



the nanny diary

STORY HANNAH DICKSON

She's worked for international celebrities and ordinary folk alike – super nanny Dorothy Waide knows a thing or two about bringing up baby



Uber-nanny Mary Poppins may have arrived at work via umbrella, but for Dorothy Waide it's more likely to be a private jet. That's the kind of star treatment you get when your services as a maternity nurse are required for the offspring of the likes of Catherine Zeta-Jones and Michael Douglas, or Russell Crowe and Danielle Spencer.

Since training as a Karitane nurse in Auckland in the 1970s, Dorothy has spent most of her career overseas – everywhere from London to Bangkok, Hong Kong to the US, and Germany to the South of France. She typically spends three months with the family of a new baby, and helps them survive those turbulent first few weeks, get to know their little one, set up routines and work out how to function as a family.

Of course you won't hear Dorothy go into specific details of any of the families she's worked for – celebrities or not. Discretion is a part of the job and she signs confidentiality agreements stipulating that a family's private details will be kept private.

Breaching such an agreement can lead to a court case and a hefty bill for damages. But in a career that spans a couple of decades Dorothy, 52, has pretty much seen it all. In her new movie *The Nanny Diaries*, Scarlett Johansson gets thrown into the midst of a dysfunctional family from Manhattan's elite, but even her spoiled-brat encounters may not have anything on real life.

Dorothy has been asked to do all sorts of unusual extras. There was the home where the baby slept well at night, but Dorothy had to be up all hours looking after a puppy instead. She's looked after a client's

dorothy's pearl of wisdom #1

"I believe that if you can give the first six weeks after the birth completely to your baby, then you will have built good foundations for the rest of her life. It's better to hibernate at home, enjoy your baby and get to know her than to socialise around the clock in those first six weeks."



Left: Dorothy gets snapped while out with actress Catherine Zeta-Jones. Below: Russel Crowe and Danielle Spencer were among her celebrity clients.



dorothy's pearl of wisdom #2

"If you want a happy child and a happy family, think in terms of consistency, boundaries and love. Take time to stop and listen to your child's needs and to explain things to them. Show them how to explore the world through toys and books. Avoid saying no until they understand the word, and then if you do say it – stick to it. Never promise something unless you intend to carry it through."

sick father, worked for women who wouldn't let her pick up the baby (kind of difficult when you're the baby nurse), and for couples who wanted her to do absolutely everything. There have been fantastic jobs that have turned into lifelong friendships, and nightmare jobs she had to leave early.

But at the end of the day, says Dorothy, what really matters is the babies. It's not about getting dazzled by big names or gorgeous homes, it's about welcoming a new life. "You arrive at a new job and there's this gorgeous little rosebud – actually there are three little rosebuds, all needing to learn how

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to bloom together as a family."

And Dorothy's advice doesn't change whether she's working for a celebrity or Mr and Mrs Average Joe. Sure, she doesn't have to sign confidentiality agreements or dodge the paparazzi with the latter, but both are hungry for knowledge and need careful handling.

"There's no difference between working for a young couple who have saved for a maternity nurse or a celebrity – they're both looking for the same guidance. Celebrities are actually no more of a nightmare than normal families are. At the end of the day, they're normal people like us. Very occasionally I might come across a mother who's into lurching and manicures, but mostly they're all looking for ways to achieve balance in their new lives."

A couple of generations ago, first-time parents weren't complete novices when it came to babies. Chances are they had been around members of their extended family when they had babies and had picked up a certain amount by

osmosis. But it's not like that any more. Some mothers have never held a baby until they hold their own. And the wide variety of childcare gurus and parenting plans can make the prospect of being a new mum rather daunting.

Dorothy starts at the beginning, establishing a routine, and is there to help and guide. "I tell my mothers that there's no right or wrong way to look after a baby. But there is a hard way and an easy way. And what seems like the easy way in the beginning may actually turn out to be the hard way in the end."

66 I still keep in touch with some of the mothers and they ring if something's wrong ☺☺

Arriving at a new job can be a baptism of fire. Dorothy has to fit in with existing staff and get down to business very quickly. The birth of a new baby is an emotional time and she often gets fast-tracked into the inner circle of family life. There are boundaries, however.

"I tend to chuckle when I hear that expression 'part of the family'. On a lot of jobs, you sit and eat and relax with the parents and there are a lot of people around the world I consider my family. But there is a very fine line there and at the end of the day you aren't family. The most important skill of a maternity nurse is to know when to be around and when to give the parents their space."

And, of course, the nature of Dorothy's work means she quickly has to say goodbye and move on to her next job. That's hard when you've shared so much. "When I first started, I would wander from job to job with no, or very little, break in between, because it helped me get over the feeling of leaving a wonderful family. I once sat on



Above: Scarlett Johansson (left) and Alicia Keys in *The Nanny Diaries*. Top right and right: Scarlett's character is nanny to the only child of a rich couple.



dorothy's pearl of wisdom #3

"When you interview for a nanny or maternity nurse, discuss your views on nurturing and how a crying baby should be comforted. Ask about her qualifications and experiences, and check her references. It's important that you both have the same expectations of routine, house rules, hours and remuneration."

what you need to know about nanny hire

- * To find a nanny, go through an established agency, or advertise for yourself. The advantage of using an agency is that all the nannies on their books should have already had police and reference checks, and a personal interview with the agency. The agency, which charges a fee, is also able to intervene in any disputes that may arise.
- * Pay rates vary, but you can expect to pay \$15 to \$20 an hour for someone to look after your children in your home. For \$20, you would expect a highly experienced nanny, with experience in looking after babies. A new graduate with little experience would expect about \$16 per hour. A mother's helper who doesn't have sole charge, or a babysitter for older children, may be at the lower end of the wage scale, earning \$15 per hour.
- * There are a number of nanny courses throughout the country. Graduates are trained in the basics of practical childcare and early childhood education. You may decide years of experience are just as effective as a formal qualification, but it's a good idea to check that your nanny has completed first aid courses and appropriate refresher courses.
- * Visit www.tinies.co.nz, www.nanny.org.nz, www.karitanebureau.co.nz or www.claro.co.nz for more information.

a plane from Bangkok to London crying my eyes out – every time I stopped crying the hostess would ask if I was okay and I would start again. As time's gone by I've learned to control my emotions a lot better, but I still keep in touch with some of the mothers and they ring if something's wrong with their child."

And when they call, Dorothy is reassured that she's helped give both mothers and babies a positive start to their journey together.

Here in New Zealand, maternity nurses may not be as common an occurrence as in Europe and the US, but the demand for nannies is steadily increasing, as more women work outside the home before their children reach school age.

Tamara Willis, an Auckland-based consultant at Tinies Childcare, says she currently has more families wanting help than nannies available. She puts the demand down to the sheer convenience of having someone coming into your home to care for your kids: continuity of care, no

complicated pick-ups and drop-offs at school and no scrambles to find emergency childcare. Live-in positions are rare here, and two- or three-day-a-week jobs are more common than full time.

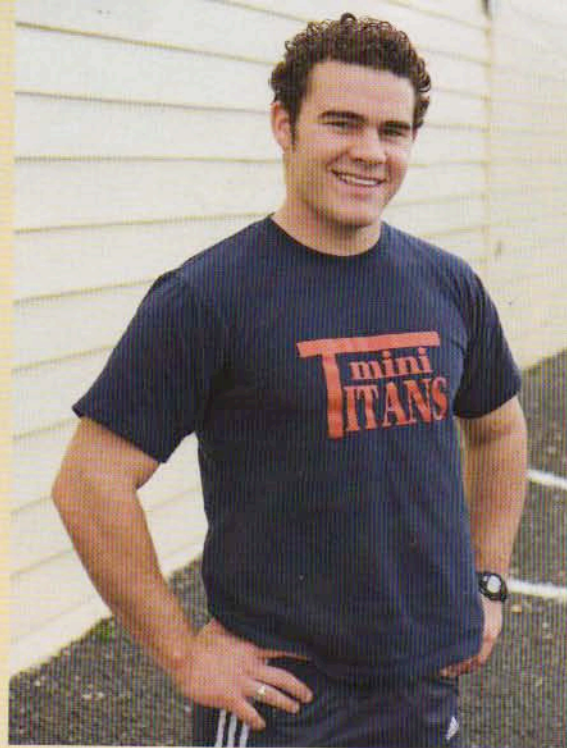
New Zealand nannies tend to be a mixture of graduates from local nanny schools (courses typically range from six months to a year) and older women who have a wealth of childcare experience behind them. "Different things appeal to different families," says Tamara. "Qualifications are very important to some, while others would rather choose someone who doesn't necessarily have the qualification on paper, but might have 15 years experience."

So, are New Zealand employers ever as demanding as the ones in *The Nanny Diaries*? Tamara is diplomatic in her reply. "Some families do have high expectations, but we always suggest that the nature of the duties get discussed at the interview stage."

And that seems to be the key to a happy nanny/family relationship. Find someone who has the same idea of the job as you do. Some nannies are happy to do general household duties as well as care for the children, while others see their role as purely child minders and educators. ■

dorothy's pearl of wisdom #4

"Some mothers lead a very busy life but at the end of the day, it's quality time not quantity time that makes a good parent. Working parents can spend five minutes a day with their children, however if that five minutes is spent solely on them it is better than a mother who is in the house all day and not aware of her children."



Nick was part way through a psychology degree when he got a job teaching swimming to primary school-aged boys at Kings School in Remuera. His ease and popularity with the boys was noticed by several mothers, who then offered him part-time childcare work. Often parents wanted him to give their sons specific 'boy time' – out at the park, getting dirty, kicking balls around. That gave him an idea for a business.

So with the help of one of his employers, Nick set up Mini Titans at the College Rifles Rugby Union Football Club in Auckland. The

manny about town

Forget Mary Poppins – enter Hairy Poppins, otherwise known as the Manny. Britney Spears and Liz Hurley have both reportedly hired a male nanny and the trend is growing as parents see the benefits of having a man about the house, doing a job that has traditionally been reserved for women.

Nick Blundell isn't too keen on catchy titles for his job, but he is keen on the job itself, looking after kids and setting up a business teaching sport to pre-school boys.

It's not exactly among the top-10 expected career choices for a 23-year-old, rugby-playing Kiwi bloke. But, Nick says, his mum is one of seven kids, which means he's been around pre-school cousins for most of his life.

"Ask any of my ex-girlfriends why I get on so well with pre-schoolers and they'll tell you it's because I'm a pre-schooler myself."

Little kids barely feature on the radar of most guys in their early 20s, so there's a bit of ribbing from his friends to suffer.

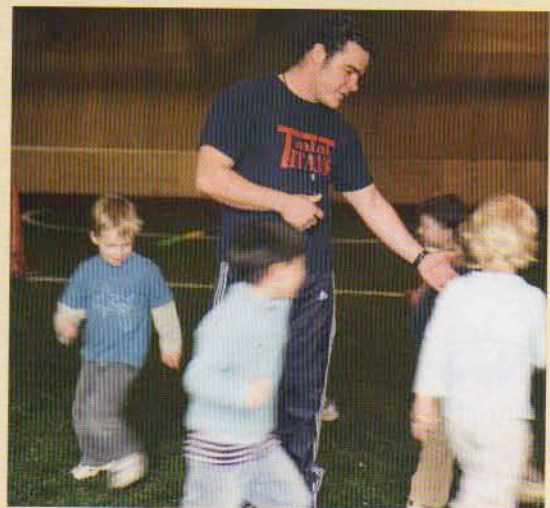
"My mates think I'm crazy," says Nick. "They just don't get it, and make no end of jokes about it. But for me it's the most natural thing in the world to do."

66 You really can have some fantastic conversations with pre-schoolers... I love kids 99

Above: It might seem an unusual career move for a bloke his age, but Nick's comfortable with kids and having grown up in a family with loads of younger cousins, he knows what he's doing, too. Below: Nick's Mini Titans class has been a hit with both parents and kids alike.

45-minute class for three- and four-year-old boys has them doing everything from pint-sized rugby, soccer and basketball drills to push-ups ('grasshoppers' in pre-schooler speak).

Nick's charges love it, their parents are happy seeing some of that seemingly endless energy expended and Nick's in his element. "You really can have some fantastic conversations with pre-schoolers," he says. "The reality is, I love kids."



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