

PROPERTY

The crash, the rort, the resort: How Lorna overcame the odds



Developer of Lowanna Beach Resort at Buddina Lorna Willis, an inspirational woman who has had her share of trials and tribulations.



MATTY HOLDSWORTH

6th Jun 2021 12:00 PM

Lorna Willis is fast approaching retirement age but she's doing anything but slowing down.

She's a grandmother, business woman and property power player who has been the driving force behind a trio of major projects.

But the past decade or so hasn't all been smooth sailing for the Buderim resident.

The Global Financial Crisis, a car crash which should have killed her and being robbed of almost \$2 million have proved major challenges.

But they've all helped build a character who is forging a legacy from her hillside home.

Here is the story of how she rose from the ashes.

2010: The car crash

Ms Willis was involved in a car crash so horrific her daughters were called to hospital and told to prepare their last goodbyes.

She was the solo occupant driving on a highway in Victoria.

Ms Willis remembers little of the day except for a "gross" pain in her chest where she lost control of the vehicle.

She careened off the highway at speed and straight into a tree.



Coast developer Lorna Willis lost \$1.8m to a financial scammer in 2011.

"The pain was one of those things that took my attention and I ran off the road," she said.

"I had to be flown to hospital and I nearly died."

Her daughters Shae, Davia, Coby and Tarryn received a terrible phone call.

"My eldest was living in England at the time and she had to fly over not knowing whether I'd make it," Ms Willis said.

"It was horrific."

She said she had injuries from her top to her toes.

It took 12 months of rehabilitation to recuperate.

While she didn't know it at the time, Ms Willis said the crash set her on course for later success.

2011: The financial rort

Ms Willis misplaced her trust into the wrong hands while she was recovering from the crash.

As a result she had more than \$1.8 million swindled of her.

Ms Willis said her funds would "go missing" or were put into bad investments.



Coast developer Lorna Willis survived a horrific car crash in 2010. She said her efforts to fight it were futile.

"In the end it wore me down," she said.

"I wasn't vulnerable or dumb and it happened to some intelligent people not just me."

Even reporting it to the Australia Securities and Investment Commission was to no avail.

"So I had to concede," she said

Ms Willis said goodbye to the money but gained a valuable life lesson.

2013: The sea change

Ms Willis moved to the Sunshine Coast on advice from friends in 2013.

She didn't look back and now her home is the "promised land".

When she first arrived on the Coast, Ms Willis set about helping high-profile developers Mark Kratzmann and her "mentor" Don Moffatt.

Then she called upon her three-decades of property experience in establishing Wow Property Group.

It's a group of property developers who aim to deliver commercial and residential opportunities on the Coast and surrounds.

She runs it in tandem with Leon Weber, Peter Moriarty and Mr Moffatt.

Nestled in the hills of Buderim with ocean views, Facetime chats with her four daughters and nine grandchildren are mixed in with motorbikes, jetskis and horse riding.

"I love it here. This place is paradise," she said.

2019-now: Her fifth baby

Ms Willis was behind the luxury waterfront apartment The Ivy at Picnic Point and the 65-subdivision Tulipwood Estate at Nambour.

Now it's Buddina's turn.

Construction is set to start later this year on Wow Property Group's transformative high-rise at Buddina to be completed by 2023.

Ms Willis said the 112-unit Lowanna Beach Resort development would be her baby.



WOW Property Group recently released apartments at the Lowanna Beach Resort to the market.

It's also the region's first beach resort in 15 years.

"I am fully focused on this project and delivering that one product, nothing else, it's my baby," she said.

"It's bigger than the Maroochydore town hall and has taken a lot of courage and strength to deliver.

"We started it two and a half years ago and it will be a six-year journey by the end of it."

Ms Willis lives alone and afar from her family but she said she was happy and excited for the future.

"I count my blessing every day," she said.

"I have an awesome team around me and a vision and end goal. We can build a significant and wonderful legacy."