

# Brenda's making an Art form of KOSCIUSZKO SWEEPSTAKES

**W**hile Brenda has worked in TABs on the south coast for the past 17 years it was her husband Warren who was an enthusiastic punter and drew her into racing.

He was part of the Kosciuszko ride with Brenda in 2019 as one of the Shellharbour Punter's Club syndicate which won the \$1.3 million race with Handle The Truth but this time around it was a family affair and a real pick up after a difficult past couple of years.

A total of 21 members of the family cheered when Tommy Berry drove Art Cadeau across the line in front at Royal Randwick, those that were on track felt like rock stars with the atmosphere, while Brenda's immediate thought about was Warren and the chance to honour him.

"I like to cruise a lot, that's what my husband and I liked to do, and the first thing I'm going to do is take his ashes over to Fiji and scatter them in the South Pacific," she said.

"That's what he wanted. Then my friends said I'll be able to get a Winnebago and come camping with them. That's another option but I'll worry about Warren's wishes first and put the rest in the bank and see what comes up."

Brenda has five children and 16 grandchildren and their shares will go a long way to providing head starts on things like buying a first home, renovations to houses, weddings and many other life goals that may have been out of reach.

It seems their judgment was quite shrewd in getting involved this year – after Brenda and Warren got "a nice little windfall" from the 2019 win only her sister was keen to try her luck a year later.

But for her third attempt she very much wanted it to be a family venture, particularly given the difficulties raised by the pandemic, and family members pitched in \$20 each.

"I'm tickled for the kids. It's helping quite a few family members out to get their heads above water," Brenda said.

"We started up a punters club for all our regular members at the Shellharbour TAB. We were lucky enough to get a horse that year but there were 45 of us

**IT'S SO FITTING THAT RACING HAS PROVIDED THE MEANS FOR BRENDA GENT TO BE ABLE TO MAKE A TRIP TO THE SOUTH PACIFIC, AFTER INTERNATIONAL BORDERS OPEN, TO FULFIL HER LATE HUSBAND'S WISHES THAT HIS ASHES BE SCATTERED THERE**

WORDS: RAY HICKSON  
PICTURES: BRADLEY PHOTOGRAPHERS

in that one.

"Warren was in that one. I decided this year to make it a family thing."

It's been more than 18 months since Warren was taken by a rare cancer.

When he was finally diagnosed the specialist gave him six months to live, he died just on 12 months after that prognosis and the ordeal took its toll on Brenda.

"He was a beautiful man. He's always been a punter, he was one of those kids that

used to nick off from school and go to the dog track or the horse racing track," she said

"He never punted big, but he always had a certain way, I think he got it off his mum because she was a punter too.

"If someone tells me a tip I might have a couple of dollars each way, I've never been a big punter. "When he was going through chemo I'd write his bets out and toddle off to a TAB to put them on so he didn't miss out."

Brenda started working for Christine Tolhurst, who runs the Shellharbour TAB, after recovering from an accident which severed her medial nerve and ligaments in her right hand and damaged the third and fifth vertebrae in her back.

And it's the Shellharbour connection that led her to select Art Cadeau as her runner when she found out she was the winning ticket holder from Warilla.

She called Albert Tory, who was the public face of the 2019 winning syndicate, for a suggestion and he quickly narrowed it down to two horses – as it turned out those two horses would fight out the finish of The Kosciuszko some five weeks later.

"I watched the draw and as soon as I saw Warilla come up I checked it and it was us. I was straight away on the phone to Albert," she said.

"He said it's a toss-up between Art Cadeau and Handle the Truth. I rang Terry Robinson but he had another syndicate wanting the horse and they'd rung first.

"They were supposed to be getting back to Terry by 4.30pm but they hadn't gone back to him and Terry said 'if you want him he's yours'.

"I followed the horse closely from then. Terry sent me a link when he trialled at Hawkesbury and we watched it.



*A jubilant Tommy Berry as Art Cadeau takes out The Kosciuszko at Royal Randwick*

"They kept in contact with me the whole time, even the day before he raced he sent a clipping of Terry in this little rowboat rowing him out in the river taking the horse for a swim.

"Tommy Berry sent me little things as well which was really good of him. The whole concept I think it's just great, if anyone doesn't give it a go, they're silly."

Brenda was clearly shaken at the podium when the Kosciuszko trophy was presented post-race.

It's understandable. She wasn't able to be on course back in 2019 to, ironically, celebrate Handle the Truth with the rest of punters' club – she was working behind the counter back at the TAB.

"My fascinator flew off my head as I was jumping up and down screaming, I could barely talk all the way home," she said.

"It was amazing, I've never heard noise like it before. If we went to the races it was only down here at Kembla and you didn't hear anything. As soon as Tommy stood up in the saddle and the cheer went out it was just magical." **RNSW**

**RIGHT:** An overwhelmed Brenda Gent (right) celebrates with Monique Robinson, wife of trainer Terry Robinson

