

# The Bulletin

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UPFRONT

## WRITE OF PASSAGE

TRAVEL

HELEN PITT

**The Australian expatriate experience has been captured in a new collection of stories.**

Time was once that ambitious Australians needed a one-way ticket out of the country. Take for example Philip Minter, who took the three-week sea voyage to the United States in 1957, so he could study for a Masters of Science. While there he became interested in agricultural extension studies, communicating research findings to farmers in a form that's useful to them. He realised this was what Australia needed and saw his life career taking shape with a view to bringing his expertise back home.

But thanks to Australian law at the time, to work with the US Department of Agriculture he had to give up his Australian citizenship. His father was so disappointed that he wrote him out of his will.

Minter says a number of Australians of his era have come to occupy senior positions in the US: President of the World Bank, a US ambassador to Israel, a former president of Ford Motor Company, the chairman of Coca-Cola, the chief operating officer of Du Pont. "Instead of the Australian government working with these international leaders, they rewarded them by taking away their citizenship," says Minter, now in his 70s, from his Philadelphia home.

These days Australians don't have to give up their passport or rights to the family fortune to work abroad. Last year's changes to the Citizenship Act mean many, like Minter, can be dual citizens, a fact that has spawned not only a softening of the government attitude to the nearly 1 million overseas Australians but also the latter's attitude to their country of birth.

An anthology published this month, *Australian Expats: Stories from Abroad* (Global Exchange), captures these changes in 33 stories. The Southern Cross Group, a Brussels-based lobby group, put out a call for stories from the Australian diaspora earlier this year. Nearly 180 replied from Swaziland to Switzerland, from Bangladesh to Bolivia. The book aims to give Australians a better understanding of the expat experience. Contributions ranging from volunteers abroad to a Benedictine nun ensure it in no way resembles a collection of tall-poppy tales.

As author and British-based expat Nikki Gemmell says in the foreword, unlike many Australians who left their country in anger and frustration in the 1950s and 1960s (Germaine Greer, Clive James, Robert Hughes et al), the current generation doesn't seem to have that burning desire to put Australia behind them once and for all.

"I was concerned about the attitude at home; this perception that we're traitors," says co-publisher Anne MacGregor. "We're hoping this book will show that many of us feel more Australian outside the country than in it."