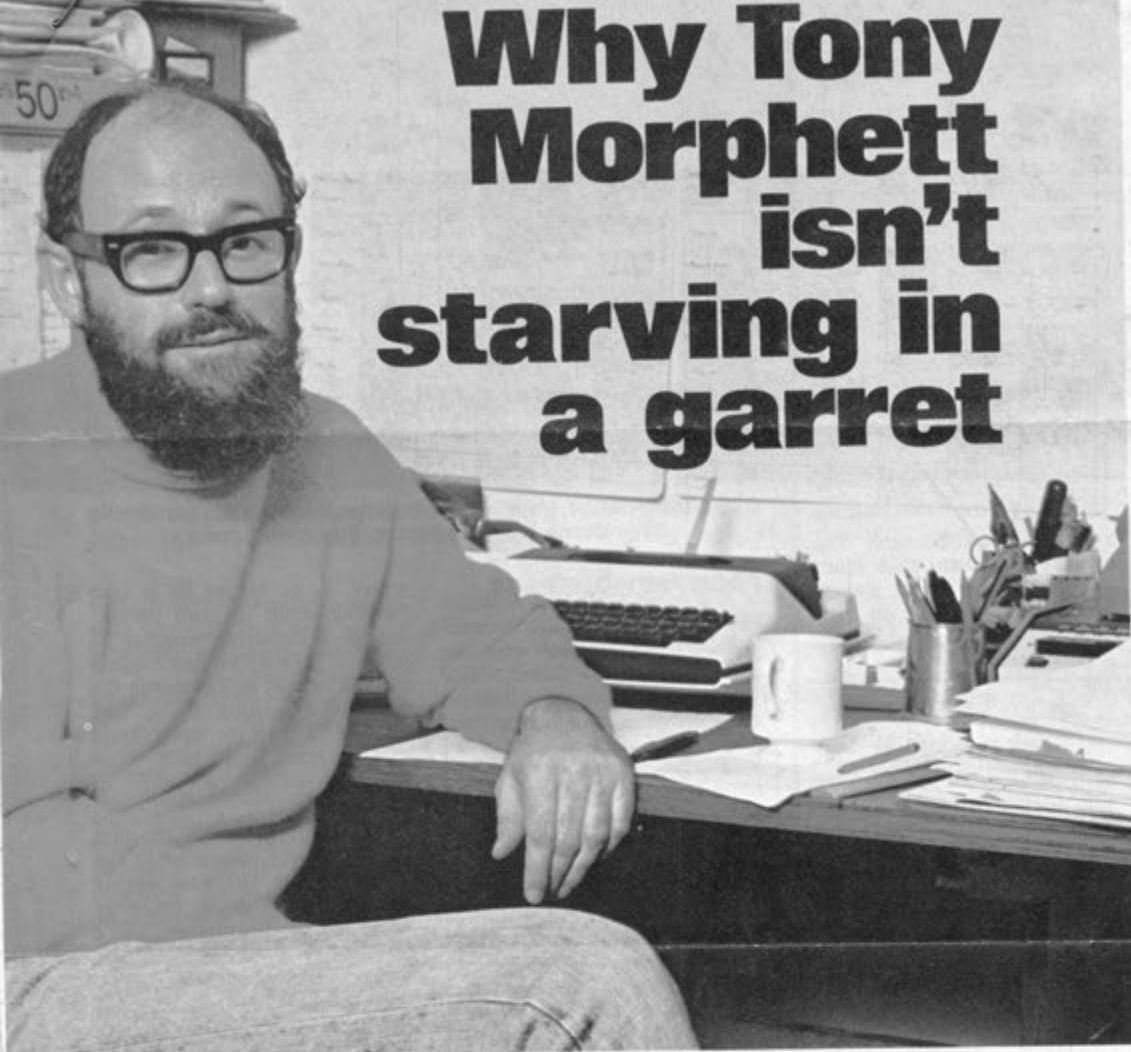


Why Tony Morphett isn't starving in a garret



SCRIPTEWRITER Tony Morphett has it easy when it comes to going to work — he just turns his chair away from the breakfast table and there is his office right in front of him.

It's a situation many might envy, and Morphett himself says he's "a happy man." But a frequent popular conception of the writer-as-layabout doesn't hold up. His filing cabinet is full of pieces of paper with storylines, plot outlines, ideas for series and ideas for plays. When you are a freelance writer depending for a living on the Australian entertainment industry, you never discard an idea.

A telephone answering machine allows him to work without interruption from early morning until he finds himself taking short-cuts. That signals he's getting either tired or lazy, and then he does something else until the next morning. On the wall in front of him are several square feet of cards plotting out episode by episode the broad details of the threads of the

stories of the next series of 13 of *Certain Women*.

This is necessary because the new series will be a serial and will be written by different people. Morphett has written the first, third and fifth, Ted Roberts the second and fourth.

"We can't do the lot between us," Morphett explains. "They're going to be produced at the rate of one a week, which means they have to roll off our (script-writing) machine at the rate of one a week, and you can't write a quality script in a fortnight. I can't anyway."

"I avoid social engagements while working on a script."

That makes a pretty severe limitation for Morphett whose screenplay output since *Dynasty* and *Catwalk* includes two episodes of *Elephant Boy*, five of the total 26 *Boney* episodes, two series of *Certain Women* and the pilot episodes of *Linehaul* and *River Bend*.

Morphett is now 35 and in the unusual position for a freelance of having to refuse commissions. "Freelancing, especially in the beginning, gives you the sort of attitude that makes it very hard

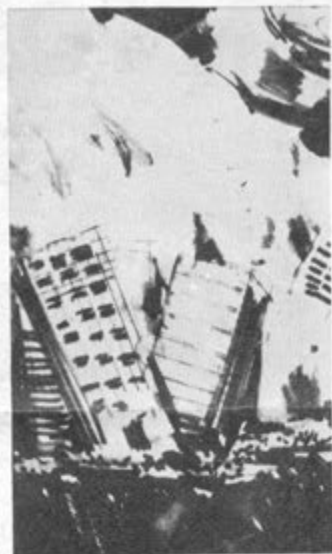
to refuse an offer of work. This is aggravated by the fact that refusing some people makes them more persistent. But you can over-commit yourself. I've done it in the past.

"There's an old showbiz saying that you're only as good as your last script. I'm not Superman, and if I take on too much work the quality will go down and I'll lose the reputation I have in the industry."

Morphett was a talks officer with the ABC when he wrote the three novels — *Mayor's Nest*, *Thorskald* and *Dynasty*. *Dynasty* took all his spare time for 18 months. At the end of 1967 it was bought by an American publisher, and at the same time he was awarded a Commonwealth Literary Fund Grant.

"I quit the ABC," he says, "the victim of a vast self-delusion. You know, you're sweating away and you think, anyone who sells a novel in America is rich — swimming pool, starlets, three white telephones . . ."

"Well, the grant and the American advance did cushion



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Horoscope

MAY 12-18

BIRTHDAY: JUDY JACQUES

JUDY JACQUES was born on May 17. She will have more opportunity to experience a variety of creative outlets in the future. Her scope will widen and she should find the inner peace she seeks. Taurean natives are usually honest and hard working. They do not act on impulse, but prefer to think things over. They are more at home in the country.

By HENDEL JOEL



CERTAIN WOMEN, from left, June Salter, Jenny Lee, Joan Bruce, Judy Morris, Queenie Ashton, Elizabeth Crosby.

Taurus

APRIL 20 to MAY 20

YOU will get the chance to prove you can handle additional responsibility. The key is to organise and express yourself. Now is the time to invest in your own future.

Gemini

MAY 21 to JUNE 21

YOU can be successful. You can also publish your ideas and look to the future. Refuse to be marooned on the personal island of your past experiences.

Cancer

JUNE 22 to JULY 22

A NEW contact with a member of the opposite sex could play a major role. Money is also strongly featured. An old case could now be re-opened. Take care with health.

Leo

JULY 23 to AUG. 22

MARRIAGE, public relations and special agreements are clearly in focus. Heed your intuitive intellect. You will have extra perception working on your side. Keep an open mind.

Virgo

AUG. 23 to SEPT. 22

HIGHLIGHT your abilities. Be versatile. Reach beyond what appears to be a limitation. Open all lines of communication. A Sagittarian native could play a key role.

Libra

SEPT. 23 to OCT. 23

FAVOURABLE lunar aspects now coincide with romance, creative endeavours and relations with children. Combine some logic with impulse. Strive for balance.

Scorpio

OCT. 24 to NOV. 21

COMMUNICATE with family members. A property issue may be settled. Do not delay any plans — the result could be a great loss. The key is to build on a solid base.

Sagittarius

NOV. 22 to DEC. 21

A FAMILY reunion could be on the agenda. A wandering relative may communicate or visit. Be diplomatic. Your curiosity may offend. Your sense of humour is an ally.

Capricorn

DEC. 22 to JAN. 19

SPOTLIGHT is on what you earn. Money is very important. You must settle all outstanding debts. Review your budget. Be imaginative and don't brood.

Aquarius

JAN. 20 to FEB. 18

PUT ideas to work. Take a chance on your own abilities. Display your confidence by taking the initiative. The accent is on personality, a new start and a fresh approach!

Pisces

FEB. 19 to MARCH 20

FINISH rather than initiate a project. Get rid of all your commitments by fulfilling your obligations. You will emerge a winner if you look after your responsibilities efficiently.

Aries

MARCH 21 to APRIL 19

FRIENDS will want you to know the truth. You will have to accept this and do away with fooling yourself. Face realities. Some wishes will be fulfilled.

FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

the blow, fortunately, because the six-figure cheques were not rolling in from the States, and if the world did owe me a living it certainly wasn't falling over itself to meet the instalments."

For the next few years he scraped a living. Now? "I'm doing OK. Rather better than an ABC talks officer and I'm living the life I want to live. I'm a happy man.

"TV writers don't starve in garrets. We're paid by the script. I'm glad to have written novels, but there are people in TV who are, it seems to me, unnaturally impressed by it, whereas surely my screen credits should carry more weight in their business. When I go back to the novel — and I probably shall — I will still want to write for TV because I enjoy it."

Feelings of insecurity about the future are no longer a problem. After *Certain Women* series two goes into production in July, he says, he should know more about the future of Linehaul and River Bend.

"The job's a bit seasonal," he says. "A bit like cane-cutting. You expect periods of sitting around, and your earnings tend to fluctuate. But after you've survived six years living, as my brother puts it 'on your wits' (he's a dentist), knowing that when things have been crook before — something has always turned up, you get a kind of confidence.

"At the moment I'm looking no further ahead than my present job, which is to make this next series of *Certain Women* as good as it can possibly be. I figure that's where work will come from in the future."

Morphett describes *Certain Women* as an immensely happy professional experience. It also marks a change in his career as a

writer, in so far as he is now "writing about his own people" but he is uncertain whether he wrote it because he had become capable of this, or whether in the process of writing it he had allowed himself to open areas within him that he'd been refusing to write out of previously.

"It's a reflection of the fact that I'm more interested in the blokes I know. If I were writing *Dynasty* now you'd probably never see the boardroom. You'd see more of the home life of the reporters than the bosses.

"*Dynasty* was about people I don't mix with socially, whereas the CW family is very close to me. I come from out Rosehill-Harris Park way, and although there are vast differences from my own family, the characters are people I know and grew up with.

"They're a family doing that very Australian thing of trying to educate the next generation to a higher level than their own.

"It was an enormous pleasure for me to get strong feelings of identification from other people involved in the series, from John Cameron (ABC head of drama) and Eric Tayler (executive producer) right through to the actors and technicians.

"There were so many people saying 'That's like my aunt' or 'My God, I recognised him' I began to wonder whose show it was.

"The degree to which the cast realised the characters and made them true people was quite frightening at times. The scene in episode Jane, when Allan (Ron Graham) had lost his job and is looking through bills when Jane (Joan Bruce) came out in her dressing gown and slippers — two middle-aged people obviously still very much in love — was moving almost to the point of



DYNASTY members, from left, Nick Tate, John Tate, Ron Graham, Kevin Miles.



CATWALK, a magazine drama, starred John Forgeham and June Salter.



BONEY: James Laurenson on location with Google Withers in an episode scripted by Tony Morphett.

embarrassment. You felt as if you were intruding on a very private moment in two people's lives.

"A strange thing happened when I was writing this episode. I thought my first draft was a pretty good script but I got a lot of critical notes from Cameron and Tayler which upset me so much I put it away for about a month before I came back and realised that I had been unwilling, for some reason, to come to terms with the subject."

THE people Morphett is writing about are not simply those he knows. They are also those with whom he has sympathy. He decries the tendency to put people down because they live in "the suburbs".

We all live in suburbs, even those of us who live in Bellevue Hill, Paddington, South Yarra or Mount Eliza, or, like Tony Morphett, Bondi Junction.

"It seems to me that working nine-to-five and wanting to have a happy marriage and a lawn and kids and a Holden are not bad ambitions. You can have persecuted majorities too.

"In *Certain Women* I'm hoping to show something of the other side of the coin. In the second series there's a character who's a professional soldier and represents, I believe, another misunderstood class in our society."

Another professional change in Morphett is that his writing is more economical than ever, a trend that has been developing since he met Glyn Davies in 1969.

If writing three novels taught him to master character and dialogue, Davies, now his partner, was his mentor in tight construction.

Television writing, Morphett

explains, is a technical skill in so far as you have to grab the audience's attention and interest in the first few minutes, but this is the hardest time to do it, because this is also when you have to explain who the characters are and what the story is about.

He maintains that there are none who do it better than Australians.

"Series such as *Boney* and *Elephant Boy*, in which Australian writers have had the same editing, the same facilities and the same acting as British writers show how well the Australians stand up.

"A local writer like John Dingwall has looked good in shows done on a tenth of U.S. budgets, and that tells me that man-for-man he's a better writer than many Americans.

"Dingwall wrote the award-winning *Divvy 4*, *The Return of John Kelso*, and he's a classic example of a writer who grew inside the Crawford organisation.

"I've never written for Crawfords - I've always seemed to be doing something else - but they've done a fabulous job for Australian television, for reasons of quality, but also quantity.

"We have been hampered by the lack of colour facilities. I think having to choose beforehand whether you will go to the expense of using colour film and intentionally aiming at an international market, often leads to the disembowelling of the product and doesn't always lead to the right decision anyway.

"When all our studios are colour equipped and everything is made in colour then your decision about your market can be made at the proper time - when the product is finished. I think something made well for

the Australian viewer is likely to be at least half the time exportable."

Story: John Howard
Colour photo: Peter Carrette



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