

Tassone leaves role of a lifetime for a life in the US

SUE YEAP

Over two seasons of *Underbelly* viewers have watched devious copper Dennis Kelly grease palms, take bribes, commit acts of violence, drink on the job and worse.

He's one of the most morally unsound characters to have graced our screens in recent years, a man who thinks nothing of bending rules and double-crossing his way to the top. In *Underbelly*'s explosive season finale on Sunday, Kelly even hires someone to clean up his dirty past as he desperately lobbies for the job of police commissioner.

For actor Paul Tassone, Kelly has been the role of a lifetime; the type of character in the type of series that gave him the acting bug almost 20 years ago.

"I am playing a real adult character; it's Shakespearean in its tone, it's high drama, I can have as much fun as I



Emigrating: Paul Tassone as Kelly.

want," Tassone said by phone from his home in the Blue Mountains.

"These gifts come along very rarely; I am so grateful it has happened. He's an iconic character; he's JR, I love him to death even though he's such a bad man."

AMERICAN UNDERBELLY

Nine's *Underbelly* franchise is to get an American makeover, with US cable channel Starz buying the rights to produce its version of the show. Precisely what Starz has bought remains something of a mystery. None of the Australian storylines will have much relevance to an American audience, and when it comes to crime television it's hard to know what Australia can teach the home of the *CSI* and *Law & Order* franchises.

FAIRFAX

Tassone grew up in Albany and the Rockingham area, attending Safety Bay High School before getting a dual degree in theatre and drama from Murdoch and UWA.

He left Perth after appearing in the teen athlete drama *Sweat* and came to

national attention playing nurse practitioner Nelson Curtis on the medical drama *All Saints*.

After *All Saints* he played evil Rev. John Hall in *Home and Away* and also appeared on stage, in film and set up a company to make corporate training videos with wife Miriam.

Tassone has also completed a film with Simon Lyndon with the working title of *Finding Her*.

But his next major project is relocating to the US with Miriam and their children.

Miriam's parents are Australian but she was born in Minnesota and holds a US passport.

"We're moving to the States at the end of the year," he said. "We are emigrating so we're preparing for that."

"We're going in July to do the whole agent and manager thing, the whole family is going to go. It's just the right time now. I am looking forward to all those opportunities."

With *Underbelly* about to end, it sounds like this could be the last we see of Tassone and Kelly for a little while. Unlike some of the other police portrayed in the series, Kelly is thankfully not a real person and Tassone said that gave him greater liberties than some of his co-stars.

"Dennis Kelly is not a real guy, he's a conglomeration of three or four real guys and at each point in his career he would be based on someone.

"So all of these things either did happen, or the kernel of what you see him do happened; so the essence is the truth but he is based on three or four different guys."

In many ways Tassone believes Kelly is a good representative of the changes the police underwent from series two to three.

Underbelly: The Golden Mile airs Sunday at 8.30pm on Nine and WIN
