

# The twins who see eating as the worst betrayal

**Twins Maria and Katy Campbell have always done everything with each other – played games, started school side by side and shared their secrets.**

And for the last 20 years they've been starving themselves to the brink of death together, too. For two thirds of their young lives – the pair have been battling anorexia and losing.

Last week they were admitted to hospital yet again, and say this time they truly want to beat the eating disorder they share. But after spending their teenage years, not to mention their 20s and early 30s in and out of hospital, they know they are running out of chances to get better.

"It's like having a ball and chain around my ankle that I can't throw off," says Maria. "I'm so consumed by what I'm eating, how many calories I'm burning, what I'll weigh tomorrow and what I weigh today. It's an obsession."

An obsession that could kill.

Even now, with the bodies and voices of children, they admit they struggle to make sense of what has happened.

Maria, who is 5ft 5in and weighs just under 6st, says: "I've lost everything due to this illness. I've lost my life, my house, my hair, my job, everything... and I'm absolutely sick of it."

Katy, who is the same height but whose weight teeters dangerously under 5st, agrees. "I can't walk anymore. My back hurts, my heartbeat is irregular, I've got osteoporosis, chronic gastric pain and pancreatitis. I'm on diuretics because my kidneys don't work."

"The recovery clinic is the worst place possible, and I feel like I've been sentenced to Holloway Prison."

"But this is going to be the last time."

Their desperation is clear but after so long in the grip of anorexia, the origin of their disease seems strangely trivial.

The girls were only 11 when they overheard a snippet of conversation between their parents which, they claim, changed their lives forever.

Maria recalls: "We were standing at the top of the stairs and heard our Dad remark: 'Gosh, those girls are becoming young women, aren't they? They're getting hips.'"

To most people, it's a harmless remark that any father might make. But for Maria and Katy, who are identical twins, it triggered a sinister pact.

"We were incensed by Dad's remark," says Katy, now 33. "I remember screaming: 'I'm never going to start my periods!'"

"We decided that day that if we stopped eating, we would hopefully lose our 'hips'. I wanted to punish him and Mum – and I suppose that's what we've both been doing ever since."

Their parents, 58-year-old Christy and wife Clare, 56 – who also suffered anorexia in her teens – have tried everything to help but so far, nothing has worked.

The twins, who have a 14-year-old brother, Joe, say they had a happy childhood but after starting a new school things soon started to deteriorate.



**HOLIDAY:** The twins in Crete with mum Clare



**SCHOOL:** The girls were weighed in PE

**We even began to resent Mum as she was so slim**

"At secondary school, at 11, we were all weighed in PE class," recalls Katy. "There was another set of identical twins who weighed less than us. They were prettier and popular, and Maria and I began to feel insecure."

"Katy and I also began to resent Mum because she was so slim," says Maria. "We looked up to her as a role model and felt we came up short. We started keeping a food diary to jot down everything we ate,

our weight and how much exercise we'd done. We started skipping breakfast and exercising fanatically, doing 50 lengths of the pool in the morning and gymnastics after school, too."

This pact saw the girls' weight drop by more than a stone in 12 months.

"We had a system where we'd starve ourselves for six days, only eating 400 calories precisely a day – ten pieces of pick 'n' mix, an orange, a banana and a

## FINALLY, I HAVE HOPE



**Their mum Clare says...**

**If having one anorexic daughter**

is bad, having two, often united against you, is truly terrible. From pre-teen to adult, year after year after year.

For me, their illness was also the return of a personal terror. I suffered from anorexia as a teenager, something my GP father had realised immediately and by my early 20s, I had beaten it.

Anorexia crept up on my daughters. Although they think we were not aware of their illness until they were 15, this is not true. I began to be concerned from when they were about 11.

A switch from a carefree state primary to a private girls' school where the girls were kept in the same class rather than encouraged to develop separately, a talent for gymnastics that turned to obsession, parents without much financial security – any one, or all of these, may have contributed.

Whatever the reasons, like most mothers, I blamed myself most.

By the time our daughters were 14 I was out of my mind with worry but discussion with Katy and Maria was met with blank denial. I also started finding food hidden behind cupboards and

uneaten cakes and biscuits stored in drawers. For the next three years we watched helplessly as our daughters wasted away before our eyes.

Right from the start, the doctors explained the girls were competing against one another to be the thinnest. Yet, any time we attempted to break the solidarity between them, they would turn on us in fury.

My big regret is that I wasn't honest with the girls about my own history soon enough. Eating disorder specialists tried to reassure me that they treat as many anorexic girls whose mothers are overweight as those with mothers who are too thin. But that didn't stop me blaming myself.

It wasn't until they were accepted to study medicine that they finally came to me for help. I took the girls to see the first of a long line of consultants.

For the next 14 years, it seemed that they were taking it in turns, see-sawing hideously between sickness and health.

It is only now that I have a grain of hope. I have never heard my daughters say that they want to get well. Now they are telling the world. This time it will be different, that is my wish.



diet cola," says Katy. "Then, on the final day, we'd eat anything and everything we could get our hands on – bread, pasta, crisps and cakes."

Maria adds: "At home, we would hide what was happening from Mum and Dad by putting our food behind radiators, in drawers, in our piano."

By 16, the twins' periods still hadn't started. Maria says: "Even now, neither of us has ever had a period. Doctors said we had to put on weight if we were not going to damage our fertility – but, of course, it went in one ear and out the other."

Despite the illness, both girls were accepted into medical school at the Royal Free Hospital in London but six months later, their tutors realised something was wrong and sent them for treatment.

Maria explains: "I remember one of the doctors saying they had noticed I had lost weight, too, but that my weight loss wasn't quite as bad as Katy's."

"Rather than be relieved, I thought: 'No one is going to say that Katy is better than me at something.' It was a trigger for me losing another two stone."

Because of this deadly competitive streak, the girls were sent to different hospitals in London in the hope they would not be able to encourage each other's weight loss. But, as always, they found ways to communicate.

Maria says: "It was the first time I had been apart from Katy and we were both in pieces. It's hard enough being forced to eat, but I hated being without my sister at the same time."

"I felt as though I was betraying her by eating. I worried that she wasn't eating and was getting worse, but equally I worried that she was eating and I was going to be left behind."

It was the first of many unsuccessful stays in hospital but incredibly, they are both now qualified doctors. While Katy has never had a job Maria was a doctor in a care home but left after six months.

They now share a flat in Finchley, North London, and their parents support them – though money is tight.

So what about the future? Will husbands or even children be on the cards?

"We've never had the opportunity to go out and meet men, let alone date," says Maria. "The illness has always got in the way, which is so sad for both of us."

Katy adds: "I'd really like to have a baby, but I've no idea if it's possible. Some doctors say it might be possible if I get to a healthy weight. Others say I may have ruined my fertility."

Her sister shares the same hope: "I want a husband. I want my fertility back. I also want my bones and hair – and it's not too late. I know people who are still ill with this horrible disease in their 50s, and I'm determined that will not be me. I am 100% ready to change this time."

They, and their family, can only hope that this time they succeed.

**By Jill Foster**