

“The future is very bright!”

Actor Simon Chilvers was always an artist at heart. He tells Mari Nelson how he turned a debilitating illness into an opportunity to pursue what he loves – and has even invented his own art form, SiPadding.

Simon, caught in action, putting the finishing touches to his oil painting, 'Garden With A Blue Bird'

Starting off at the Melbourne Theatre Company, Simon Chilvers has never been short of acting roles, constantly juggling a mixture of theatre, television and radio projects throughout his life.

From Shakespeare to Ibsen and Chekhov, he's played all the greats and became a household name in shows such as *A Country Practice*, *Prisoner*, *Homicide*, *Division 4* and *Rafferty's Rules*, in which he played Sgt Julian Flicker. His favourite was *Dunera Boys*, receiving an AFI Best Actor Award, and also *The True Believers*, in which he played Doctor Evatt.

But an unfortunate combination of influences – including stress, changing cities and the death of his first wife – revealed underlying health problems.

His acting career came to a halt in 1996 when he was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis (MS), a disease that affects your brain, spinal cord, and vision. Although there had been small hints to MS throughout his life, a cruel incident on stage led to his diagnosis.

“I was in the middle of a play and I couldn't concentrate or remember where I was or what I was doing,” he tells *Peninsula*



Simon and wife Sally, right, celebrating the website launch with its creators, the Frenchs Forest-based Brilliant Digital Marketing team. Top row: L-R: Cathy Proctor, Nicola Elkington, Alanna Nichols and CEO Deb Jeffreys



Sydneysiders especially love Simon's 'Eucalyptus Sydney's Botanical Gardens'

Living. “I couldn't think or breathe and I had to accept that I could no longer work on stage.”

Simon's life changed and his work was limited to voice-over documentaries and commentaries.

“I could do a little bit of television, which I continued to do when asked,” he explains. “But I gradually became less mobile so haven't done much of those sorts of things recently. I used to love doing the voiceovers and documentaries, but that sort of work has dried up.”

Knox-educated Simon, who was born in London in 1939 and has resided in Fairlight for 30 years, discovered art at a very young age and recalls drawing images of overhead planes during the Second World War.

On leaving school his parents convinced him to pursue advertising. After realising he “wasn't too fond of that”, his grandmother inspired him to go to an acting audition, where

he was immediately offered a role.

“I didn't want to be an actor,” he laughs, “and it got in the way of being an artist as I was never out of work. I didn't have time to draw.”

Now he's doing just that – and instead of letting MS stop his creativity, it's enhanced it. Although Simon doesn't think of himself as an early adopter, he created his own form of art (he calls it SiPadding) on an iPad wife Sally bought for him when they were first launched.

“I was having an operation and Sally bought it because she knew I'd go nuts at not being able to move,” he smiles. “I downloaded some apps and started 'painting' on them – I still use some of those apps today.”

To see or purchase some of Simon's art, go to www.simonchilvers.com.au



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