



## FACT SHEET

Week beginning Monday 19 June 2006

### Media and Technology

#### Da Vinci comes to Victor Harbor

Ursula and I took a week off recently and had a very pleasant time at the seaside township of Victor Harbor. I have had a lot of association with this beautiful region on the Fleurieu Peninsula reaching back into my childhood.

As it is with many of my recollections of happy times throughout my life there are, of course, movies involved. On the southern part of the Peninsula, in my lifetime, there used to be two major venues where you could go to see a movie. One was the drive-in at Port Elliot and the other was the cinema in Ocean Street, Victor Harbor.

Sadly, the Port Elliot drive-in closed a few years ago – one of the last remaining from that romantic era which began in the 1950's. It was a great bit of summertime fun to catch a double-feature there – right into the 1980's. The drive-in was located on a country hillside with sheep and cows grazing nearby and, on a warm summer evening, you could enjoy the spectacular sunset out across the Bay while you waited for the light to fade and the movie to begin.

When the drive-in closed for the last time the owners, with a nice touch of showmanship, left a message on the marquee which read:  
“Goodbye...and thanks for the memories.” I took a photograph of the sign.

Happily, at Victor Harbor, the charming little art-deco picture theatre which began its life in the town's main street in 1923, still survives. My own first memories of this theatre stretch back to the early 1950's and some pleasant family nights at the movies. Unusually for me I can't actually recall any of the movies except one and, even then, I can't recall its title.

It was a black and white “B” feature, cheaply made but with a story that could have come straight out of an up-dated Boys Own adventure book. There are four or five guys exploring for oil somewhere in a middle-eastern desert. Well they get stranded – I think their plane crashes perhaps – but, with great luck, they happen upon some really great transportation in the form of a World War Two German army tank. The tank had been caught in a sandstorm years before and kind of mummified. It even still has a full tank of petrol and everything about it works – including the guns – which is particularly handy given that it turns out that there are some very warlike tribesmen in the region. And so the story unfolds. I wish I could remember the title of the movie but I have never been able to. But, for me, seeing that movie at the Victor Harbor picture theatre has become a precious boyhood memory.

In those days going to the pictures was about more than just seeing the movie – it was a complete experience. The management at the Victor theatre knew

how to make it a great night and, during the interval between the two movies, they would play a selection of the top ten Hit Parade numbers over the theatre's big sound system. Imagine it, "Skokiaan" filling the auditorium in stereo! I can hear it now.

Down the years, the theatre has had several names and a number of owners. It is now called the Victa Cinemas and is a family-owned business. The theatre has weathered many storms along the way. It survived a fire in 1931 and some periods of closure during the bleak years for cinemas which followed the introduction of television to South Australia in 1959.

However, over the past ten years, under the care of enthusiastic owners, the theatre's projection and audio equipment has been up-graded to state-of-the-art standard and the seating and decor has been thoughtfully refurbished. Charming, the old foot warmers were retained. Just the ticket on a cold winter's night at the seaside.

In 1998 the theatre was modified to incorporate a second screen and it's one of the best modifications of its kind that I've seen. The upstairs and downstairs decor has remained virtually unchanged so that in either of the auditoriums you still have the feeling that you're experiencing a good old fashioned night at the movies.

But there's nothing old fashioned about the movies that are screened at the Victa Cinemas. With two screens in operation and up to four sessions a day the Victa can run as many as ten first-release movies in any given month.

The Victa Cinema is a great place to go see a movie. Add it to your list of "things to do" next time you visit Victor Harbor and you won't be disappointed. In addition, your patronage might just help this delightful piece of living history to continue to thrive.

When Ursula and I were down at Victor Harbor recently we decided that we would shout ourselves to a kind of mini film festival at the Victa Cinemas.

We ended up seeing three movies in the course of the week – balm to my soul.

The first was a Walt Disney production called "Eight Below" which is a drama, based on true events, about a team of sled dogs left behind at an Antarctic research station to fend for themselves during the winter.

It's a well-crafted movie, well written and with appealing performances by all of the performers – those with two feet as well as those with four feet. The huskies and malamutes are just wonderful and for dog lovers such as ourselves the movie was a heart-tugger. If you're a dog person don't miss it.

On our second night at the Victa Cinema we saw The World's Fastest Indian. This movie is also based on real events, the story of a New Zealander called Burt Munro who, in his sixties, decided that he would have a crack at setting a new world speed record for motorcycles.

Burt is played with great appeal by Anthony Hopkins. You have to forgive him his attempt at doing a Kiwi accent. Overseas actors simply can't do Australian accents and, judging by Hopkins, Kiwi accents are even harder.

Accents aside, Hopkins does manage to get inside the skin of this quintessentially eccentric character, portraying the amalgam of innocence, charm and steely determination which carried Burt Munro inexorably toward the realisation of his dream.

The story seems to be so much of a fantasy that you have to keep reminding yourself that these events really did happen and it's this underlay of truth that gives the movie its real strength.

It is indeed one of those movies that celebrates the triumph of the human spirit. It is life affirming to see a person fulfilling a dream even if the idea of going really really fast in a straight line on a very old motorcycle may not be everybody's idea of a particularly sensible or, for that matter, worthwhile thing to do.

There's not much to dislike about this movie. It's a yarn about the kind of oddball bloke that many of us know – a mechanical tinkerer whose dreamland is his back shed workshop. The difference with Burt Munro was that he also had a touch of genius.

Our third, and final, visit to the Victa Cinemas was to attend the opening night screening of the much-awaited Da Vinci Code. Well we had done well with the sled dogs and the old guy and the motorcycle – but, I guess, you can't win 'em all.

I've since read that the Da Vinci Code has been banned in Pakistan. Lucky Pakistanis!

I haven't read the book – and I don't intend to. I went along to see the movie in the expectation that it might be a passable thriller. It's not. It's just plain silly.

I was so bored during the movie that I deliberately started to think of other things. I began to hope that the fact that I was sitting in the Victa Cinema might help me remember the title of that tank movie from 1953. Now *that* really was a thrilling adventure yarn.

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