

Mending for MUM

Sophie Hunt, 22, wanted to fix her broken family. But she had to fix herself first...



Left to right: Tommy, Evie, Sophie, Lorna and Beth



Mum Jeanette on her wedding day, before she fell ill

Heaving the roasting tray out of the oven, I wobbled with the strain.

As I checked the steaming hot chicken, my back ached so much I wanted to crumple to the floor and cry. But I bit back the tears. I didn't want to upset my brothers and sisters. 'It's almost ready,' I called, starting on the gravy.

Every part of the Sunday lunch had been carefully budgeted for – my wages at a local bar didn't stretch far. I'd been round the supermarket adding it all up in my head. I knew how important it was to have a traditional lunch as a family. To have our four-bedroom house filled with the homely smell of cooking. 'It's what Mum would have done,' I thought, sadly. The last few months had been unbelievably difficult.

A few years earlier, my mum Jeanette started getting ill with her diabetes. Mum was tough and determined to fight even when she had her left leg amputated in 2008.

I'd left home, but Mum still cared for my five siblings, Danny, then 18, Lorna, 17, Beth, 15, Evie, 14, and Tommy, eight. 'This won't stop me,' Mum insisted. But when her second leg needed removing in 2009, she

developed an infection. I moved home to help out while she spent time in hospital.

When she died on August 1, that year, aged just 45, we were all absolutely crushed.

Mum was the glue that held our family together. I knew what I had to do. 'I'll look after you all,' I'd promised. So at the age of 21 I became their substitute mum. Tommy's dad had him every other weekend but the rest of the kids were my responsibility. I turned the dining room into a bedroom and moved in permanently. Believe me, it was tough. My days were a blur of laundry, cleaning, cooking and working at a local pub.

I never stopped. It was taking its toll on my back. I had been diagnosed with scoliosis – curvature

of the spine – when I was 17. I'd lost a lot of weight when I became a vegetarian in my teens and Mum had noticed a lump on the upper right side of my back.

Because I was older, doctors said it was too late for surgery. 'I'm deformed,' I sobbed in horror. I was told physiotherapy sessions would help and the lump wouldn't get any bigger. But now I knew it was getting worse. The lump was bigger and

my size 12 tops were feeling tight on my size six frame. Even on hot summer days, I wore cardigans and neckerchiefs to mask how my right shoulder jutted forward.

'You look tired,' Danny said, as I served up lunch. My back was killing me. 'I'm fine,' I insisted, forcing a smile. How could I complain after the year we'd all had?

All I cared about was keeping the family together. I wanted the kids to still feel secure and loved. 'Yummy,'

Tommy said, as he slurped down his gravy-covered veggies.

Everyone felt the absence of Mum but, as we chatted about the day, for a moment we could smile. Just seeing him happy was proof that all the hours of overtime had been worth it.

By January 2010, my back was worse. I had physiotherapy twice a week, but after six months, it was just as bad. 'I need to fix this,' I thought, logging on to the internet. With all my responsibilities, I had to be fit.

The lump caused by Sophie's condition



'I couldn't take the pain any more, but a new treatment offered hope'

I searched for alternative treatments, and came across a clinic called Scoliosis SOS. It offered a treatment called ScolioGold, an intensive exercise and education programme helping to build up back muscles to alleviate pain, and even reduce curved spines without surgery. People on the website were raving about it. 'Maybe it would work for me?' I thought.

I couldn't take the pain any more so I applied, with nothing to lose. When I was accepted on the four-week course in Suffolk, I was over the moon. Then I saw the cost – almost £3,000. 'I can't afford it,' I sighed. I did have some savings but I felt so guilty using them for just me.

'You need to do it,' my siblings insisted. 'You deserve this.' I was so touched and knew it would benefit them in the long run too. So, reluctantly, I agreed and in August last year, I went to the clinic.

Nervously, I spent my time learning about my condition and did exercise for six hours a day. After just three

weeks, I was already standing up straighter. 'I hadn't realised how hunched over I'd been,' I said, feeling so relieved. I felt so confident and the pain disappeared. On my last day, I was shown a new X-ray of my back and compared it to one taken when I'd arrived. The difference was huge. The curve had reduced dramatically. 'Thank you,' I wept. When I got home, I walked proudly through the door.

'Your back is so straight,' Lorna gasped. Everyone crowded round for a look. 'Amazing,' Tommy beamed. Now, I do exercise every day and work fewer hours to reduce the strain on my back. I wish Mum had lived long enough to see me walking tall.

Above all, I wish she'd seen how we've all turned out – Danny, now 20, Lorna, 19, Beth, 17, Evie, 16, and Tommy, 10, are all doing so well. We would have made Mum proud.

For more info on ScolioGold see: www.scoliosis-treatment.scoliosissos.com

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