

# NEVER FORGET

Postnatal depression took a much-loved young mother, but it became the catalyst for her friends and family to help others.

Words Victoria Carey Photography Pip Farquharson



Louise's sisters Simone Short and Jacqui Cotton. **Opposite page** The friends who formed the Gidget Foundation gather at The Barn at Kitchwin Hills to reflect on what they have achieved.





A SOFT CHALKY DUST settles on the sun-bleached grass on the verges and storm clouds scurry across the sky, threatening to rain. The road winds like a ribbon through the valley and I catch tantalising glimpses of houses discreetly set back from the road, most hidden by giant stands of grey box and ironbark trees. A dark brown Thoroughbred mare standing near a gate lifts her head and looks at me inquisitively as I drive slowly by.

It's a place famed for the quality of its horses, raised on the pastures fed by limestone deposits higher up in the hills. Chances are probably greater here than anywhere else in Australia that the mare I have just passed will foal a Group 1 race winner next spring.

But that's not the reason for my visit. I'm here to meet with a very special group of friends who decided, when faced with a tragedy 22 years ago, to do something to make a difference. And what a difference they have made.

I need to say here that this story has special significance to me. I first remember hearing about Louise 'Gidget' Blacker from a mutual friend. There was nothing unusual about that, as we

all worked in the publishing industry and we were at that stage of life when many of us were pregnant or had young children at home. But I will never forget the shock in June 2001 of hearing of Louise's death as a result of postnatal depression, and my friend's deep sadness at the news. It bought home to me how insidious this disease is and how little we knew, back then, about how to treat it.

I later went on to edit the magazine where Louise had worked as an advertising sales manager. When I read this part of a speech her mother Sue gave about her daughter at a Gidget Foundation lunch, I had to smile — and also wish that I had had the opportunity to work alongside her. "She loved Easter Show time when all the country ladies who advertised in the magazine came to town. Some of them told me that one of the reasons they came to the Sydney show was because they loved spending time with Louise, as she was such fun to be with, and a bit naughty."

At Louise's funeral, her friends and family started to talk about what they could do in her memory. "I was given the task by a group of our friends of finding an appropriate charity to >

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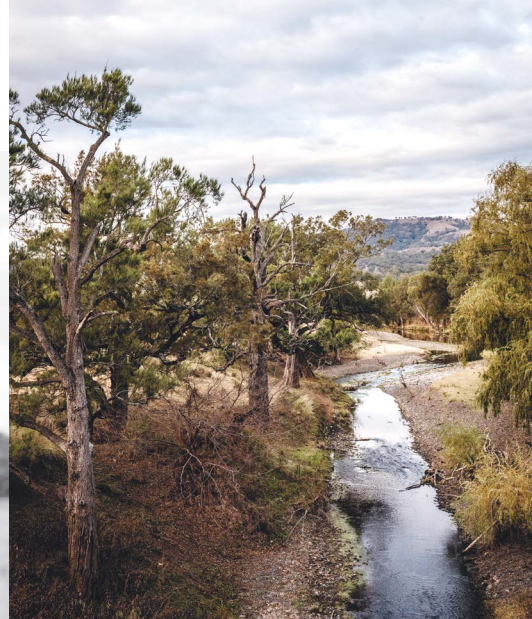


#### COMING TOGETHER

This page, clockwise from above The Gidget Foundation founders gather around the firepit at The Barn; Louise's youngest sister Simone with friends Libby Bowditch and Lou Hunter; Alexandra Berthold and Lou with a Kitchwin Hills broodmare; Jarrod and Libby Bowditch recently renovated The Barn; mares grazing in the paddock next to the house. **Opposite page** Kitchwin Hills is a blend of flat, undulating and hill country, providing perfect conditions for breeding some of the best Thoroughbred racehorses in the world.







#### HOME Paddock

This page, from top left Jarrod, who is also a non-executive director of the Gidget Foundation's board, leading one of the broodmares; in his happy place; limestone deposits in the hills ensure the water is rich in calcite; Alexandra, herself now a mother of four, was one of Gidget's closest friends, after meeting as teenagers; some of the racing memorabilia at The Barn; tucked away in a tranquil corner of the property, The Barn is a place of peace; rugs in the yearling preparation stables at Kitchwin Hills. Opposite page The property has separate rearing and breeding farms.



make a donation, and I was shocked when I couldn't find one," Libby Bowditch tells me in the kitchen of The Barn, the house on Thoroughbred stud Kitchwin Hills near Scone in the Upper Hunter Valley of New South Wales, where those same friends have gathered today. Libby's discovery was to prove pivotal, a moment that laid the cornerstone of the Gidget Foundation.

Named after a nickname Jarrod, Libby's husband, had given Louise many years ago because she reminded him of Sally Field's character in the 1960s American sitcom, the foundation has gone on to develop world-leading specialised perinatal care. Then in November last year came news of a landmark \$26.2 million investment by the Australian Government, which means 12 new perinatal mental health centres can be rolled out around the country.

The Gidget founders — Jarrod and Libby, Louise's sisters Simone Short and Jacqui Cotton, and her friends Stephanie Hughes, Alexandra Berthold, Kim Bouret and Lou Hunter — have achieved far more than they could have ever imagined on that sad winter's day more than 20 years ago.

It's amazing what the power of friendship can do. **B**  
For more information about Gidget Foundation Australia and where Gidget Houses are located in regional areas, visit [gidgetfoundation.org.au](http://gidgetfoundation.org.au)

#### HELP IS AT HAND

- Perinatal depression and anxiety (PNDA) affects almost 100,000 expectant and new parents in Australia each year.
- Maternal suicide is a leading cause of death among expectant and new mothers.
- Depression affects up to one in 10 women during pregnancy. In the first year after birth, it affects up to one in five women.
- Gidget House provides free individual psychological counselling sessions delivered face-to-face at various locations in New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria.
- Start Talking, a telehealth program run by the Gidget Foundation, is a national service providing free psychological counselling services for expectant and new parents delivered via a video call service.
- Gidget's Emotional Wellbeing Screening Program promotes the early detection of PNDA through a preadmission appointment with a Gidget midwife.
- 60,890 appointments have been delivered since the Foundation started.

"I was given the task of finding an appropriate charity to make a donation, and I WAS SHOCKED when I couldn't find one," says Libby Bowditch.

