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FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT: The Village

Airs 8.00 pm Tuesday August 21 on ABC TV and iview

Sean Dorney got thrown out of PNG for his reporting yet he received one of its top honours. He skippered its footy team and fell for a local girl. Now suffering motor neurone disease, he makes an emotional final visit.

For most Australians, Manus Island evokes a grim, now-shuttered detention centre, nothing more. But for veteran ABC correspondent Sean Dorney, it's paradise.

It's where he married a chief's daughter, Pauline, after draining his bank account to pay bride price, and where the embrace of a vast extended family awaits.

"People have said to me that Pauline is like a princess in Manus, whereas you're just a commoner" Sean Dorney

And it's where Sean and his beloved Pauline are now returning, in what will probably be his last time in PNG, the country that's defined his life.



“The thing is I’ve now got motor neurone disease. I may have just two years left” Sean Dorney

As his boat touches shore, a burly tribesman lifts the frail Dorney and carries him to the sand. Tears flow in a tempest of drums and song.

“Even the smallest children are constantly dancing. I’m no longer up to the more vigorous moves – but even with a walking stick one can but try” Dorney at welcome ceremony.

Sean Dorney first reported on PNG before it won independence from Australia. He ended up a household name, thanks to his reporting of political crises, disasters and daily life struggles.

Thanks too to his place in the national rugby league side. His team mates called him “Grasscutter” for his tackling style. It’s a sport that unites a country where 860 languages are spoken... though Pauline needed lots of persuasion.

“I was thinking, do they call this sport? This is not sport. This is a bunch of dogs fighting over chicken bones” Pauline Nare, Sean’s wife

On this farewell journey to PNG, Dorney makes a special report for Foreign Correspondent. He finds nuggets of progress, like more girls getting educated. He unleashes his frustrations in trying to inform Australians about their nearest neighbour, about whom they seem to care little.

“Frankly I’m appalled at the lack of coverage in Australia” Sean Dorney

It’s his journey as a sick man to his and Pauline’s Manus clan that showcases PNG’s great treasure... the pulsating villages where 80 per cent of its people live. They’re poor but they enjoy what Sean calls “subsistence affluence”.

In Tulu, Sean is initiated as a clan chief, a first for an outsider. Then, before Sean is carried back into the boat, comes Tulu’s healing ceremony, unforgettable in its passion and unimaginably removed from the high-tech Australian medicine to which he will return.

Few correspondents have etched themselves more deeply into the life of a country they’ve covered than Sean Dorney. *The Village* airs on Foreign Correspondent at 8 pm Tuesday 21 August 1.30 pm Friday 24 on ABC TV and at 7.30 pm AEST on Saturday 25 on the ABC News Channel; also on iView

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