

# Sins of Our Fathers

Synopsis for a feature film

by

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Told from the present-day perspective of an ex Vietnam Vet and a young, female F/A-18 Jet Pilot seeking to follow in the footsteps of her Grandfather, his father and his father before him by serving in her country's military, *Sins of Our Fathers* is a sweeping story of one Australian family's involvement in 6 major conflicts occurring over 100 years in 10 different countries – the 2<sup>nd</sup> Boer War in Africa; WWI in Britain, France and Germany; WWII in Burma, China and India; the Korean War; the Vietnam War of the '60s & '70s, and the present day struggles in Afghanistan.

Think *Top Gun* meets *Good Morning Vietnam*, *Saving Private Ryan* and *Gallipoli* as, using the unique historical exploits of the 5<sup>th</sup> Royal Australian Regiment Battalion Band (whose Vietnam Vets were the only group to serve in the *simultaneous* roles of *Infantry*, *Stretcher Bearers* and *Military Bandsmen* in the revolutionary musical period of the '60s) *Sins of Our Fathers* tells a story of trust, love and personal evolution using five generations of an Australian family to explore changing attitudes to nationalism, the family unit and the place of each of us as citizens of the world.

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Bob 'Trumpy' Conway's comfortably hermetic existence at his hinterland bush hideaway is suddenly rent by the arrival of fiery ex-wife, Sharon, whom he hasn't seen in nearly 40 years. Introducing him to the teenage granddaughter he's never met (Nic, raised singlehandedly by her GranMa from toddlerhood) Sharon asks Bob to talk the underage Nic out of wanting to become one of Australia's first female F/A-18 fighter pilots. Bob is both unwilling and unable to articulate the Vietnam horror-stories he's sublimated for so many years and for Sharon it's history bitterly repeating itself. For Nic, though, with no male role models in her life and desperate to connect with the Grandfather she's deified, it's a heartbreaking rejection which only reinforces her decision to be the next – and best – military member of the Conway family.

In the gap-year that follows Nic, a precocious graduate from high school as a 16-year-old Dux, works two and sometimes three jobs to pay for flying lessons along with her need-for-speed hobby of dirt-bike racing. A biker from way-back, Bob is able to watch anonymously from the crowd ... as well as from the darkened corners of the clubs and pubs Nic plays as member of a rock'n'roll band. The muso in him is thrilled to see the gift passed to his Granddaughter but, unable to change 60+ year-old spots, Bob can't bring himself to make contact.

It's when he's refuelling his light plane one day that Bob comes face to face with Nic. Intrigued to discover he's a pilot she opens up, the pair bonding for the first time. Bob's pleased by the connection but, characteristically, flies away without taking it further. But he's there – albeit it anonymously in the RAAF Amberley Base crowd - when Flying Officer Nicole Michele Conway graduates as a Top Gun. On this occasion Sharon sees him ... the pair saying nothing after holding each other's gaze before going their separate ways.

Now a confident young woman in her own right Nic motorcycles unexpectedly to Bob's place. Discovering her Grandad is also a biker opens more doors between the pair and, after an afternoon riding together, Bob invites her to stay the night. She discovers the music studio at the back of his house and is thrilled when he invites her to lay down a vocal for his latest jingle. She's even more touched to discover he's been secretly turning up to her music gigs. With the shared experiences of military service to further bind them Bob opens up to Nic in a way he hasn't to anyone for most of his life. The pair swap fears and emotions to which they've never admitted ... Nic her experiences in the cockpit of a jet fighter over Afghanistan; Bob his desperate attempts to understand life as a teenager in the 5<sup>th</sup> RAR, one minute trying to kill people, the next saving lives as a medic and then, as a military bandsman, playing music to soothe terrified Vietnamese villagers being questioned by Military Intelligence. Nic's sense of family is further enriched when Bob takes her to visit his octogenarian Dad, Harry,

who shares with her stories of the two World Wars – those he lived through, and those told to him by his father, Billy, born in the late 1800s.

When Nic discovers Bob is about to take an annual trip to Vietnam, piloting for a couple of crazy ex-Vets who go each year to personally clear landmines, she wrangles leave to go with him. Appalled, Sharon is immediately in Bob's face. She's asked him one favour in 40 years – to talk their Granddaughter out of going in harm's way – and instead he offers to lead her into a fucking mine-field! Bob gently stands his ground. Nic is her own woman now – this is her call, no one else's.

In Vietnam Nic comes face to face with the legacy of war. Amputee mine victims – many of them children – equate all too easily for Nic with the unseen results of adrenaline-fuelled button-pushing in the cockpit of an F/A-18. Ironically, though, it takes her return to Australia to acquaint Nic with death for the first time as she watches her now-beloved Great-Granddad Harry pass away. After marching for him in the next Anzac Day Parade – and then witnessing Bob swapping stories with his Vietnam mates in their Mess afterwards - Nic makes the life-changing decision to transfer to the Army to fly medical-evac "Dust-off" choppers rescuing wounded under fire ... Nic's "good" way of fighting a war.

Arriving at this place of Conscientious Objection within the military costs Nic her lover - fellow jet pilot, Brandon. Not having shared her Vietnam experiences he's unable to understand her decision. After a night of passionate love-making alternating with impassioned argument the pair, though still very much in love, break up ... neither realizing they've conceived a child.

Less than a week later in Afghanistan Nic, her chopper downed by enemy fire, watches a young boy barely bigger than the weapon he's holding aim it at one of her crew. Drawing her side-arm Nic yells for the kid to put it down. The boy swings his weapon; aims it at her. Nic is forced to fire. As the dead boy's weapon hits the ground it discharges, the round ricocheting off the side of her helicopter before tearing into Nicole's head.

6 YEARS LATER Nic's 5 year old son Zac traces an ever-curious finger over his Mum's badly scarred face as the pair say farewells. She'll miss him desperately while she's off flying volunteer missions delivering humanitarian aid but, for Nic, it goes only some tiny way towards redressing the balance of the lives she took in the name of being 'right'. The once beautiful but superficial teen who saw dropping bombs from an F/A-18 as a romantic dream has grown – with her Grandfather's help – into a beautifully battle-scarred woman who now recognizes life is about give as well as take.

As Zac stoically watches his Mum walk off his GreatGampsTrumpy – there to wave bye-bye, too – asks why Zac's trying so hard not to cry. Zac says it's a Guy-Thing; he's old enough now to know boys have to hang tough once they get to a certain age. Bob gently encourages Zac to cry – just this once – to see if it makes him feel better. Sharon, looking after Zac while Nic's away, is deeply moved to realize her once closed-off Ex is now such a different man. One who – with his Granddaughter's help - has reached a place of being able to articulate his feelings in the hope a small boy can grow up doing the same. Eventually drying his eyes Zac announces the tears *have* made him feel better and, as he and Bob watch Nic take off, they pinky-swear that Zac can hold off hanging tough for a few more years yet.

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For more information on *Sins of Our Fathers* or other comdey/drama titles created by **Sean Nash** contact:

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