

PHOTOGRAPHY: TONY MOTT; GETTY IMAGES; OPPOSITE PAGE: PICTURE (TOP LEFT) POSED BY MODEL IN HO WAY ASSOCIATED WITH A STORY

“A mentor helped me TURN MY LIFE AROUND”

With a little help from her Big Sister, Yasemin, 16, beat the blues and got her life back on track.

I've never had a proper family. Dad died when I was 10 and Mum couldn't look after me, because she was an alcoholic.

My grandparents raised me and my siblings. Growing up, I could hardly speak English because my family spoke Turkish at home. My life was completely different to my friends' and I believed my mum didn't love me and had put me up for adoption.

I felt responsible for my siblings, so I had two part-time jobs – after school and on weekends. I'd take more shifts when we needed to

buy things, like if my brother needed a new school jumper. I was so busy, I had to do my homework at lunch, which made it hard to socialise. By the time I was 15, the

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pressure of being there for everyone and not having time to be a teenager took its toll and I started to cut myself.

Growing up, Yasemin says she felt different to her friends and abandoned by her mum.



Eventually, my grandparents found out and took me to see a psychologist.

attended workshops to help us meet new friends and build relationships. One of my favourites was run by swimmer Shelley Taylor-Smith, who told us how her dad passed away when she was young. By the end of it, I was sobbing. I turned around and to my amazement, everyone else was crying and comforting each other. I'd never been emotional around my family, let alone strangers, so it was a nice feeling.

I've kept in touch with my Big Sister. I adore her – she's always there for me when I need advice. I'm thankful for the path my life has taken 'cos it's made me the person I am today.

After that, I spoke to my school counsellor who told me about a camp for traumatised girls called Butterfly Bootcamp.

I went along and, while there, became part of the SISTER2Sister program, where a Little Sister (like myself) is paired with a Big Sister, who acts as a mentor. My Big Sister, Lisa, a PA, is awesome.

Over the four days of camp, we

vocal cords and I needed an operation to remove them.

In 2005, I had the surgery – it was one of the hardest times of my life: my parents had split up and I was broke. Still, I persisted and, with the help of a close friend, my dreams began to fall into place.

These days, I have more than 60,000

publishing company. Writing songs and performing my own music feels right. I hope one day I'll be singing to massive crowds, selling heaps of albums and reaching people through my lyrics.



“I enrolled in singing lessons and, six months later, I had my first gig”

MySpace fans and I've become their number one unsigned Australian artist**. I've also been discovered by peermusic – an independent

Weblink

Want to hear some of Renee's tunes? Head to myspace.com/reneecassar.



The SISTER2Sister program pairs Little Sisters, like Yasemin (right) with Big Sister mentors, like Lisa (far right).

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The SISTER2Sister program is currently being expanded nationally. For more info, visit lifechangingexperiences.org.

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