

Turning tragedy into triumph

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DUNCAN and LYN McPherson with their children Hamish, Tess and Thomas

"Tragedy often prepares ordinary people for an extraordinary destiny..."

LIKE most people, Duncan McPherson was happy within his own slice of world – a successful business, three great kids and a beautiful wife.

McPherson had a nice ordinary life until tragedy struck on March 8, 2010 when his wife, Lyn, lost her battle to ovarian cancer.

All of a sudden McPherson's existence was thrown out of balance and into a certain degree of turmoil.

Sure, he had good friends and family around him, but the pain McPherson was fighting inside, especially when he was home alone, was taking its toll.

"When Lyn passed away I went from carer to losing my life partner and living a very silent existence," McPherson explained. "I found it extremely difficult to find people to communicate it all with.

"Looking after our kids came first, but I struggled. After losing a life partner, the men get left behind and the support process isn't there."

That ignited part of McPherson's transformation from ordinary to extraordinary.

Realising a void needed to be filled, McPherson contacted the Women's Cancer Foundation – Ovarian Institute and offered his service as a counsellor for men.

"Drawing on my own experience, I wanted to assist men with the grieving process," McPherson said. "I would be their 'cold call' so they could have someone to talk to

who fully understood what they were dealing with.

"I've been that cold call for quite a few men, with some even calling back after a period of time to tell me how much it helped."

Along with helping men during the aftermath of tragedy, McPherson became active in the initial process involved with ovarian cancer.

McPherson's focus is primarily based on the dire need for better awareness, services and early detection.

Again, it was McPherson's own experiences with Lyn which are catalyst for his passion.

"Lyn was diagnosed on New Year's Eve 2008 after noticing the first symptoms six months before," McPherson recalled.

"She had what we now know are typical ovarian cancer markers such as bloating and sore stomach, and given her profession as a nurse and midwife, she had a feeling it was something serious and was becoming more frustrated as it got worse.

"When she got that diagnosis we got some fish and chips, a bottle of wine, sat down and said 'let's work it out' as we knew she was in a fair bit of trouble.

"She had major operations, blood transfusions, chemo and radiation, but lost her battle after 15 months.

"During that whole time she never complained a day...she was gracious the whole time and worried more about those around her.

"Sadly, the mortality rate among women diagnosed with ovarian cancer is so high, it is a silent killer, which is why I am so heavily involved, particularly in fundraising."

McPherson's tireless work – which saw him named among 2014 Australia Day Honours – stems from Lyn's original effort and wishes.



NATALEE EMERY scoring with Pushkin for Tasmania's first 'Teal Pants' win – Photo Stacey Lear

Despite her own failing health, Lyn began fundraising as a way of increasing research and nurses to support those facing the same adversity.

"Receiving the Australia Day Honours was overpowering and terrible at the same time," McPherson declared. "I didn't, and don't do it, for awards, it is all about my wife's wishes.

"If we can assist in fundraising research to find an early detection device it would be a terrific result in improving the survival rate, which is minimal at this point."

Long before Lyn's passing, McPherson was a passionate harness racing participant – a purist with a devotion to trotters, which he shares with well-known industry supporter Michael Taranto.

Aware of McPherson's two loves, Harness Racing Victoria suggested a heart-warming way of combining the pair in the name of charity.



EMMA HAMBLIN and Jivin Cullen provided the first 'Teal Pants' win of 2017

"I got a phone call asking if I would be okay with the new race series for trotting mares being named after my wife and the Lyn McPherson Breed For Speed was launched," McPherson said. "Naturally I said 'yes' as I was touched right in the heart and so honoured.

"It was then the job of Michael and I to tie the ovarian cancer fundraising to the series."

Hence, the Teal Pants program was born, with reinswomen in Victoria earning a set amount for the cause with every win.



South Australia's DANI HILL and personal 'Teal Paints' sponsor Gordon Carter proudly display their teal colours

Growing in stature to also include New South Wales, the Teal Pants 'drive' has gone national this season thanks to help from Harness Racing Australia, with every reinswomen in Australia raising money with each triumph between February 1 and March 11 – Lyn McPherson Breed For Speed night at Melton.

"To have each state embracing the Teal Pants concept is amazing," McPherson said. "It goes further than just raising money, which is needed to research and care, it lifts the awareness of ovarian cancer as well.

"During the last week or so we've been hearing and seeing a lot about AFL's Women's League, and even the women's 20/20 cricket, but the women of harness racing have been leading the way in sport for a long time.

"Thanks to all the reinswomen jumping on board with the help of administrators, my wife's wish is continuing to come true."

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