



# 'My restaurant is a celebration of Georgie's life'

Businesswoman Nicola Horlick tells Victoria Young about keeping a promise to her daughter, Georgina, branching out into food and film, and having seven bridesmaids at her wedding

**Nicola Horlick, 52, lives in London with her second husband Martin Baker, a writer. She has five children and Martin has three. She has recently opened the first of a chain of restaurants named after Georgina, her oldest daughter, who died of leukaemia in 1998.**

**I was thinking about opening a restaurant for a long time because about 14 years ago, I promised my daughter, Georgie, I would.** It's very much a

neighbourhood restaurant in Barnes, where I live. It's light, fresh and airy.

**Georgie was diagnosed with leukaemia aged two.** She was fine between three and eight, but then she relapsed, got desperately ill and nearly died. She managed to pull through, but when she was 11, it came back again. She had to have a bone marrow transplant and had lots of awful complications, and she died at the end of that year.

**Georgie loved food, but, during her last year, she was often fed intravenously.** We planned a restaurant called Georgina's that would have all of the food she most wanted to eat: amazing salads and everything would be really fresh – she loved vegetables.

**I know that it was better to have had Georgie and lost her than not to have had her at all.** I learned an awful lot from her: she was so brave, so determined. The restaurant is a celebration of Georgie's life. She was a very enthusiastic person – she wanted to make people feel special, spoilt and entertained, and I'm very proud that I was Georgie's mother.

**I'd had ten years to think about what would happen if Georgie died.** But the children were even more distressed than I thought they would be. And my marriage broke up. So it was much, much harder than I'd anticipated.

**It's difficult now because Georgie has been dead for longer than she was alive.** It's like standing on a beach and

Georgie's in a little boat, with no oars or rope, and she's floating away from me. She would have been 26 this year and I don't know what she'd have been doing or who she'd have been with.

**I have various plates spinning at the moment:** in 2007, I moved away from the public market and since then, I've only invested in rather offbeat things, such as film and private companies. So, as well as building up a chain of restaurants, I'm producing films and am chairman of a new investment business called Rockpool, plus I'm on the board of a hospital.

**My new business, Derby Street Films, produces scripts and films.** We have some really exciting film projects going on, including a gangster movie set in 60s London, which will be directed by *Twilight* director Catherine Hardwicke, and I'm the lead producer.

**I've never been intimidated by being in a minority in the boardroom.** My father said that I could do as well as my brother and I went to a boys' school, with 300 boys and four girls, so I was really used to being in a male environment.

**I surround myself with women, though, not because I'm trying to favour women, but because they've often been the best person for the job when I was looking.**

**I always make sure that I have an older man there in the background because my father died in 1997.** Originally, it was Keith Percy, who I worked with at Morgan Grenfell, and now it's Peter Barton, who helps me and gives me advice. When I'm 70, I'll have to find a 90-year-old man to be my shoulder to cry on!

*I know that it was better to have had Georgie and lost her than not to have had her at all*

**I auditioned for RADA when I was younger, but decided being an actress wasn't the right thing.** I applied for jobs in the City and I was lucky to be offered a job at what was then the best merchant bank – SG Warburg. I was made a director at 28.

**At times, I felt really scared and lonely.** You've got to be careful when leading a business. There were lots of issues to deal with – alcoholism, cocaine addiction and bulimia. One employee was about to get married and I discovered his fiancée was cheating on him – so I told him. They didn't get married and he's always been grateful, but it was one of the hardest things I've ever had to do.

**My children are much older now, so they take up less time.** During the term time, only one of them is at home and

he is about to go on his gap year. Benjie, 12, is at boarding school and my 15 year old is at school in the States, because she's dyslexic and it suits her better – we go there a lot to see her. Alice is a fashion designer and away a lot, and my 21 year old is studying medicine. Two of Martin's children are at university now and one's at school, but we see a lot of all of them.

**Martin and I met when he was a financial journalist and came to interview me.** He says that it was love at first sight, but I was so focused on doing the interview that it didn't occur to me. Plus, I thought he was happily married because he kept talking about his children. Although when I was lamenting how terrible it was to be divorced and said, "Who'd want to marry a middle-aged woman with five children?"; he replied, "A middle-aged man with three children?"

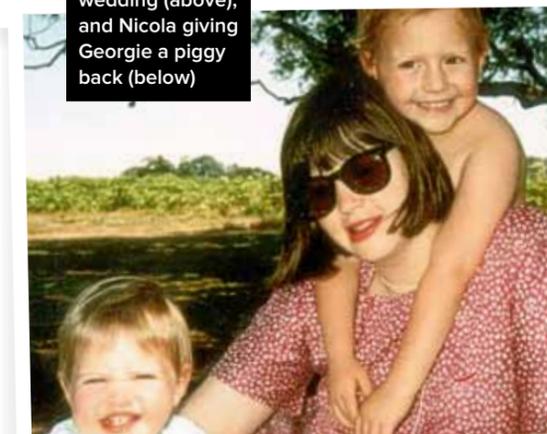
**We had such a meeting of minds; we think along the same lines.** He started talking about marriage after a month, and proposed a few months later. I had seven bridesmaids and my dress was by Anna Valentine.

**Getting old doesn't bother me at all. When you get older, you've had real experience of life and become wiser.** You know more about the pitfalls of life and business – though I don't feel any older than I did 30 years ago.

**Since losing Georgie, I have things very clearly in perspective.** The only thing that would ever keep me awake at night would be something to do with my family because the most important thing to me is my children. It also means that in the face of failure, I'm very philosophical and I say, "Well that was that and let's just get on with it." **w&h**



Nicola's second wedding (above); and Nicola giving Georgie a piggy back (below)



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### Nicola's tips for business success

- 1 Make sure the business is properly financed. If you run out of cash really quickly that's disastrous.
- 2 Make sure that you have a good business proposition; that you understand the market you're addressing or, if you don't, that you've got someone that does.
- 3 Employ the best people you can find. Motivating them isn't just about money, but giving them a vision of where the business is going.
- 4 Use your common sense. In the case of our restaurant, we need a good prime site because there's no point in being on a back street – you have to have the footfall.