

## The Travelling Man



**Name:** Pieter de Vries

**Home town:** Lismore, New South Wales

**Occupation?**

Cinematographer and teacher of video, photography, and lighting techniques.

**What genres do you specialise in?**

Documentaries and documentary series are my mainstay, shooting TV and cinema commercials in between.

**Current assignments:**

I've just finished a series of documentaries for ABC Australia, with interviews by Australian television presenter Andrew Denton. *The Elders* has as its focus some of the greatest thinkers and doers of our time, and as elders, are usually over the age of 70. With three camera set-ups (Sony HDW-750s), finding a suitable location was one of the greatest challenges.

Earlier, I was in Dhaka, Bangladesh, to interview Muhammad Yunis, a pioneer of Micro-Loans. My hosts (government minders) took me

to a group of huts circled around a muddy courtyard – the poverty here is at a level that I cannot forget. They told me that some local women were doing their 'banking' that day, and it might be worth taking a look.



As I approached a timber hut that looked like an animal pen, when my eyes adjusted to the darkness I realised I was in a tiny space where sixty tiny women had gathered. Silently, each held a small sum of money in their hands ready to pass on to the 'banker' who was seated at a rickety desk.

**Have you been busy?**

I contribute to several industry and photographic publications and run my training courses. This takes care of downtime between assignments.

**What inspired you to want to train others in video and lighting techniques?**

I have a passion for cinematography; it's what I've always wanted to do. I love to show others how to go beyond the video basics.

It's so easy not to do because high quality equipment is so affordable, but few shooters have the knowledge that make the camera and lighting work for them. With the right know-

how everyone has the ability to get professional results.

**Whereabouts have you been shooting?** Central Australia and Bangladesh. I think Bangladesh was the 76th country I've worked in.

**What other types of productions have you shot?**

I've worked in the 3D IMAX format and for television. *Ghosts of the Abyss* was a High Definition 3D large format film centred on the Titanic wreck using Sony/Panavision 3D camera technology, directed by James Cameron. I own an Arriflex SR2 Super16 camera and have

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used it on so many blue chip documentaries over the years.

**Was it easier shooting documentaries on film than it is now with video?**

I'm very much at home in the digital landscape. I don't miss magazine emulsion scratches, airport x-ray affected film, mysterious edge fogging, hairs in the gate, and so on. I treasure my film background and the values it has instilled, but I've carried these over to my work in Digital High Def. But I'm very happy to shoot commercials and clips on film any time.

**Do you like shooting solo or with a team?**

Some of my happiest times are when I'm working alone. However, being part of a good team of professionals brings so much more to a shoot – not to mention all the industry gossip I might otherwise miss out on.

**Is the amount of gear you have to carry around a hassle?**

I have a regular driver who tows a shiny trailer and it carries all my equipment. I do get tired of fifteen cases, two hundred and twenty kilos of stuff turning up on airport luggage carousels – but for me it's the price I pay to see the world, meet extraordinary people, and see amazing places. Being a freelancer with my own equipment is handy when it comes to packing for flights. Every case is hand picked and nothing travels that won't be used.

**Do you find customs a hassle in some countries?**

So long as you have a carnet for the countries that require one, it's usually smooth sailing. I always make sure that it's filled out neatly and correctly and that the total value of the equipment is written in *their* local currency. This tiny calculation pays off especially in the US. It gives customs the impression that you do this regularly and know your

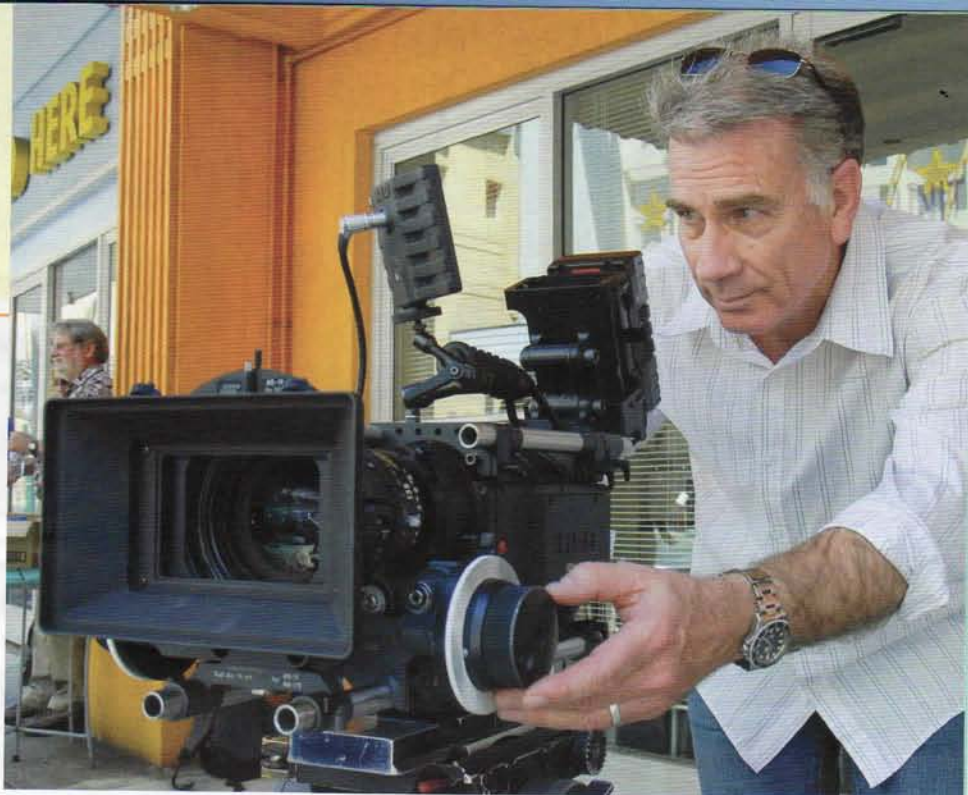
stuff, so this air of confidence will help get you through with few questions and a nice fat stamp on the document. Mention that you've worked with Steve Irwin – that always opens the gates!

**What was your first-ever shooting job?**

I think it was on a Bell & Howell 70DR wind-up. I was covering some semi-momentous event but left the 'taking' lens cap on. You could easily do this on the 70DR because the 'taking' lens was separate from the 'viewing' lens. The editor told me that the film was quite under exposed!

**Most recent assignment?**

A six-week trip all over the Pacific, retracing the Queen's 1953/54 tour of Australia. The presenter, Kwame Kwei-Amah, tracked down the men who played key roles at that time. It was directed by a wonderful director, Nic



**Young from Lion Television UK. Current camera equipment you use?**

I own a Sony Digital Betacam DVW790, Arriflex SR2, three HDV cameras, and Nikon and Canon stills kits, but mostly work in the digital HD formats. I have comprehensive lighting gear and portable jib and dolly kits. Digital Betacam is still very much in the loop – I've had that camera since 1998.

**Other gear you have access to?**

Pretty much everything that's currently available HD-wise. Different assignments are now shot on different formats. I'm

happy to rent HD cameras these days.

**Equipment wish list?**

How about 35mm depth of field characteristics on a 2/3-chip camera without having to stack all kinds of gizmos onto the front? It won't happen, but it would still be nice.

**What piece of gear do you wish someone might make?**

PartyBalloonCam – the camera magically floats by being suspended under a whole bunch of helium filled party balloons. Hey, I just invented it!





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### Best thing about your job?

The instant access to unbelievable locations and the shortcuts to meeting some of the most fascinating people in the world. In this job, amazing experiences can be enjoyed regularly that others may never see in a lifetime. It's nothing less than a privilege.

### Worst thing about your job?

Probably the amount of gear I have to lug.

### Dullest assignments and why?

Hmmm, can't think of any – maybe I've forgotten them!

### Hairiest/scariest assignments and why?

Filming the re-enactment of a battle between two warring tribes in Papua New Guinea. They forgot about the filming and started fighting again – for real! Ended up chasing us out of the village with spears in hand.

### Favourite food and drink?

Chilli fish with vegetables, and a glass of wine.

Pieter de Vries

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