

A daughter killed on the eve of turning 18. A sister who idolised her, about to hit the same birthday. And a mother torn between pride – and terror



Protective: Della with daughter Abi

Picture: JOHN LAWRENCE

myself to throw them away.) The first time she came down the stairs with Kelly's Spice Girls T-shirt on, I had to steady myself against the kitchen worktop.

But she takes comfort in it, and I have to respect that. Losing a sister is hard enough, but in a way Abi lost her parents, too, because we both changed so much. Above all, we became far more protective.

It started almost immediately. Before, Abi had always been given a lift to school by our neighbour but I could no longer let her travel in someone else's car. I had to drive her everywhere.

I was also horrified when Abi said she wanted to walk to school with her friends at the age of ten. Images flashed into my mind of a car mounting the pavement, but I had to let her go.

And then there were the school trips I wanted to keep her from for fear of the coach journey. I'd spend the whole day worrying whether she had put on her seatbelt.

Of course, the older your child gets, the more varied experiences they will have. But instead of accepting that, your paranoia builds and builds.

Abi was 15 the first time she went into Guildford with her friends. I made her text me a running itinerary: from when she was walking in – and out – of Topshop, to where they went for lunch and when they entered the cinema.

Everything she does is magnified by the fear of: 'What if...'

I am now resigned to the fact that I must let her out of my sight, but I feel I have to be told her whereabouts every second of the day. This is a heavy burden for her, but at least she understands.

As for driving, a year ago Abi was very keen to take a test.

I dread the day that Abi leaves for a new life

She reasoned that it was being a passenger that scared her: by learning to drive, she would be taking charge of her own destiny.

Sean and I reluctantly bought her a VW Polo and I gave her lessons. That was until she had a panic attack on the road last June.

'I can't do this,' she sobbed. She hasn't been able to take the wheel since. I certainly won't be rushing her into it.

It is yet another way her sister's death has taken its toll.

She wants to be an actress and is due to study performing arts at Winchester University in September. Yet she feels guilty that this is something else that Kelly missed out on. She even chose this university because of its location – only 40 minutes down the road. She needed to know, both for her sake and for ours, that she could pop home at any time.

It goes without saying that I dread the day she leaves for her new life.

She's very independent and I want her to exercise her desire for freedom, but at the same time it sends me into a panic. How will I spend my days without daily parenting? How will I know she's safe?

But we must face a higher hurdle before that: Abi's 18th birthday party in three weeks.

I know she fears a party celebrating being an age her sister never reached, but she also wants to mark the occasion like other teenagers. It is a jagged dilemma.

If we do go ahead, I will plough all my energies into giving her the best night possible. On will go the plastic smile and I'll do my best to make everyone feel at ease.

Afterwards, though, I'll collapse into bed and burst into tears.

You see, I'll always crave the memories Kelly never got to make. And, sadly, Abi's progress will always feel bittersweet as a result.

■ **FOR more information, visit www.safedrivesurrey.org and www.driveiq.co.uk**

following weeks and months remain a blur.

Matthew was living with his biological father at the time. Sean, Abi and I had endless therapy sessions. I was prescribed anti-

depressants, too, but that didn't stop the suicidal thoughts. Not that I could ever have done that to my family. I found by far the best therapy was speaking to parents who had been through the same

thing at Safe Drive Surrey, the roadshow that had so moved Kelly.

With time, I started to campaign myself. It felt like the only way of ensuring that my daughter hadn't died for nothing.

I am now also involved with Drive IQ, a piece of state-of-the-art free online software which anyone can use to become more aware of the dangers of driving.

One of the reasons I found myself drawn to other parents who had lost children in road accidents was that many of my own friends let me down. Some would cross the road or blank me in the supermarket rather than confront the issue – and they still do.

Others would say: 'Well, at least you've still got two children' as though that made it all better.

The sad thing is that there are times you feel so low you resent the

fact you have other children to stay strong for. And it is exceptionally difficult when a surviving child begins to resemble the one you've lost. Kelly and Abi had different fathers, so facially they don't look that similar – but there are certain expressions and mannerisms they share.

Abi laughs like her sister, with a peal of infectious giggles – though one of the saddest things is that she herself doesn't recall how Kelly's laugh sounded. There's a certain way she looks at me, too, that reminds me of her older sister.

To be honest, it's a double-edged sword: a comforting remembrance laced with the agony of loss.

For the past year or so, Abi has taken the same size as Kelly, which means she has been wearing some of her clothes. (I couldn't bring

Tinker Bell with a sting

DO YOU believe in fairies? It seems scientists do, having discovered a 'Tinkerbell fairyfly'. At just a quarter of a millimetre long, it is one of the smallest insects and is barely visible to the naked eye.

The tiny wasp has been named Tinkerbella nana after Tinker Bell, the fairy in Peter Pan, and Nana,

the Darling family's dog in the book. The creature was caught in the forests of Costa Rica. Scientists gently drag a super-fine mesh net through the vegetation then carefully search the debris.

The world's smallest insect is a species of mymaridae fairyfly, which is just 0.005 inches long.