



Round midnight

A sleep-deprived mother of three wrote a novel instead of going back to bed.

By **Fiona Purdon**

IT would seem the last thing a sleep-deprived mother-of-three would have time to do but write a novel is exactly what Fiona Higgins has managed to do

Higgins said her two youngest children would wake up at least five times a night, so instead of returning to bed, she would often start typing.

"Coming from such a sleep-deprived place, rather than go around the twist I started to write," she said. "The characters seemed to turn up in my head," she said on a recent tour to promote the book.

Higgins writes in the voices of six new mums, all from different backgrounds, who form a

mothers' group at their local baby health centre.

"Mothering is an intensely individual experience but also a shared common universal one. What I tried to capture in the novel is that life with children is not a Johnson & Johnson commercial. It's OK to feel disappointed and distressed at times."

Each of the six mums have their "own joys and challenges", including Ginie, who is a high-flying lawyer who returns to work when her baby is a month old; and Made, a newly arrived migrant from Indonesia.

As well as providing an entertaining read, Higgins wanted to tackle taboo subjects such as the "enormous burden of expectation" on mothers; pelvic floor issues leading to incontinency; and how babies can put a strain on relationships.

She said one in four couples in Australia will separate after having children.

The Mothers' Group culminates with a tragic

afternoon that will test the friendship of the six women.

After having a textbook first baby (Oliver is now four), Higgins' next two children Skye, 2, and Luke, 10 months, regularly woke at night.

Higgins had finished the first draft of the novel by the time she had taken Skye to a sleep clinic when she was 14 months old.

Higgins found the support of her own mothers' group, to which she has belonged since 2007, invaluable and all members read early drafts of the novel.

"I'd never felt so close to a bunch of people since high school... you have powerful shared experiences, you are all equally vulnerable... and powerful friendships emerge," she said.

Higgins wrote about her experiences of living on a Queensland farm, near Dalby in her 2009 memoir *Love in the Age of Drought*.

***The Mothers' Group*,
Allen & Unwin, \$29.99**



WHILE THEY WERE SLEEPING: Author Fiona Higgins is striking a chord with other mothers