

## To the younger version of me,

I can still remember it now; you've got a beautiful vision of how you'll enter the journey into motherhood. You've got it all planned out, as you do with everything. You're excited to get married and have babies with the love of your life. You both talk about what it's going to be like to have kids and what you want in pregnancy and in life as a family. Your thoughts and visions are painted with so much colour, they're so innocent, but why wouldn't they be? You're not aware of how much life will change, you're living in ignorant bliss that everything you hope for is going to turn out the way it should. **I wish I could protect you from it all and tell you that every wish comes true, but it doesn't.**



You finally experience pregnancy after years of infertility only for it to be ripped away when you give birth to your son at a premature age that he didn't have a chance to survive at. He's beautiful and you name him Lennox. There are no words to describe the pain you feel, it's crippling and so lonely despite the support that surrounds you. You fight with every being in your body for Lennox to be honoured and remembered.

You muster up the courage and strength to try IVF again which is successful and you enter your second chapter of motherhood crippled with fear. You relive the same trauma and give birth prematurely to your 26 week old baby girl. She's just as beautiful as Lennox and you name her Waverly. For 4 months you endure life between the NICU and Special Care Nursery. After 4 long months you finally get to take Waverly home. You've been waiting for this moment for so long and while you should be basking in the celebration of what you've all survived, you're slowly being pulled under by the viciousness of post partum anxiety and depression.

Bringing Waverly home is a miracle after all she survived. You're so proud of her and she is your biggest inspiration in life, she still is mine to this day. You wear a smile on your face in front of others but crumble in the moments you're alone. Intrusive thoughts play in your mind like movies, they're uncomfortable and confronting. You can't shake the sterile habits you've picked up from NICU and you start showering 5 times a day because you're terrified of germs. Leaving the house becomes hard. You're trying to protect your immune compromised baby and it consumes you.

**It's a struggle to adjust to life outside of the NICU and you know that you need help.** I am so grateful that you do get help and ask for a referral to Gidget Foundation Australia.

**Gidget Foundation Australia becomes such an important role in your life, a saviour.** Your clinician is everything you could have hoped for. She hears you, she doesn't tell you to try to accept what happens and move forward. She holds space for you while you begin to process the enormity of what you've all been through and in turn you feel safe and supported.

The support you needed was to be heard and to have a space where you could pour your heart out and have someone listen without feeling like they had to fix you or search for positives in such awful situations.

Overtime your panic attacks lessen, they're not multiple times a day and gradually you can't recall how long it's been since you've had one. You learn coping habits to get you through the moments of panic and day by day, session by session you become the incredibly strong and courageous woman I am today. This courage gets you through another rough few years of motherhood while you watch all Waverly fights through as a result of her prematurity. You're her biggest advocate and you feel the weight of this.

The journey ahead of you is cruel and relentless at times. It'll leave you speechless and you'll question time and time again 'how much can one person endure?'

Instead of band-aids you now have an armour. Times won't always be tough, but they won't always be easy. Your armour isn't for swords and knives it's the for the intrusive thoughts that stop you in your tracks, the anxiety that can attack with vengeance and for the grief that can drag you under. You'll fight a war and it will shape you into a very different version of yourself and when you meet me at where I am today, you'll wear your strength with pride, you'll love the family you've created fiercely. **You'll know when it's time to seek support and you'll know how to cope through the challenges that come. You're going to find the strength to put yourself first and to speak up for what you do and don't want. I want you to know that you're going to get the support that you need and that it will change your life for the better. You're going to be so proud of the woman and mother that you become.**

Be kind to yourself,  
Love the next version of me xx

