

Past Student Story

Kylie King (1993)

Kylie's Journey



When I look back on my time at St George High School (1989–1993), I can't say I was the most academic student. Subjects like maths and science weren't really my thing, but I showed up every day for one reason—sport. Netball was my passion, and I excelled at it to the point where I even considered repeating Year 12 just to continue playing at rep level.

I was, however accepted into the South Queensland Institute of TAFE, where I studied an Associate Diploma in Photography—combining my love for the arts and creativity. Moving to Toowoomba, I shared a house with fellow St George High graduate Melissa Pohlner. While studying, I continued playing netball, earning a spot in the Toowoomba and District Netball Club's representative team and making it to the

Toowoomba All Stars and also made the State League team competing in Brisbane. But my journey was cut short by a serious injury. Handing over my uniform was devastating. I remember they even took my socks ! But when one door closes, another opens.

Despite my netball dreams ending, my love for horses remained. Somehow, I managed to move them from St George to Toowoomba, making the long drive to them twice (sometimes three times) a day. After completing my photography course, I worked in the industry for several years before transferring to Melbourne—despite never having been there before. To me, Melbourne was the entertainment capital of Australia, and that was where I wanted to be.

I arrived with my horse float full of furniture but no horses! They had to wait back in Toowoomba for me. With no place to live, I moved from motel to motel with my little dog Kayla, until I finally secured a rental. A friend invited me to play netball again, which helped me reconnect socially. While chatting, I mentioned how much I missed my horses, and she introduced me to someone looking for a flatmate—on a property with stables. Within a week, I had moved in, and my horses were on their way from Toowoomba. I was living my dream—horses, netball, and even performing in a band.

From photography, I briefly transitioned into real estate photography, where I met a flight attendant who encouraged me to apply for the airlines. I got accepted and spent years traveling across Australia, earning a great living while still performing with my band on weekends and competing my horses. Life was good. And if there's such a thing as icing on the cake, I had met the love of my life. I had traveled from St George to Melbourne thinking I needed to escape country boys—only to marry the biggest country boy imaginable. We built a life together, and

today, we have three incredible children, Jack 18, Honor 16 and Hilton 13. We live in a beautiful home on 100 acres on the outskirts of Melbourne.

A New Path Begins

About five years ago, my life took an unexpected turn. It started with small things—changes in my netball game, a decline in my writing, a limp when I walked. At first, I ignored them, but soon, people started noticing. Then COVID hit, and while many struggled with lockdowns, I welcomed the isolation. It meant I didn't have to explain what was happening to me. But my horse-riding instructor saw what I was trying to hide. She sat me down and urged me to see a doctor, believing I had a neurological condition.

I started googling my symptoms, and one answer kept appearing—early-onset Parkinson's disease. I kept rewording my searches, hoping for a different result, but it was always the same. I promised my instructor I'd see a doctor. The GP referred me to a neurologist, but COVID delays meant waiting three months for an urgent appointment. A nurse friend stepped in and said, "Pack your bags, I'm taking you to the hospital. You need answers now."

Within an hour of arriving, I had my diagnosis: **early-onset Parkinson's disease**. "It won't kill you," the neurologist said, "but it will make life challenging." My response? **"Okay, well, I'm going to ride Para."**

He had no idea what I meant, but I did. Through my children's Pony Club, I had met a young woman with cerebral palsy who competed in Para-equestrian events at an international level. I had always admired her resilience and, in a strange way, had wished I had something that would allow me to compete in that space. Now, my wish had come true—just not in the way I expected. Be careful what you wish for!

I just needed a horse quality enough. Then, I call it serendipity, Oscar (Belaire Cannavaro) came into my life. He had just retired from Grand Prix level and was to make the perfect Horse for Para. And from there we entered the world of Para-equestrian. We achieved incredible milestones—securing a **scholarship with the Victorian Institute of Sport**, being named a **High-Performance Team member for the Australian Institute of Sport**, and achieving a **world ranking of 21**, with my goal for 2025 set on breaking it into the top 10. In 2023, Oscar and I won the **Australian Grade IV Para Championships and become National Champions** and were **longlisted for the Paris 2024 Paralympics**.

But Oscar was 22 years old, and I knew I couldn't ask him to endure international travel and competition at that level. Even though I knew he was up for the challenge. It was time to find my next partner.

Chasing the Olympic Dream

In early 2024, I traveled to the Netherlands to find my new horse, as I had exhausted every option here in Australia, eventually choosing **Ivan Carlos**—a stunning black gelding. Rather than flying him to Australia and back again for Paris, I made the bold decision to **relocate to Europe** and train there. My family supported me, and the plan was set.

Then life intervened. My dad fell critically ill, and I refused to leave until he was out of his coma and stable. When he woke, he told me, **“You have to go. You have to do this.”** So I did.

I arrived in England 2 months later than planned ready to train—only to receive devastating news: **Ivan was severely lame.** No one knew how it happened, but it meant six weeks of complete box rest, rehab and lost time. I had already lost so much time. Despite everything, I was determined to ride. With just one week of walking-only training, we entered our first competition in Europe. We performed **beyond expectation for the time we had had together**, but with too little time left to qualify for Paris.

Fighting for a Cure

With my Parkinson’s progressing, I had to step away from my job of Office Manager for our Company and was unable to go back to flying. But I wasn’t about to sit still and do nothing. Instead, I threw myself into **fundraising for the Shake It Up Foundation**, an Australian Parkinson’s disease charity dedicated to finding a cure. This is more than just a cause for me—it’s my mission. One of my proudest initiatives is the Annual Shake it Up round - An event I am working tirelessly to establish as a Nationally recognised event across AFL, NRL and Netball Leagues. By 2030, I want to see this round on the official calendar - a time where every club, every team and every fan unites to raise awareness and funds for Parkinson’s research.

Right now, I’m working with **St George Rugby League** club to organise a Shake it Up round **in the name of John Barrett, who not only is an amazing human in his own right, He’s also done amazing things for town and those in it.** My hope is that the entire St George community gets behind this event—because together, we can make a difference in the fight against this disease. In late 2024, I underwent Deep Brain Stimulation Surgery (DBS) to help minimise the symptoms of my Parkinson’s, which had become progressively worse to a debilitating point. I have documented my entire journey on Instagram (@kyliechristianofficial) in the hope that it helps answer questions about Parkinson’s, DBS or anything else related to the disease. If I can inspire at least one person to chase their dreams despite their challenges no matter what they are, and never give up then it was all worth it.

Looking Ahead to LA 2028

We may have missed Paris, but my journey is far from over. I have proven my determination, resilience, and will to win. My focus is now set on **Los Angeles 2028.** I am continuing to train, compete, and push towards representing Australia on the world stage in LA.

Meanwhile, Oscar has stepped back from international competition, but he isn’t fully retired. My daughter now rides him, learning the high-level movements, and together, they’re excelling. I hope to enter a few more competitions with him here in Australia before finally taking the saddle off for good and letting him enjoy the parks of retirement.

Life doesn’t always go the way we plan, but sometimes, the unexpected path leads to something even greater than we ever imagined. If you embrace the journey, you might just find yourself exactly where you were meant to be.

I credit St George High School for shaping the determination and grit that have carried me through the toughest years of my life. It prepared me well.

Thank you St George High.