

Real lives

yourlife

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STORY OF MY LIFE



with ALICIA KELLY  
He's been at school two weeks – and I'm a wreck

IT has been two long weeks since my son started school. Until that momentous first day, my worries were naively centred on him and how he would fit in. Would he like it? Would he wear the uniform? Would he make friends? However, on day two I discovered a truth that will probably resonate with the millions of mums who have trod this path before me. It's not him I need to worry about, it's me. It first came to me when I realised that, while he was waving me off with a big smile and a spring in his step, I was already a shadow of my former self. What was ailing me? Three small words: the school run. It's not the traffic. We go on foot. It's just the relentlessness of it. The whole family has to be up, fed, washed, dressed and out of the house by 8.30am. For five days on the trot. This is no mean feat. Every day my mind is a whirl of lunch boxes, book bags and PE kit. It can only be a matter of time before we forget something. But then there are unexpected pressures. Like what to wear? Not him obviously. I'm talking about me. My standards are not too high. I'd just like to turn up in clean clothes with brushed hair and a shiny face. I think it was on day three that my inadequacies really hit home. At pick-up time, I rushed to the school gate to take up my position among the other parents. My trousers were mottled with yoghurt (the baby's contribution to the proceedings) and my face was definitely glowing – with sweat. All I could think to myself was: He's doing OK but I really must try harder. Followed by, roll on half-term. I need a rest. I racked my brains after seeing 16-year-old Giles Potter, from Norton, on the *X-Factor*. Why was he strangely familiar? Then I remembered I interviewed him around three years ago after he won a music competition. The Pershore High School pupil earnestly told me all he wanted was to be a performer. I thought, "Don't they all?" and forgot all about him. But I do now remember his teacher saying he was both talented – and a great kid. So I'll be rooting for him.

# 'We get everyone up, help mum get dressed, do the housework, make dinner, give mum her pills...'

And those are just some of the relentless tasks that fill the days of young carers Becky and Sarah Rowe, who have been looking after their mother and brother since they were 12 and 14. CATHERINE PHILLIPS spoke to them

**N**AVIGATING your way through your teenage years is tough at the best of times. While some of us look back at them with happy nostalgia, few would like to return to the days of balancing friendships, relationships and exams while hormones are raging. Young carers often miss out on the happier aspects of Becky Rowe and her sister Sarah, from Medway Road, Ronkswood, Worcester, became young carers while only 14 and 12 years old respectively. Their lives became radically different from their schoolfriends at Blessed Edward Oldcorne Catholic College after their mother Miffy Farmiloe's mental health problems meant she could no longer cope. The sisters make up the 166,363 young people and children in England and Wales who care for a relative, according to Census data published in May. However, the Young Carers in Focus (YCiF) partnership believes this figure massively underrepresents the true picture. Now aged 22 and 19, the sisters' lives are non-stop. They juggle caring for their mum and 13-year-old brother Matt with seeing their partners while Becky does shift work at a supermarket and Sarah has an apprenticeship. Becky explained: "Mum has always had mental health problems but they grew to a point where she couldn't cope anymore. "Day to day we will get everyone up and moving, help mum get dressed and will do housework, clothes washing, make dinner, making mum have her medicine. "We listen to her problems if she is having a bad day." But instead of complaining, Becky said they were lucky as they had each other for support and, unlike some carers she knows, it wasn't until they were older that her mother needed to be cared for. "Mum's always said that if she had a magic wand she would make

YOUNG CARERS

- The average age of a young carer is 12.
- Young carers are children and young people under 18 who provide regular and on-going care and emotional support to a family member who is physically or mentally ill, disabled or misuses substances.
- The 2001 census identified 175,000 young carers in the UK, with 13,000 caring for more than 50 hours per week. The 2011 census identified 178,000 young carers in England and Wales alone; an 83 per cent increase in the number of young carers aged 5 to 7 years and a 55 per cent increase in the number of children caring who are aged 8 to 9 years.
- **MORE INFORMATION**
- Worcestershire Young Carers Group: 01299 252 320
- yss.org.uk/young-carers
- youngcarers@yss.org.uk
- Young Carers: youngcarers.net
- NHS young carers hub: nhs.uk/carersdirect/young
- Carers Direct: 08088 020202

herself better. All carers want that too, but not for selfish reasons, you just want the person you love to get better. But you just get on with it." Becky and Sarah go to Worcestershire Young Carers Group once a month to spend time with other young people in the same situation. "It is a really big help. It would be nice if there was more funding but we do a lot of fund-raising ourselves. "We have a sit down and talk to each other. It's a good chance to unwind and allows us just to be silly little kids again." Becky and Sarah are also working with other young carers to create a first-person documentary with support from charity Fixers to encourage greater support for unpaid young carers.

Due to be screened at schools in Worcester this term, the group hope the film will show teachers and other young people the challenges they have to face on a daily basis. "I had some really good teachers who knew a lot about caring when I was at school but there were others who did not have enough information. "It can be lonely at times. We didn't do the whole party scene, we didn't go out very much or do things like that. You do miss out but you wouldn't not do it [caring]. We also want to help other young carers to realise that they are not alone and there are other people out there like them that can help and listen." And for youngsters who have just started out caring for a relative, Becky has these words: "Carry on. There are people out there who can help and support you – you just need to get in touch with your GP or school. Above all, know you are doing a good job." When talking about what other young carers have to face, Becky describes them as inspirational but quickly adds "I wouldn't say that about myself." Others, however, would disagree. Becky and Sarah's lives are relentless and while they admit to getting tired they have to just keep going. Becky says: "We haven't organised who is going to do what, it just kind of happens. It falls into place naturally, as silly as that sounds. We don't take it in turns as such but we just balance it – if I'm working a late shift, Sarah will let me lie in while she gets everyone ready. "We are like all other sisters, we do have the odd squabble but we also get on really well." While there is no magic wand to take away her mother's illness, Becky has more straightforward wishes at the moment. "I would love to read a book, I haven't read one in ages. "Being able to sit down and watch half an hour of *Eastenders* and not having to keep getting up would also be great!"



Sisters Becky, left, and Sarah Rowe, who care for their mother and younger brother. Picture: Nick Toogood. 3213377902

What's happening

Food prices a worry

RISING food prices are causing stress for four in 10 consumers, while a third say they are struggling to feed themselves or their family. Almost eight in 10 shoppers are concerned about the increasing cost of food, with almost half spending a larger proportion of their income on it now than a year ago, *Which?* found. Food prices have risen above general inflation by 12.6 per cent over the past six years

DEALS FOR SAVERS

NO-NOTICE ACCOUNTS	
Account, term, min deposit, rate, interest	
Britannia 0800 132304	SelectAcc Instant £500 1.75% Yly
West Brom BS Via branch	BEsy Instant £1,000 1.60% Yly
ICICI Bank hisave.co.uk	HiSave None(H) £1 1.50% Mly
Investec investec.co.uk	E-say None(H) £25,000 1.55% Mly

CVs hit job chances

JOBSEEKERS are hitting their chance of finding work by not spending enough time on their CV, according to a survey by the National Careers Service. It found that the most common mistake was not tailoring a CV to a specific job, as well as poor spelling. Joe Billington, director of the service, said: "People are not spending enough time on making sure their CV is fit for purpose."

DEALS FOR BORROWERS

SHORT-TERM FIXED RATES	
Rate, period, max%adv, fee, incentive	
Norwich&Peterborough 08453 002522	1.99% for 2 years 65% £295 Yes
Market Harborough BS 01858 412610	2.79% to 31.1.16 85% £995 Yes
Norwich&Peterborough 08453 002522	2.29% for 3 years 65% £295 Yes

Savings and borrowing rates correct as of September 19. Rates may change without notice

MY BEST FRIEND

**JO HOBBS OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST, WORCESTER**  
WHOIS YOUR BEST FRIEND? Tracy Green. She knows me better than anyone and is always able to make me feel better whatever the situation. HOW DID YOU MEET? HOW LONG HAVE YOU KNOWN EACH OTHER? We met at primary school. I moved

there when I was eight years old from another school and we have been friends since. That's 32 years – eek!  
WHAT IMPACT HAVE THEY HAD ON YOUR LIFE? Tracy helps me through difficult times, she has the ability to make

me laugh at any situation. Laughter is excellent therapy and enables you to look at things from a different perspective. I like to think I do the same for her.  
WHAT DO YOU DO TOGETHER? We talk, talk, talk. Our children play together and we walk our dogs

together. We put the world to rights and sort each other's problems out. We used to drink and party, but although Tracy still parties hard I am not able to keep up these days.  
WHAT DO YOU KEEP TO YOURSELVES? Secrets!

TEN THINGS... I WANT TO DO BEFORE I DIE

**PETER SHEERAN**  
Chief executive, English Symphony Orchestra, Worcester

**ONE**  
See ESO play a BBC Prom concert at the Albert Hall because it would be a symbol that a great deal of work has paid off.

**TWO**  
Get a (bull)dog because it would mean that I was spending enough time at home to look after it properly.

**THREE**  
Visit Jerusalem – not as a tourist or in a party, just my wife Basia, daughter Hannah and me. It is one of those places, like Istanbul and Berlin, that has such an incredible history that it would not matter what state it is in now, the mind would still boggle.

**FOUR**  
See the Royal Worcester Works project at the old porcelain factory complete, with a proper musical representation because it would be one of the final pieces of the jigsaw.

**FIVE**  
Meet the next generation – it would mean that the baton had been properly handed on.

**SIX**  
Finish the complete works of James Joyce. I have been reading and now re-reading *Ulysses* for 15 months and hate to think how long *Finnegan's Wake* is going to take.

**SEVEN**  
Perform Vaughan Williams' *Songs of Travel* because I have been learning them at the Elgar School of Music for most of this century and feel the need for 'closure'.

**EIGHT**  
Ride on the Trans Siberian Railway and arrive safely. I have always had a fascination for all things Russian and a fear of the essential lawlessness of the people.

**NINE**  
Face an over of Shane Warne because he is the greatest bowler of our time and only lives down the road!

**TEN**  
Write a book all about me. Obviously, ego! My idea is to find 365 things important to me and write a page about each one. The ensuing desk diary would be everyone's Christmas present forever.