

**The MY STORY series is all about you – our very own readers! In their own words, our readers share stories of challenges, adversity and kicking butt!**

*To submit your own MY STORY, email [penny@liftmagazine.com.au](mailto:penny@liftmagazine.com.au)*

In this issue, single mum to three teenage sons, *Jennifer Johnston* looks back at the time she took on an extensive home renovation project that meant demolishing one third of her house. We're still not sure if she's crazy or a genius – you decide!

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## MY STORY: JENNIFER JOHNSTON

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**Last year I took on an extensive home renovation project. Not happy with remodelling my kitchen and bathroom, my project involved demolishing one-third of my house, raising and shifting it on the block of land to create a spare parcel of land to sell at a later stage. The project was 18 months in duration. Not an easy achievement for a single female in the traditionally male dominated building industry. Throughout the venture, I wore many hats. At any one time, I was the Project Manager, Decision Maker, Designer, Financial Planner and Visionary. Friends and family were in awe of my tenacity to tackle such a project. But I'm one for a challenge.**

### **SO WHY DID I DO IT?**

A single mum for two years, it was time to reassess my living arrangements. The marital home, mine via the divorce settlement, had become a constant reminder of a past I wanted to leave behind. My house, on a decent sized suburban block is close to

Brisbane's CBD, but was too big for my needs. I have three sons who live with me part-time. You'd think having three "young men" would be a help with the mowing and garden work. "In my dreams!" My teenagers are challenged to keep their rooms tidy, let alone help me maintain the garden.

I was working part-time in an office admin role that provided a regular, but lowly paid income. I was also trying to establish myself as a freelance writer which meant an irregular income. I considered downsizing homes. My check list included a fresh start, a lower maintenance home designed around my needs and likes. But searching the market to find the right house in a neighbourhood I liked, combined with the costs of selling pushed the downsizing idea beyond my budget. During the search for a new house, I viewed properties where a large block of land was split, the original house renovated and a new house built on the second block. It started me thinking, if property developers could do this and make a reasonable profit – why couldn't I?



Jennifer and her three sons now have a stunning sanctuary that includes a retreat for Mum upstairs – bliss!

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(inset) Home Reno: Before. Main: During.



Home Reno: After.



## **MY LIGHT BULB MOMENT**

I'd previously completed a few renovations, but those projects were in conjunction with my then husband and nothing on this scale. My block of land was large enough to split into two. Selling the spare block should offset the renovation costs which was a major motivator! Council said I couldn't demolish my entire house as parts of it were built prior to 1946. But the post-1946 components could be demolished with clever architectural input!

I met a town planner and architect to determine the feasibility of my project. When council finally gave the green light, 12 months of planning began. Many friends questioned my sanity to take on such a project - solo. But I'm a determined individual - an Aries trait.

Finding a builder proved challenging. But 14 different builder's site visits and three months later, I locked in a builder I felt I could trust. The project commenced in March 2016, with me packing up and de-cluttering 16 years of accumulated "stuff" to move into a rental property.

Knowing the project would be time consuming, I resigned from my office job to

be the full-time project manager. For the next six months, I climbed rickety ladders to check progress on-site, answered the seemingly endless list of questions, sourced tiles, timber flooring, fixtures and lived through my eldest finishing Grade 12 and my twins starting their first year at middle school.

In late September 2016, my new house was ready. Designed around my current lifestyle and my future as an empty nester my home was exactly as I had imagined. The boy's bedrooms and media room are downstairs with mum's retreat upstairs – bliss.

## **BELIEVE IN YOURSELF**

When you're flying solo, it's essential to possess a steely inner conviction about yourself - that you can achieve whatever you put your mind to. Never question your ability. I proved my doubters wrong. Apart from the exterior paint, the project came in at my pre-determined budget. I have the satisfaction knowing the project will (almost) pay for itself when I sell the subdivided land. Friends and my builder suggest I should consider building a house on the spare block, to control the look and proximity of the house. Right now, I don't wish to go down that path again – but I never say never!