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COLLECTIVE

ISSUE 3

THE
MAN
BEHIND
TED

EWAN
MCGREGOR

WHAT MAKES
HIS HEART
BEAT FASTER?

25
WAYS TO
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GRASSROOTS
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WORKING
FOR THE
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IN HER EARLY '20S, it appeared Cathie Reid had it all. Hailing from the Latrobe Valley in Gippsland, she was studying pharmacy at Melbourne University, then returning home each weekend to work at her beloved local pharmacy, a job she'd had since a teenager. The end goal was that one day she'd end up junior partner and possibly expand the business. She also had a long-term boyfriend (her high-school sweetheart) who supported all her endeavours.

By the age of 27, however, Cathie's life had come crashing down. The year was 1996 and after being married to the so-called love of her life for only 12 months, the marriage was over.

"My whole world turned around when I found out he was having an affair. Everything was very traumatic," she recalls. "I lost 15 kilograms in three weeks. Everything I thought that was my plan was no longer there."

In need of a break, Cathie took off to Fiji for a pharmacy business conference because, "I could get a tax-free holiday and I wouldn't have to go on Club Med singles!" she laughs. "At the time I really did think I was a sad loser who was going to be single forever and live like a nun."

What she found there was something different altogether: a business opportunity.

Cathie was approached to be involved in a start-up aged care pharmacy business. She happily snapped up the chance with both hands. But it wasn't the only serendipitous moment. After accepting an invitation for a friend's 30th birthday, she ran into an old classmate from pharmaceutical college, Stuart Giles, literally on a foot path outside the restaurant.

"It was that real *Sliding Doors* moment when one life ceased and another life started," continues Cathie, "even though I was traumatised and damaged and not looking for any serious kind of relationship."

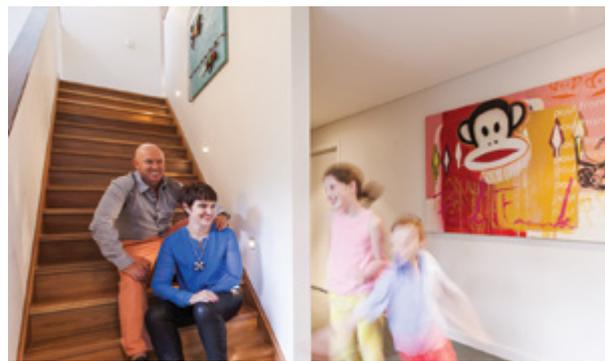
But again, that's exactly what she got. He proposed for the first time six weeks later ("at 4am after being out at the races for a friend's bucks party") and a few subsequent times after that. Eventually, Cathie accepted.

At the time, Stuart was working for a competing pharmaceutical business, which posed obvious problems for the couple. But instead of one person leaving their job for the other, they decided to take a more daring course of action, and become, as Cathie says fondly, "masters of our own creation". >

cathie reid MEDICINE WOMAN

AN AFTER-SCHOOL JOB *stacking nappies* as a PHARMACY ASSISTANT *put CATHIE REID on the path to a career in HEALTH CARE.* Now 43, Cathie together with her husband has built the APHS GROUP into one of the LARGEST suppliers of PHARMACEUTICAL SERVICES in the country, boasting an ANNUAL TURNOVER of more than AU\$300 MILLION.

WORDS: JESSICA MONTAGUE
INTERVIEW: LISA MESSENGER



Together they used what little savings they had and equity from Cathie's house to start their own company: the Active Care Pharmacy Group (ACPG).

"I was the face of the business in the aged-care industry and growing and recruiting [that arm of the company]. Meanwhile, Stuart was looking after the hospital side of it," she explains. "But then, at the end of the day we'd both go back into the pharmacy and build systems to allow us to deliver the services we'd sold to the customers. Everything literally had to be built from scratch."

Their hard work paid off. Within the first three months of the partnership they had purchased three pharmacies. And by 2002, they had merged with the Brisbane-based APHS Pharmacy Group as minority shareholders.

"At the time we had no idea, but after doing the Gallup StrengthsFinder test not long ago, we discovered Stuart and I had the perfect set of complementary skills for business partners," laughs Cathie. "We've always just clicked – Stuart is all about strategy and big-picture while I'm more the nuts-and-bolts planning person. At that point, things just naturally fell into place and into the pattern of what we were good at."

And for a few years that's how it stayed, until 2007 when Ramsay Healthcare decided not to renew its contract with APHS, instead opting to create their own internal pharmacy business – a move that would strip APHS of 60 per cent of its revenue. Add to that the fact that the remaining partners at APHS were looking to retire and the dynamic husband-and-wife team had a potential business disaster on their hands. But rather than crumble under the pressure, the pair made their toughest choice to date.

"There wasn't really any decision other than to proceed with the transaction to buy out [the remaining partners], and then go hell for leather with reinventing the business," says Cathie, philosophically. She adds: "Externally, people would view Stuart and I as having a big appetite for risk, but the fact is we were – and still are – looking for opportunities."

The move paid off, and by 2010 they owned APHS outright. The business was diversified into three separate arms: the core original pharmacy business (which is still the "powerhouse" of the company); a focus on national cancer care (which has expanded to become the Integrated Clinical Oncology Network); and the APHS Packaging manufacturing business, of which Cathie is now CEO. It is in this latter role that Cathie has become widely recognised, winning the National Commonwealth Bank

By 2012, the APHS Packaging business was producing 1.5 MILLION sachets weekly for 17,000 CONSUMERS and 220 PHARMACIES NATIONALLY (with the latter growing at a rate of 20 PER MONTH).

Business Owner Award category at the 2011 Telstra Business Women's Awards. This was largely due to her introduction to Australia of a Dutch-developed product (with Australia the first country to achieve medical device registration) known as the Medido Monitored Compliance Device. Designed for the ageing population, it's a web-based gadget that alerts a patient when their dose of medication is due and conversely advises their carer if it is missed. The core business is medication pre-packaged into sachets, so pharmacists save on packaging costs and it gives the patient confidence to manage their own medication.

By 2012, the APHS Packaging business was producing 1.5 million sachets weekly, for 17,000 consumers, and 220 pharmacies nationally (with the latter growing at a rate of

20 per month). Early 2012 also saw a significant investment in the company by one of Australia's leading pharmaceutical wholesaler and healthcare businesses, The Symbion Group. For the judges of the Telstra Business Women's Awards, it must have been a no-brainer, but ask Cathie about receiving this prestigious award and she is self-deprecating.

"More than anything, filling out the application [for the Awards] was the most meaningful part because it allowed me to reflect on what I had achieved," she explains. "When you're living day to day you don't see things in that light, so just taking ownership of what you've done makes you feel empowered. I don't think women tend to do this very well. We're always more likely to view ourselves as not having been the critical component of success."

Given that Cathie and Stuart have two children together (daughter Sasha, 11, and son Sam, almost nine), this is a healthy sentiment to be passing on. As is their never-ending passion for quality health care, capacity for hard work and innate ability to snoop out new ventures. In fact, this is what Cathie is interested in at the moment – in particular, the opportunity to fuse health care and technology in a more cohesive and user-friendly way.

"I think the ability for health care to collate, interpret and utilise information that patients have captured themselves in handheld devices is quite an interesting challenge," she muses. "The whole way that technology and social media is opening up health care in a way that's never been done before is fascinating. I'm not quite sure where it's going to go yet, but I want to be part of the solution."

And we bet she absolutely will be. ■