."

Former Olympic swimmer Lisa Curry turned 50 in May. Separated from husband Grant Kenny since 2009, she now lives with younger partner Joel Walkenhorst, with whom she is planning to travel around Australia.

LISA CURRY

LISA Curry is a woman on a mission. She may have knocked up her half century this year but she's out to smash the stereotypes around getting older. "I really want to prove those people wrong who say you can't look great when you get to 50," she says, with a determined edge to her voice. "You know, the perception that you are going to be menopausal, have a fat belly and can't wear a bikini any more. It's all garbage. I don't feel 50 and I don't think I look it." And to prove her point, Curry is sporting a pretty impressive bikini bod herself, having shed 13kg earlier this year. "I went through a really lazy stage last year where I didn't want to exercise and was enjoying having wine and cheese and dips and slowly the weight crept on," she remembers. "One day I looked at myself in the mirror and thought, 'this isn't me' so I did something about it. It wasn't easy, but I did it." Now Curry, who admits to some trepidation in the lead up to her 50th birthday ("It just seemed like a really old number") wants Australia to shape up and get healthy, too. She's launched her own diet and fitness program (Keep it Simple Sweetheart) and will hit the road in a campervan with boyfriend Joel Walkenhorst to encourage us to get off our butts and eat better. "It's been a dream of mine for a long time," enthuses Curry, of her plans to visit regional and rural areas. "My youngest son Jett is finishing grade 12 this year so I can follow my passion to create a healthier Australia." And have some fun along the way. Walkenhorst is 20 years Curry's junior, and no doubt contributes to her younger mindset, as do her three kids — aged 17 to 25. It seems Curry, who spent a month in hospital in 2009 after being diagnosed with heart condition myocarditis, is having a ball. "I am alive and healthy... I am about to head off on an adventure around Australia. What's bad about being 50?"



MAGDA SZUBANSKI

Comedic actor Magda Szubanski is back as alter-ego Sharon in the movie *Kath & Kimderella*. The 51-year-old describes herself as "happy and content" though "still a work in progress".

MAGDA Szubanski feels younger now than she did in her 30s. "I felt older than and more wearied by the world but now I feel this joyful kind of lightness," she says. "I think it's because I'm getting a bit better at life. I accept it on its own terms and understand how it works." "And hopefully, I've gained some wisdom along the way, and the only way you can get wisdom is with age and experience." Her sense of lightness may also be down to the fact that she decided to come out last Valentine's Day. "I think people think it will just be euphoria (after coming out) and of course it's not because nothing is like that," she muses. "But there is a sense of feeling stronger and more comfortable. I've always been a very open person so now it's like, great. I'm totally open now. And I feel proud of having done it, too." Not that she wishes she'd done it sooner. "No, it was the right time. One thing I know as a comedian is that timing is everything. I'm really pleased I did it when I did." At 51, Szubanski is busier than ever. She's just about to start working alongside Geoffrey Rush in theondheim musical *A Funny Thing Happened On The Way to the Forum* and there's also an upcoming film, *Goddess*, with Ronan Keating. And, of course, she's back in Sharon's netball kit after a five-year break. "There's an absolute sense of homecoming when cast and crew get back together, as we've all been working together since the dawn of time," she says of working on *Kath & Kimderella*. "We're like an old rock and roll band. And filming in Italy was fantastic. It was nice to go somewhere other than the Nepean Highway." Turning 50 held no fears for Szubanski. And while she admits to a new-found contentment, she will say that her life isn't all peachy. "There are elements of my life that are struggles for me, elements where I feel I'm not too flash, but in my own way, I just bumble on." Such as? "Well, I'm not going to detail all my flaws. I think we all know a lot of my failings," she says. "I'm like the poster girl for imperfection who's just trying to inch her way forward."

After six years hosting ABC 774's *Drive* show, Lindy Burns moved to the evening program this year. Married to Peter, a primary school teacher, she says she still can't believe she's now 52.

LINDY BURNS

IF you had a magic wand that enabled Lindy Burns to take 10 years off her age, she says she wouldn't do it. Sure, she'd like to lose the odd ache and pain, and her less than perfect eyesight, but she'd like to stick with her emotional and mental maturity, thank you very much. "Those kind of niggles with your body are offset with how you feel about yourself and your place in the world," she muses. "You understand yourself a bit more and I wouldn't trade that for anything. I think at 42 I was still a bit emotionally immature, so no, I wouldn't want to go back." Not that Lindy actually believes she's the age she is. "It's kind of bizarre, but in my head I still think I'm 18 and feel, in some ways, as if my life has just started. Sometimes I'll be walking down the street and see my reflection and go, 'Oh, that's right, I'm a middle-aged woman'. But I don't feel like that at all." Lindy had no problems celebrating her 50th birthday, though 51 was a different matter. "Fifty-one knocked me around a bit, that extra year made all the difference. For me, there is this sense that I am running out of time. There are so many places I want to travel to and people I want to meet and films I want to see and books I want to read. "So the thing that happens in your 50 is this sudden realisation of 'don't let time pass you by'. And you do start to grab opportunities with both hands, perhaps more than you would have done in the past." The 22-year ABC veteran ("The first time I sat down behind a microphone, I knew this is what I wanted to do") tries to look after her mental and physical health with running and yoga and by surrounding herself with friends of all ages. "I have quite a lot of friends who are younger than me, which keeps you up to speed on things like social media and the like," she says. "Although, that said, I also have friends who are in their 60s, and sometimes they are much more up with things than the 30-year-olds. At the end of the day, it's all about attitude."



JO HALL

Jo Hall, 54, juggles reading the weekday updates for *Nine News* with being a single mum to her four children aged 13 to 30.

EYEBROWS were raised when Channel 9 stalwart Jo Hall stepped aside from her long-time weekend news anchor role last December. Was it a case of a veteran newsreader, notably a female, being pushed aside for a younger model? (Hall's replacement was Alicia Loxley, 30.) Hall says nothing could be further from the truth, insisting that after 13 years of working weekends, not to mention every Christmas and New Year, she wanted a break. "I realised that I'd missed so much of my children's lives at the weekends, the sporting achievements, etc, not to mention important stuff like weddings," Hall explains. "My 13-year-old twins are also about to hit puberty and, being a single mum, I thought it was important to be around." Nine months on, Hall is relishing having her weekends back. "I enjoy it for me, as well," she says. "I appreciate and value every single hour of those weekends now I'm not working any more." That doesn't mean she isn't still ambitious. "I tell Pete (Hitchener) all the time that I want his job," she laughs. Hitchener is 66, so is it realistic that Hall could be still reading the news at his age? "Things are slowly changing," says Hall, of the fact that more older women are still working in Australian TV journalism. "We are not totally there, perhaps not by a long shot, but the signs are good simply by the fact that people like myself, Tracy Grimshaw and Liz Hayes — women who are supposedly over that magical use-by date — are still being very useful." Hall is sanguine about getting older, saying that she's "embraced it". "I've never been shy about telling people my age. And there's a wisdom that age gives you. You know how to enjoy life more." That said, Hall admits to frustration at some of the less appealing aspects of being in her 50s. "It's pretty hard to embrace the unattractive changes of getting older, like when your roots grow out and they are grayer than they are brown. And I could do without the extra lines of my face." But ultimately, Hall sees her age as just a number. "It's really true that you are only as old as you feel. Although sometimes I feel 108, running around after the children," she says.