

Judith (Judi) Brown

“I believe in the power of Women to achieve amazing things”

To spend time with Judi is to feel the care, compassion, strength and resourcefulness that naturally comes from her. An extraordinary life that has made a genuine difference in maternal health supporting women, children and midwives across the world.

Judi was born in Brisbane, one of four children, to parents who took great pride in their children's achievements. Judi left school at the age of 15 years old, bored with the schooling system and the career options available to women at the time. An avid bookworm Judi loved to read, particularly the classics, which led to her really wanting to become a journalist; the stories, the words, people's ideas and travel all attracted her. However, this option required a university degree which was not an option for her at the time.

Early career

At 15 years of age Judi took a job as a receptionist for a local business but because Judi dreamed of a professional career and desperately wanted a pathway to university, when she turned 16yo, she commenced as a cadet nurse at the Royal Brisbane Hospital. Her role of a cadet nurse, one of only six positions in the entire organisation, was like a 'messenger girl' which allowed her to know many of the Staff and the layout of the hospital. This was the perfect grounding for Judi to successfully commence nursing training at 17.

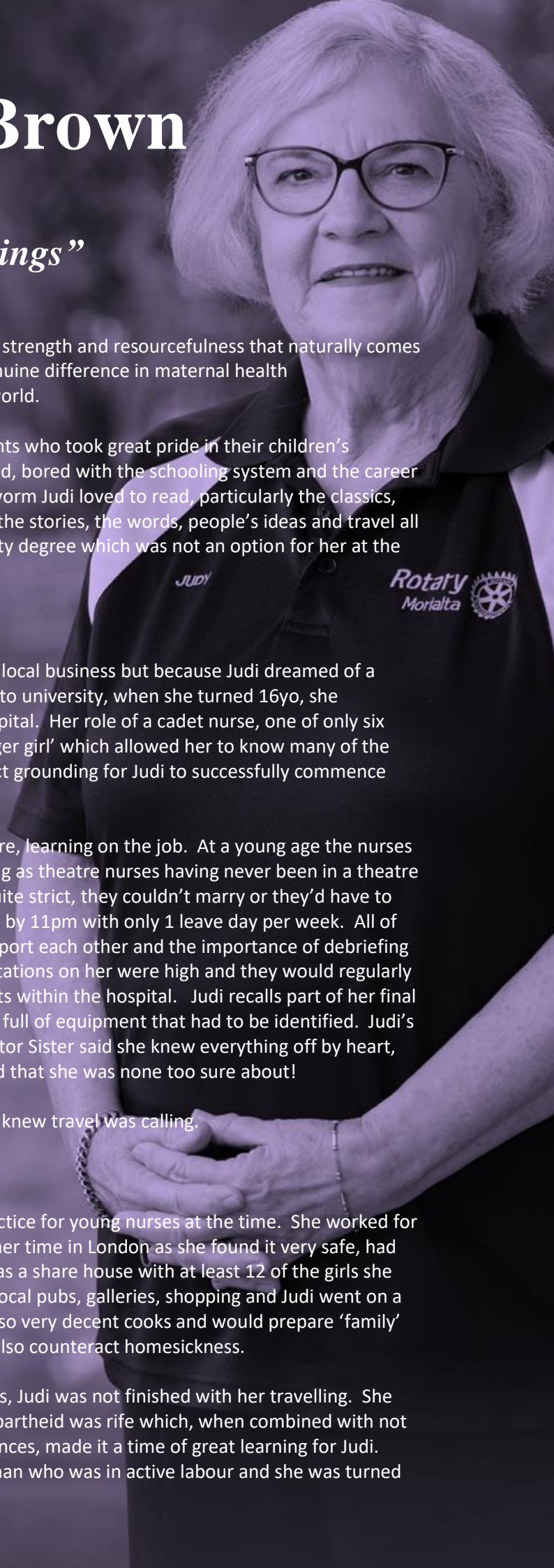
Nursing training meant Judi was straight into patient care, learning on the job. At a young age the nurses were given high levels of responsibility including working as theatre nurses having never been in a theatre before. They lived in the nurses' quarters which was quite strict, they couldn't marry or they'd have to leave, they had to sign out and sign in ensuring this was by 11pm with only 1 leave day per week. All of this meant that the nurses learnt resilience, how to support each other and the importance of debriefing to get through it. As the Staff knew Judi already, expectations on her were high and they would regularly quiz her on how she was going in her various placements within the hospital. Judi recalls part of her final 4th year exam was an oral examination with a large tray full of equipment that had to be identified. Judi's exam was stopped and she was marked 100% as the Tutor Sister said she knew everything off by heart, but truth be told there were items that Judi had spotted that she was none too sure about!

Judi finished her nursing training at 21 years of age and knew travel was calling.

Overseas

Judi moved overseas to London in 1969, a common practice for young nurses at the time. She worked for 2 years at the University College Hospital. She adored her time in London as she found it very safe, had the best social life as the accommodation she stayed was a share house with at least 12 of the girls she had nursed with, coming and going. They would go to local pubs, galleries, shopping and Judi went on a camping tour around Europe. Some of the girls were also very decent cooks and would prepare 'family' meals which was a great way to build close bonds and also counteract homesickness.

Whilst many of the girls returned home after the 2 years, Judi was not finished with her travelling. She moved to Johannesburg, South Africa at a time when apartheid was rife which, when combined with not speaking Afrikaans and other significant cultural differences, made it a time of great learning for Judi. One such recollection was of a black South African woman who was in active labour and she was turned



away from the whites only hospital Judi was working at, she saw the woman at the bus stop waiting to get home. This, along with other experiences would go on to influence her future midwifery practice especially maternal health care and social justice.

Family

Returning to Brisbane in 1972 Judi returned to the Royal Brisbane Hospital and it was around this time that Judi met her future husband Geoff, a veterinary student, at a friend's party and they married in 1973. They had the most interesting adventures together in Ireland where Geoff was practicing his veterinary science by vaccinating and testing cattle with Judi to assist.

They settled in Adelaide and went on to have their 3 children, 2 boys and a girl. They also established the Newton Veterinary Clinic in 2011, a successful local business and service, which they sold in 2022.

Midwifery

When her children were all aged under 5 Judi returned to study midwifery and neonatology which would take her career in the most extraordinary direction. She studied at the Queen Victoria hospital in Adelaide which led to a long, distinguished midwifery career.

Judi finally got to university and holds two Graduate Diplomas and a Masters of Education (HRD), University of South Australia. She is a Distinguished Fellow and a Life member of the Australian College of Midwives (ACM). She has held senior positions in SA including Assistant Director of Nursing (Education) at the Women's and Children's Hospital and CEO/Registrar, Nurses Board of South Australia to name just two.

Internationally she has worked in the United Kingdom, South Africa, Netherlands, Poland and Middle East countries. As Director of Nursing and Midwifery development for the Dubai Health authority (2006-2009), she established the first midwifery training program and midwifery professional association in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). She has worked as technical consultant to the World Health Organisation (WHO) in Geneva, Thailand, India, Iran and for USAID in Afghanistan. She has led midwifery regulatory delegations to Spain and Canada. Judi was a Regional Technical Advisor (Midwifery) to the United Nations Population Fund Agency (UNFPA) in Cairo and facilitated education workshops in Dubai, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Qatar and Morocco. She was also for 3yrs, the volunteer Director of the International Confederation of Midwives, The Hague, Netherlands, the global professional association for midwives, with membership of 120 countries.

Volunteering

Judi has dedicated her time to projects she is passionate about. One of the those was as the inaugural Chair of White Ribbon Alliance for Safe Motherhood based in Washington DC. Judi contacted the group via email and interestingly they didn't have a midwife involved in their advocacy work so Judi volunteered her time to support this important initiative and organisation, which in time grew to be a global entity.

From retirement in 2017, Judi is volunteering her time to the Rotary Health SA Indigenous student's health scholarships initiative and is a Board member of the Leahurst Nurses Foundation, which provides financial support and scholarships to nursing and midwifery students in SA.

In 2018, as a member of the Rotary Club of Mordialta, Judi initiated a Rotary midwifery leadership *buddy* project in Papua New Guinea (PNG). The project, supported by individual rotary clubs, rotary district and global funding, is currently in Stage 2, which will see a total of 50 PNG midwives benefit from the program.

“Healthy women, healthy children, healthy nation.”

