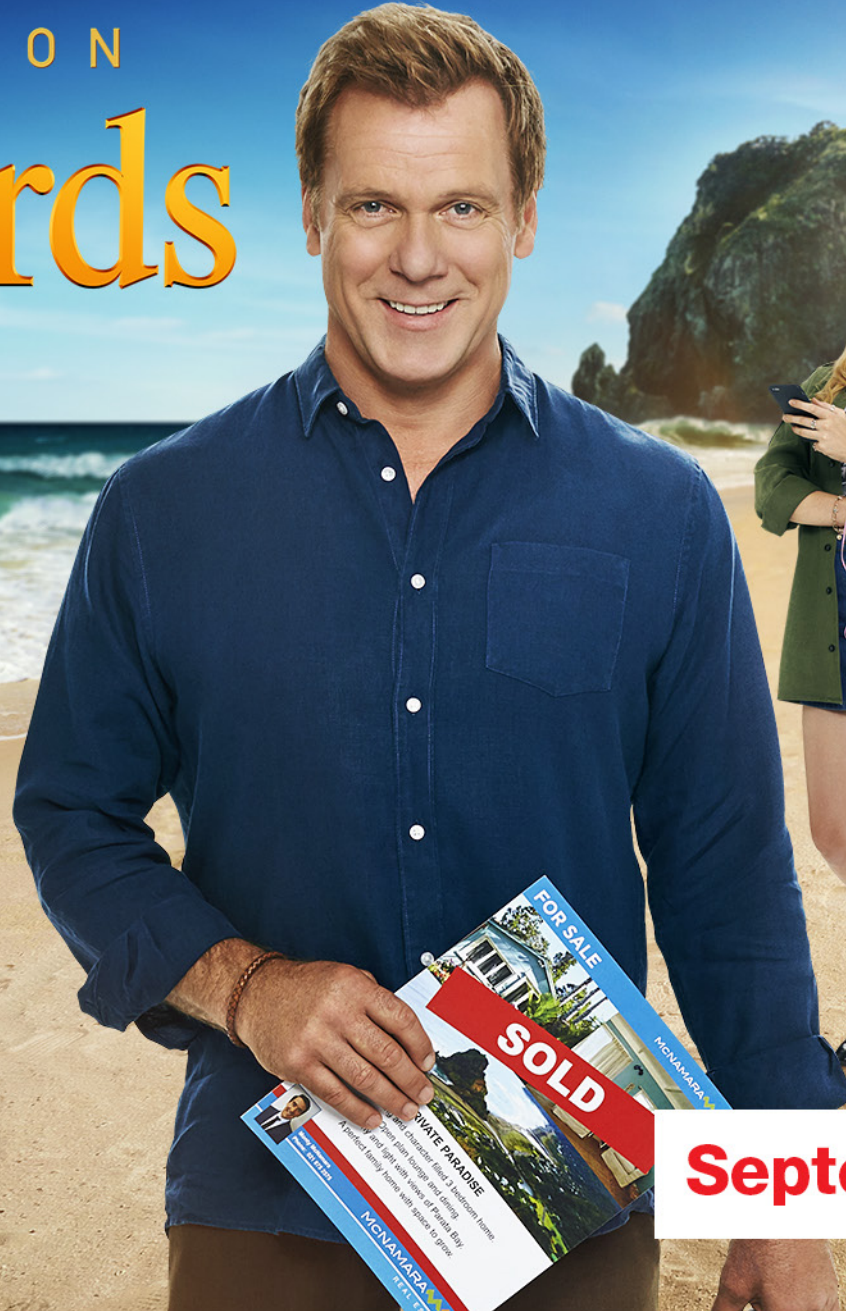



MAJOR NEW AUSTRALIAN DRAMA

ERIK THOMSON

# 800 words



September on 



**“The experts reckon some of the most stressful things in life revolve around death, buying and selling real estate, emigrating and international travel. Only an idiot would do all these things at the same time.”**

**George Turner (played by Erik Thomson)**

**One of Australia’s favourite stars, Erik Thomson, is back in Channel Seven’s new family drama 800 Words. The award winning actor plays George Turner, a man seeking a fresh start for his family in the most unlikely place on earth.**

A columnist for a popular Sydney newspaper and devoted father of teenage kids, Shay (Melina Vidler) and Arlo (Benson Jack Anthony), life has been pretty good to George. His biggest concern, aside from raising a family with wife, Laura, is ensuring he pens exactly 800 Words for his weekly column. His precise word count is a personal quirk. It gives George control and stability, but that all vanishes with his wife’s sudden passing.

Acting on impulse, George quits his job and tells his kids to pack their bags because he has just bought a house, sight unseen, over the internet in the fictional New Zealand seaside town of Weld.

George is convinced a seachange is the antidote to his family’s loss. But it’s really an illogical attempt to return to happier times, to a place full of fond memories

where he spent his summer holidays as a child. But for George’s kids, who have yet to even process the enormous loss of their mum, Weld is worlds away from anything they have ever known.

Ignoring pleas from his editor, Jan (Bridie Carter), to rethink his plans, George turns down her offer to continue his employment as a columnist. The Turners leave Sydney bound for Weld - which is nothing like George remembered it. It is a remote, isolated and forgotten place far off the Kiwi tourist trail.

A car crash is not a great way to arrive. Their ‘dream home’ turns out to be a half-renovated nightmare lacking the basic requirements for a family – like an actual kitchen.

Just as George questions his sanity and his decision to move, along comes Woody (Rick Donald), a fellow Aussie-import surfer and handyman - who may be as much of a hindrance as he is a help; and the women of Weld - four single local ladies who are intrigued by the new arrivals. They plan to become big players in whatever future awaits him and his children.

Erik is also Associate Producer of the heart-warming drama 800 Words. “There’s nothing like 800 Words on television... it’s a family journey,” Erik says. “It’s a ‘starting over’ story that taps into that part of me that is universal. We all wonder what would happen if we changed everything and went somewhere new.

“George and his kids sell up their house in Sydney, one of the most expensive cities in the world, and start all over again. I love watching that kind of thing. It’s a ‘fish out of water’ experience because we have Aussies living in New Zealand.”

Seven Network’s Head of Drama Julie McGauran is Executive Producer. The series is a co-production with NZ’s South Pacific Pictures with Executive Producers Kelly Martin (Westside, Step Dave, Shortland Street, The Brokenwood Mysteries) and Chris Bailey (The Brokenwood Mysteries, Nothing Trivial, Go Girls).

Australia’s Pino Amenta (Wentworth, Winners & Losers, Packed to the Rafters) and New Zealand’s Mike Smith (Siege, The Brokenwood Mysteries, Underbelly: Land of the Long Green Cloud) direct the series.

**800 Words was co-created by James Griffin (Outrageous Fortune, The Almighty Johnsons, Westside) and Maxine Fleming (Being Eve).**

# George Turner

played by **Erik Thomson**

**George Turner loved his life in Sydney. He adored his wife Laura, and his job writing a newspaper column of exactly 800 words every week. Together they found balance in the challenges of work and being parents to their two kids, Shay and Arlo.**

Then Laura died unexpectedly. And George had to decide how to save his family.

Erik says with the passing of Laura, his character makes a very questionable decision. "He defies all logic. In not knowing how to move forward, George opts to move backwards to a time he felt safe and happy. They say 'nostalgia wears rose-coloured spectacles' and George leaps back to happier times."

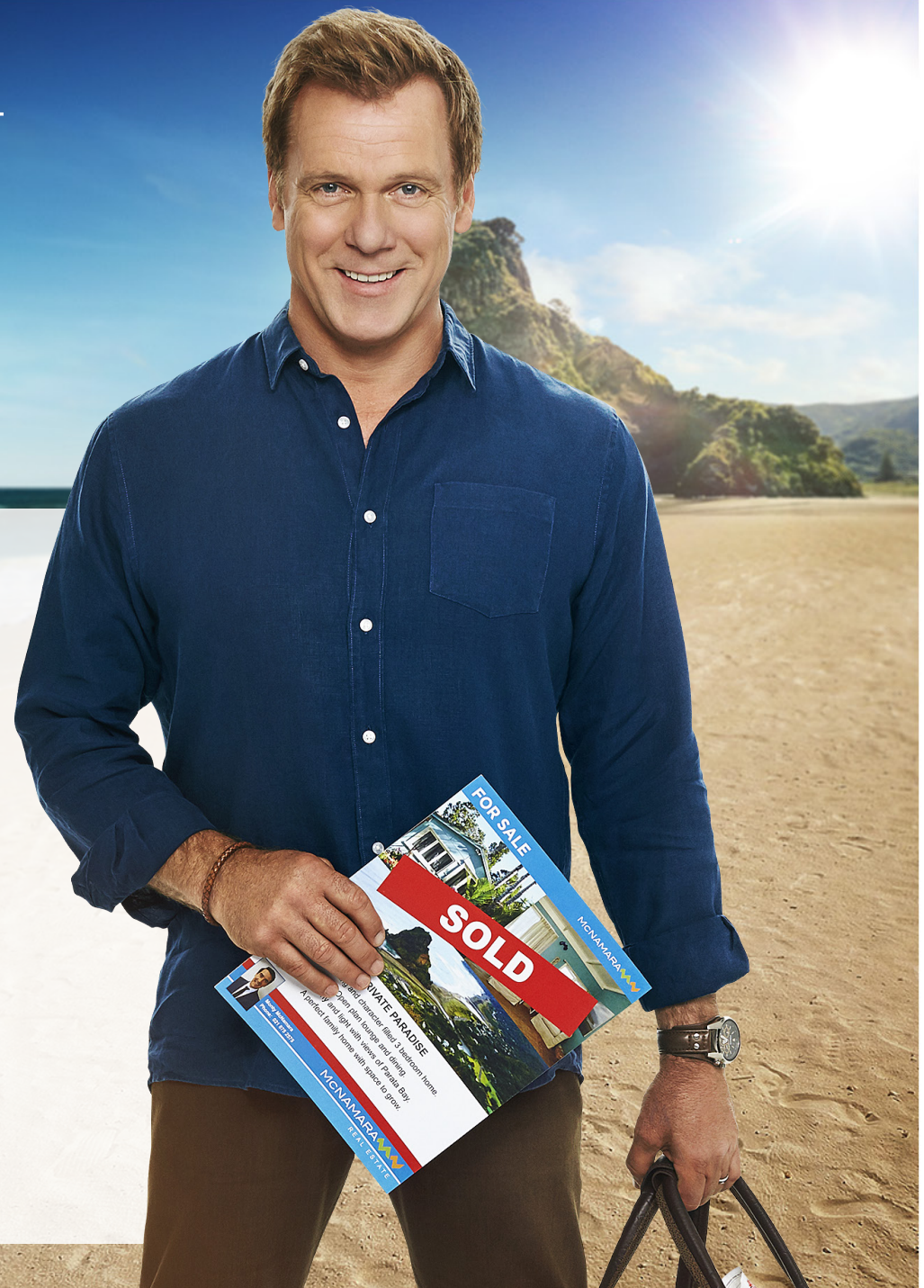
George quits his job, uproots his family and relocates to his childhood family holiday destination in remote New Zealand.

"Sometimes you need to go back, before you can move forward," Erik says.

George's boss Jan, the editor of the magazine supplement of a weekend Sydney newspaper, remains the viewers' reference point between the two trans-Tasman worlds.

The first column George ever wrote for her was exactly 800 words so Jan called it 800 words. Every week since then George has turned out exactly 800 words. It's his little obsession to make sure his word count is spot on 800. Readers like his laid-back, easily digestible style, and his wry observations on the world he sees.

His sudden seachange could be perfect fuel for future 800 word columns, but for now he has quit his job and his focus is on healing and helping his children move forward.



# Erik Thomson

Associate Producer of 800 Words

**This is Erik Thomson's third major production with Channel 7. Although he modestly downplays his credit as Associate Producer of 800 Words, it is the most involved and hands-on Erik has ever been on set.**

"I read the script and took it to Channel 7 as I knew it was a perfect fit...everyone agreed we just had to make it," Erik says. "Being an Associate Producer allowed me to be involved in the creative process along with the writers and producers. It was a massive and very interesting learning curve for me."

Erik's successful 17 year partnership with Seven began as Dr Mitch Stevens on All Saints. He earned three nominations for the Silver Logie award for most popular actor, winning the award in 2003.

Then came his much-loved role as Dave Rafter in the hit family drama, Packed to the Rafters, and four Silver Logie award nominations for Most Popular Actor and a Silver Logie nomination for Most Outstanding Actor.

Born in Inverness, Scotland, Erik was seven when his family moved to New Zealand. It was then he began performing in school plays, a pastime he continued to pursue as he got older. He studied performing arts at the New Zealand Drama School, as well as English Literature and Drama at Victoria University in Wellington.

Erik accumulated a long list of theatre and TV credits in NZ, including a recurring role on the Hercules and Zena – Warrior Princess series before his trans-Tasman move to Australia in his early 20s.

Roles in Wildside, 13 Gantry Road, Water Rats, Pacific Drive and, of course, All Saints and Packed To The Rafters followed. Erik then starred in the mini-series Through My Eyes – The True Story of Lindy Chamberlain and The Alice, playing

ex-rock star Jack Jaffers opposite his real-life partner, actress Caitlin McDougall.

In 2004, Erik won the AFI Award and a Film Critic Circle Award for Best Supporting Actor for his first feature film role in the multi-award winning Somersault. In 2008, Erik was again nominated for an AFI Award for Best Supporting Actor for his performance in the multi award-winning film The Black Balloon.

More recently, he appeared in the ABC TV telemovie, The Broken Shore, and the mini-series, The Code, before playing a supporting role in the debut feature film by Wayne Hope and Robyn Butler, Now Add Honey, starring Portia De Rossi, Lucy Fry, Hamish Blake and Lucy Durack.

His other film credits include Accidents Happen with Geena Davis and The Boys Are Back alongside Clive Owen.

In 2014, Erik returned to the stage with the Melbourne Theatre Company playing the President of The United States in The Speechmaker, a Working Dog comedy production that proved an instant hit with sell-out audiences.

Erik lives in South Australia's McLaren Vale, married to Always Greener star Caitlin McDougall. They are proud parents to daughter Eilish, eight, and son Magnus, four.



# Shay Turner

played by **Melina Vidler**

**Shay is George's 17-year-old daughter; a young woman looking to figure out who she really is. She's got as far as realising she will never be as academically inclined as her younger brother, but she is much more naturally inclined towards art, to the point of having actual, real talent - even though she doesn't realise this yet.**

When her mother died only a few months ago everything else in her life has paled into insignificance. She has tried to be strong for her father and brother, and to step up and fill Laura's shoes around the house. But this is an impossible act for anyone, let alone a 17-year-old. The end result is a huge amount of grief and hurt building up inside. She knows it's there, but she hides it because she has to be strong for her family.

Her father's decision to move the family to a small town in New Zealand could be the thing that finally tips her over the edge.

"Shay doesn't want to lose precious memories of her mum. If she moves to New Zealand then that's all going to be gone, and it will be like her mum never existed," explains Melina.

## Melina Vidler

Melina Vidler is an actor and model with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Acting from Queensland University of Technology. This is her first major television role and she says working with Erik has been phenomenal.

"It's mind-blowing how incredible Erik is. He is very generous and so willing to give advice; he's really become a sort of father figure in real life because this is my first time in such a big production. I went to him for advice all the time," says Melina.

Melina's previous acting credits include the feature film *The Arrangements*, the television show *Mako: Island of Secrets* and a series of short films, theatre productions and television commercials. She has also worked as a photographic and runway model.



# Arlo Turner

played by **Benson Jack Anthony**

**Arlo is super intelligent and super quirky. A lot of people think he's a bit strange and he has no friends as a result. He doesn't seem to mind though as he's busy exploring the world of books, the Internet and anything else that intrigues him.**

For a kid of just 14, he has wisdom and sensitivity beyond his years. On the face of it Arlo has taken the death of his mother as well as any boy possibly could. He is sad and sometimes her absence upsets him, but for the most part he has suppressed his feelings of unfairness and anger in favour of quietly getting on with things. It is, of course, the quiet ones you have to watch most closely.

## **Benson Jack Anthony**

A keen dancer, Benson Jack Anthony started acting at a young age with his first role in *The Mystery of Natalie Wood* directed by acclaimed director Peter Bogdanovich. His other television credits include *Legend of the Seeker*, *Chatroom Chicks*, *Blood Brothers* and a small part in *Underbelly Razor*.

He attended Sylvia Young Performing Arts College in London and The Village Performing Arts and Brent St Studios in Sydney.

Benson says he clicked instantly with Melina, who plays his on-screen sister. "I had a four hour plane trip sitting next to Melina on the way to New Zealand and we really bonded so by the time the plane landed we were already like brother and sister," he says.

Benson is slightly reluctant to confess to the similarities between himself and his character, Arlo.

"Okay so I am slightly geeky and that's the same for Arlo," he says. "Melina was always calling me a geek when we hung out between shoots and I would say, 'No, I'm not really' but Arlo is a bit smart and sometimes a little bit know-it-all and if I'm truthful I'd say that's a little bit like me too."



# Jan

played by **Bridie Carter**

**Jan is the editor of the newspaper magazine supplement that George writes for in Sydney. George got the job as a columnist through his wife Laura's close friendship with Jan.**

Jan had always enjoyed George's views on life and after a couple of wines at a party, she challenged him to write some of them down. It worked and she gave him his own column – a bloke's voice at the back of a primarily female-oriented publication. George really enjoyed it and readers loved it too so it marked the start of George's career as a writer.

Since Laura's death, Jan has become George's best friend. Laura's sudden passing has hit her hard too. She's worried about the kids and how they're going to cope without their mother. And she's not happy about George's impulsive decision to quit his job and move overseas.

## Bridie Carter

Playing the role of an editor in 800 Words conjures fond memories for Bridie Carter, who cast herself as a reporter at the age of eight for her cousin's backyard film about the infamous band KISS.

"I played a reporter from the Australian Women's Weekly interviewing the band and following them on their exploits. It was good training for my latest role!" she says.

Bridie's first acting classes were at the Bouverie Street Theatre in Melbourne and she graduated from NIDA in 1994.

Her first professional role was in Neighbours at the age of 18. She fondly remembers running from a hospital, blood splattered, under the direction of Peter Andrikides in GP; and in Home And Away she played a lesbian lover alongside fellow classmate Rachel Blake. Bridie is best known for her role as Tess Silverman McLeod on McLeod's Daughters, a role which saw her nominated twice for a Gold Logie and four times for a Silver Logie.

Despite a guest role on All Saints as a traumatised hospital patient, her path had yet to cross with Erik's until 800 Words. "As an actor, you get to work with all sorts of leading men," Bridie says. "Erik has a generosity and strength of character that has been wonderful to collaborate with."

Bridie's versatility hit new heights when she won Dancing with the Stars in 2007. Additional television credits include It's A Date, Wild Boys, Rescue Special Ops, My Husband My Killer, Going Home, Above The Law, Murder Call, Water Rats and GP.



Bridie appeared in the comedy feature film I Love You Too alongside Brendan Cowell and Peter Hellier. Other film credits include Envy and Fresh Air, Nostalgia, Skin, The Things My Father Never Taught Me and Ragtime. Her theatre credits include Love Letters (Ripe Productions), No Names.... No Pack Drills (NIDA), Lockie Leonard Human Torpedo (Ensemble Theatre) and Communicating Doors (Marion St Theatre).

Bridie is married to clothing designer Michael Wilson. They live on a cattle property just outside Byron Bay with their two boys, Otis and Tobias. Apart from her acting work, Bridie is about to take the big leap of moving to the next paddock on her farm (literally) to build a new self-sufficient home.

# Woody

played by **Rick Donald**

**Woody came to Weld to surf. But the Aussie expat never left after riding that first wave on the local beach.**

Woody's real name is Jeff. He's a surfer, builder, philosopher, party animal, facilitator and friend. He's a man of many parts, none of which work at great speed, but which generally get there eventually.

Rick says everyone has a friend like Woody. "He's the guy that walks into your house, opens the fridge, grabs a beer, sits on the lounge and watches your TV.

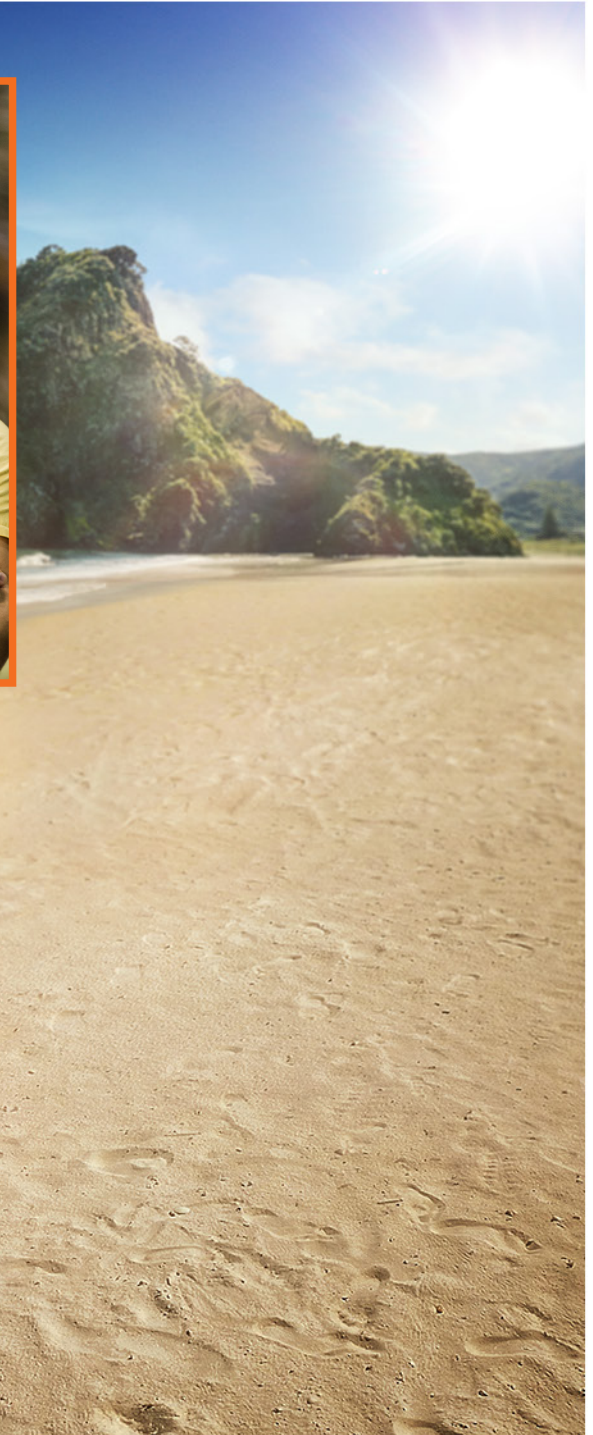
"George has no one when he first moves to Weld. Woody can see he's a bit of a duck with a broken wing and he's there to help George and be a brother. There is a bit of an age difference, George has experienced a lot more, he's had a family, he's lost his wife and Woody doesn't want to face such grown-up events. He does a lot of stupid things, he's constantly tripping over his mistakes and landing on his face, but while some of the town might point fingers and laugh at him, George never does."

## Rick Donald

Rick Donald is best known for his starring role alongside James van der Beek in the short-lived but acclaimed 2014 US television sitcom Friends with Better Lives.

Rick hails from Queensland and graduated from the National Institute of Dramatic Art in 2009.

His television credits include recurring roles in The Doctor Blake Mysteries, House Husbands, Home and Away and Underbelly: Razor. He's also appeared in the telefeatures Blood Brothers, Paper Giants and Dripping In Chocolate and is the voice of Firehead in the children's animated series The Woodlies.





# Tracey

played by **Emma Leonard**

**Tracey is an Aussie teaching at Weld District High School where she is also their youngest ever House Dean. Originally from Melbourne, Tracey moved to Weld with her now ex-husband. She has all the right qualities to be a great teacher, but deep down she harbours a fear that she is actually isn't very good at it.**

She is terrible at relationships. A sun-worshipper, she has no problems with her body and doesn't really care if anyone else does. Nude sunbathing and swimming are a natural part of her daily routine as we soon discover when George unwittingly enters a nudist beach hoping to surf until Tracey, fully naked, calmly introduces herself and explains that it is not a surfing beach.

## Emma Leonard

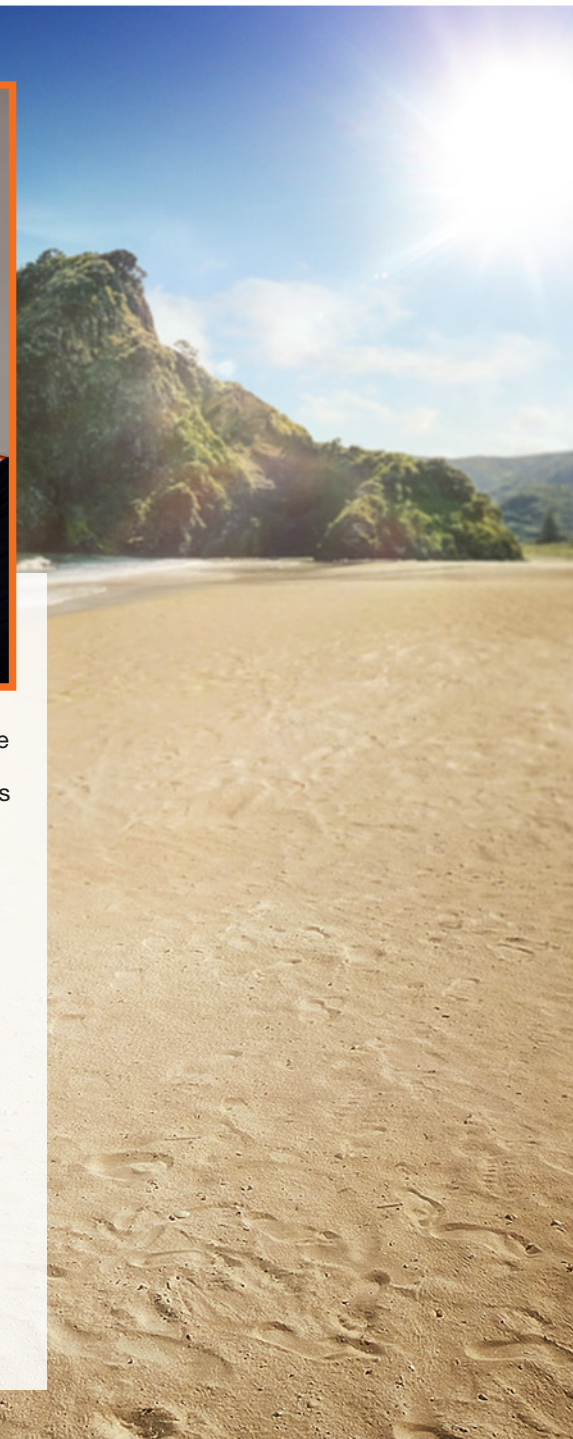
Emma Leonard grew up in the Southern Highlands outside of Sydney and says her upbringing helps her relate to the small town lifestyle of Weld.

"It's the sense of community that you have, which Tracey obviously grew to love in Weld, that I can relate to from my childhood," she says. "You run into people in the street and everyone knows everyone's business so that felt really familiar and hilarious to me. There is so much comedy in everybody knowing everybody's business."

Emma previously played teacher Henrietta Brown in *Seven's Home And Away*. Her other television credits include *Underbelly: A Tale of Two Cities*, *Wonderland* and a 2005 guest role in *All Saints*.



Her big screen credits include the lead role of Destiny in *Dealing with Destiny* and the role of Lisa in *Vulnerable* for which she was nominated for Best Actress in 2011 at the Hoboken International Film Festival New Jersey.



# Fiona

played by **Michelle Langstone**

**Fiona is a tireless worker for the betterment of all, whilst simultaneously forgetting to have a life of her own.**

Fiona owns and runs (on her own, since the divorce) the Weld Boat Club, which sounds far more grand than it actually is. She is also the local volunteer ambulance driver; stalwart member of the Weld District council; leading light in the Weld Book Club and several other organisations/societies/clubs dedicated to bringing culture and enlightenment to Weld.

## **Michelle Langstone**

This is not Michelle's first time playing a Fiona. In 2005, she landed the role of Fiona on McLeod's Daughters which garnered her a nomination as Most Popular New Female Talent at the 2007 Logie Awards. She spent two years working on McLeod's Daughters before returning to New Zealand.

Michelle says her latest Fiona gets to know a lot more about George a lot sooner than others in Weld. "Throughout the series they discover each other's history, and they're both people that innately understand what it's like to have the rug swept out from under them. The most important thing is that Fiona is a friend to George, she's a female influence in a life that's had that female influence removed."



Michelle's other television credits include lead roles in The Almighty Johnsons and Go Girls as well as Legend of the Seeker, Being Eve, Street Legal, Spin Doctors, The Strip, Power Rangers, This is Not My Life and Shortland Street.

Michelle's feature film work includes Realiti, which earned her a Best Actress nomination at the 2014 New Zealand Film Awards; For Good, which won her the Best Actress Award at the St Tropez Film Festival in 2003; Separation City and After the Waterfall.

Michelle has also starred in a number of theatre productions, her most recent being Other Desert Cities at Wellington's Circa Theatre and The Lover at Auckland's Basement Theatre.



# Katie

played by **Anna Jullienne**

**Katie is a part-Māori artist and owner of the local arts and crafts 'gallery'. She's also a tireless fighter for the rights of the ordinary people of Weld and opponent of big money interests in the region.**

Katie is one of the ex-lovers of Zac, with whom she has a child, Billy, who is the absolute love of her life.

Anna Jullienne says her character spends a lot of time with George because Weld is a small town and Katie's son Billy is the same age as George's son Arlo.

"Because Katie has lived in the same town her whole life and raised her son there, she hasn't had a whole lot of fresh starts, so new blood in her community is definitely exciting," she says. "When George and the Turner family rock up, the whole community, especially the women, find this new man quite interesting. Good gossip fodder at least!"

## Anna Jullienne

Anna Jullienne was halfway through an arts degree when she was offered the core cast role of nurse Maia Jeffries on New Zealand's Shortland Street. Then 21, Jullienne had already won awards for stage acting and public speaking.

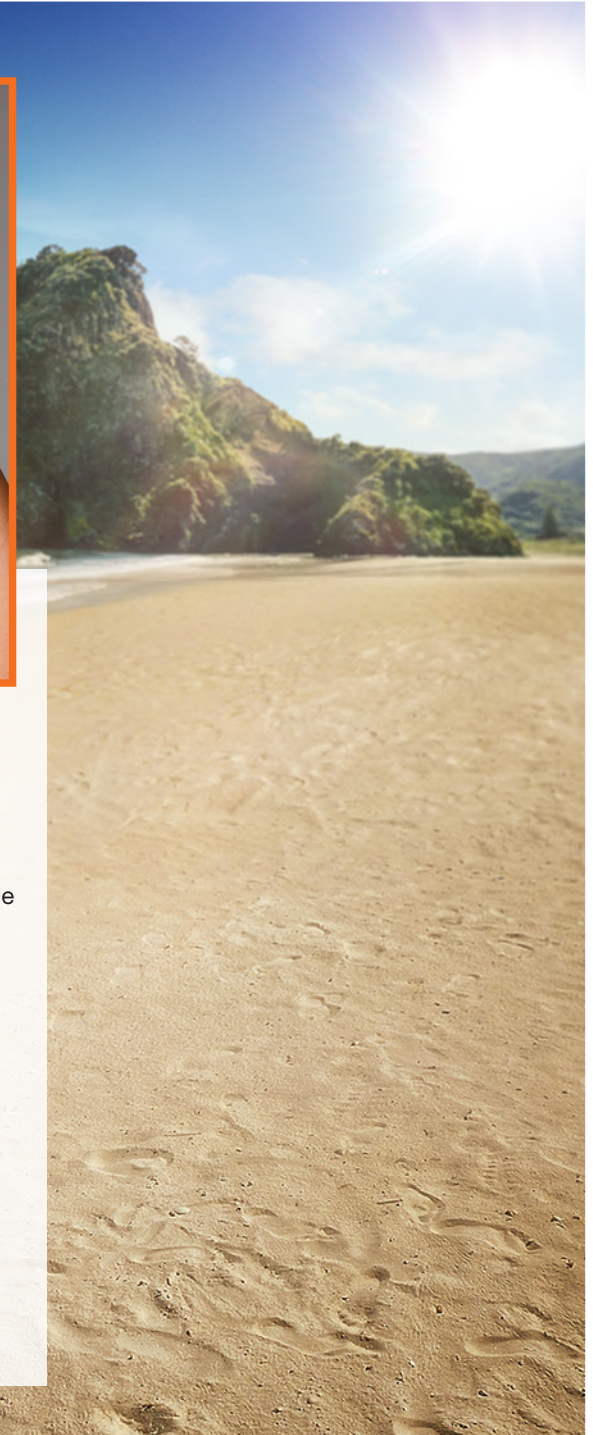
In 2007, the year after her character took part in New Zealand television's first civil union, Anna was honoured with the Best Supporting Actress gong at New Zealand's Screen Awards. Jullienne appeared on Shortland Street for six years from 2004 to 2010.

Following her role in the Kiwi edition of Underbelly: Land of the Long Green Cloud, Anna played a nightmarish PA in the contemporary noir drama The Blue Rose and has had guest roles in the gritty crime series Harry and primetime comedy series Agent Anna.



Well known in New Zealand for her comic timing, Anna has appeared as herself in skits for the hit Friday night comedy show Jono and Ben at Ten as well as the cult hit webseries Auckland Daze.

Anna's theatre roles include playing the title character in Auckland Theatre Company's Anne Boleyn as well as Death of a Salesman and The Vagina Monologues.



# Hannah

played by **Cian Elyse White**

**A gun surfer, Hannah also works a multitude of different jobs in and around town – waiting tables at the boat club and shop assistant at the surf shop. She dates guys but gets bored with them very quickly. She doesn't date surfers because they get threatened as she's better at riding waves than they are.**

Cian Elyse White describes her character as fearless, staunch and outspoken. "When we first meet Hannah she's a bit stand-offish and she's a little bit short with George, but what I love about her is that's not who she is at all," she says. "Her interest gets a lot deeper, she wants to help George and his family. I really enjoy being able to show the depths of Hannah and the wonderful, colourful rainbow of a lady she is."

She has a contemporary family tree – her father is Zac and her half brothers are Ike and Billy. She doesn't really get on with her mother who left town a few years ago.

## Cian Elyse White

Originally from Rotorua in New Zealand's North Island, Cian Elyse White studied at Toi Whakaari: New Zealand Drama School.

In 2015 she appeared in South Pacific Pictures and Touchpaper TV's co-production Tatau, a thriller series on BBC3 and BBC America. Her other television credits include Underbelly: Land of the Long Green Cloud and a guest role on contemporary noir series The Blue Rose.



Cian is part of a cooperative that in 2015 opened New Zealand's first indigenous theatre space. Her theatre credits include Mo & Jess Kill Susie for which she was nominated for the Chapman Tripp – Best Female Newcomer Award; Awatea (Auckland Theatre Company); Te Awarua (Smackbang); The Prophet (Tawata Productions) and most recently the Auckland Theatre Company season of Kings of the Gym. A career highlight for Cian was touring Birds with Sky Mirrors (Mau Theatre Company) to Taipei, Rome and Athens in 2012.

# Ike

played by **Alex Tarrant**

**Ike is the brains behind his dad's IT business. Ike is great with technology and practical things in general. He's also the Robin Hood of Weld, fighting the powers-that-be in the name of truth and justice. Enigmatic, Ike doesn't say much but when he does it carries some weight. Oh, and being cute doesn't hurt...**

Alex Tarrant says Ike is the black sheep of Weld. "He's still young but I think back in his younger days he was quite a ladies man. Some people would consider him to be mischievous, but he sees himself as a crime fighter and he's able to keep his secrets, his vigilante secrets as well as his relationship secrets."

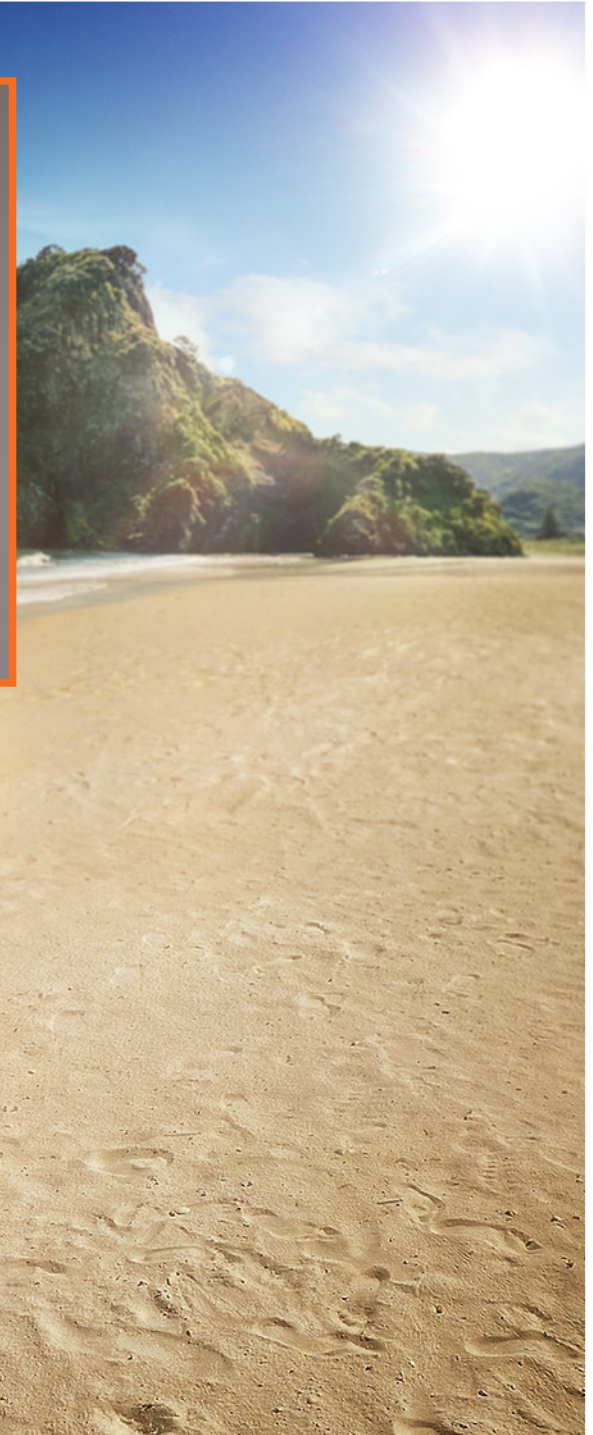
## Alex Tarrant

Alex Tarrant has a Bachelor of Arts in Performing Arts from Toi Whakaari: New Zealand Drama School.

Originally from the small New Zealand coastal town of Raglan, Alex has been in consistent demand since graduating drama school and moving to Auckland.

His credits include the Nothing Trivial finale telefeature, the UK/New Zealand BBC3 co-production Tatau, the ANZAC drama series When We Go To War and Totes Maori, in which he was the host.

He has appeared in numerous short films and theatre shows including Red Leap Theatre Company's production of The Arrival.



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