



I loved the excitement of being a chef

# My TV CHIEF challenge

**M**iserable after the collapse of my six-year relationship, I trudged through another day of my job as an industry policy officer. "I have something to cheer you up," my work colleague, Helen, smiled. "A TV documentary is looking for volunteers. You get to experience your dream job for two weeks, why don't you apply?" I've always had a passion for cooking and dreamt one day of being a chef. But at 10, I broke my back in a bicycle accident and was left in a wheelchair with limited work prospects. Excited about the

challenge of working in a professional kitchen, I emailed the contact Helen had given me that night in December 2004. "We'd love to feature you in our series," someone from *Give Me A Break* told me two weeks later. I was rapt and, after a few months sorting out health and safety issues for my wheelchair, my nine-day placement was set up at the Perth Convention Exhibition Centre in one of WA's largest kitchens. On the first day of shooting, July 19, 2005, I was nervous but excited. "I'll be your mentor," executive chef Adrian Tobin

said. Day one mainly consisted of chopping, dicing and helping the chefs. The cameras in my face didn't bother me but zipping around the kitchen in my wheelchair proved tricky. My first challenge was to cook lunch for 50 staff. Heaving huge pots of boiling water around was impossible but with the help of another chef, I managed. The early mornings and long shifts were also hard but I got used to them. It was just as well as I faced my toughest challenge of the week – to prepare a meal for four food critics. The meal was a lamb rump dish followed by a lemon and lime tart. Meat dishes were my



Me today

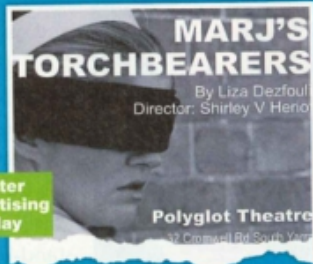
specialty, but desserts were definitely not my forte. "If the pastry's too thin the tart will break," Adrian warned during my practice run, as I battled the dough.

"This is going to be a nightmare," I panicked on the day of my final test. Sure enough, disaster soon struck. "This is ruined!" I cried, looking at my runny mess of a tart. Thankfully, one of the chefs had prepared one earlier, which we served. "That lamb was cooked to perfection," the critics complimented afterwards. I'm proud of myself for being thrown into the deep end and surviving. I now know that a disability needn't mean inability. **Mallika Macleod, 28, North Perth, WA.** *Give Me A Break, SBS, 7.30pm Wednesdays from March 29 to April 19.*

AS TOLD TO SONJA KOWALUKO PICTURE: OLSON IMAGES

# An act of INSPIRATION

**I** fell in love with the theatre at the tender age of four when I started acting lessons to cure a speech impediment. Classes continued twice a week until I was 14 when I left school to train as a hairdresser. After my marriage in 1945, when I was 20, I had my four children in very quick succession. By the time I was in my forties, the acting bug started to bite again. "I need to get back on stage," I said to my children, who by now all had families of their own. So in 1975, aged 50, I decided to travel to England and then Canada for 12 months, studying acting



A poster advertising our play

and also producing and directing plays. Once back in Australia, I did more of the same and then, at the age of 62, I began teaching at a theatre school in Melbourne in 1987. When I started to suffer regular chest pains in 1999, I knew my time to retire had finally come. The doctors told me that I had blockages

in my arteries and so I was put on medication. I had a few operations to unblock my arteries, looked after myself well and the pain gradually faded. But last year, in July 2005, the severe pains returned, this time in my head. My neurologist told me there was nothing more he could do for me. The doctor's words, "nothing we can do", rang in my head as I lay in bed. Waking up the next morning, I decided that if nobody else could do anything for me then I'd have to do something for myself. "I've got an idea for a play," I confided in Vickie, a friend and former student.

## I needed to get back on stage

"I want to portray women who have broken barriers through history and inspired us – people like aviator Amy Johnson, scientist Marie Curie and nurse Edith Cavell, who was shot by the Germans in WWI after helping soldiers escape. They all refused to just sit back and went on to do fantastic things." "That sounds like a great idea," Vickie encouraged. She kindly helped me with my research and in three months the first draft of *Marj's Torchbearers* was finished after another good friend, Liza Dezfooli, wrote the script. Rehearsals began, then last September I approached



Me directing Caroline, one of the actors

Melbourne's Polyglot Theatre, in South Yarra, about hosting our play. They had a free week in early April so we booked in. Today, at the age of 80, I refuse to let ailments get the better of me. It's not yet time for me to just sit down and get on with my knitting. Directing this play has given me a new lease of life.

I hope it inspires others as much as it has me. **Shirley V Heriot, 80, Armadale, Vic.** *Marj's Torchbearers runs from April 5 to April 9.*

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