



# Two of us

LINDY & SOPHIE HARDCASTLE

After being misdiagnosed with major depression and admitted to hospital four times, Sophie Hardcastle, 21, finally found out she had bipolar 1 disorder. Her mother, Lindy Hardcastle, 52, has been her primary support.

**LINDY:** Sophie's very strong-willed. When she was little she used to throw her shoes at the front door, and say, "Out. Now." I was, "Right, we'll go for a walk."

Sophie was surfing competitively from when she was 12 and loved the whole competitive surfing scene. Then at about 15 she became a mass of nerves, and would paddle out and often not catch a wave. I wasn't the most supportive parent then.

For years 11 and 12, Sophie went to a selective school. There was a lot of pressure to perform academically and she pushed herself really hard. She always wants to be the best at what she's doing. There was a period when she was going out from Friday night to Sunday. When we asked where she was going, she lied. She was crying all the time and tired. I'd be, "How can you be out Friday to Sunday, and on Monday you can't get out of bed to go to school?"

The GP put Sophie on antidepressants. But she had a lot of dark thoughts and the antidepressants made her more able to act on them. She started self-harming. So she saw a psychiatrist who said she needed to be in hospital. She went into hospital for eight weeks, initially in an intensive care unit where she was on suicide watch. I had a job in the city [Sydney], so every morning at 7.30 I'd go to the hospital for half an hour on the way to work. Then after work I'd sit with

her before I came home. She had always been an engaging, articulate person and to see her unable to focus or talk was devastating.

I lost my job while Sophie was still in hospital. Then I was at home with her for six months. She was on the wrong mix of drugs, so she was still really unwell. For two years I lived in fear I was going to get that phone call.

Her psychiatrist said, "You can't be her guardian 24/7. She's a very sick girl and she may take her own life. You have to accept that." I said, "There is no chance of me ever thinking that is acceptable." I believe you have to have one person standing in your corner and fighting for you. Sophie's lucky because she's got friends, a lovely boyfriend and a great sister who look after her.

Eventually bits of daylight shone through. She started to see a future and began a uni course. It took me a long time to trust her again and believe what she was saying. She bullshitted me for more than a year.

A year and a half later, she said she wanted to defer uni and write a book about her experience, and that's what she did. The book is a fabulous step, but it's not like it's over. She was readmitted to hospital in June this year because she was manic.

When she needs me, I cut back on work. That's made it hard, financially and because I take a lot of pride in my work, but I wouldn't have it any other way.

“

**It hurts when I see the way my illness affects Mum. We lost each other for a while, but I feel now I can talk to her the way we used to talk.**

”

I know how difficult it is for Sophie with all her friends drinking and partying and doing drugs. But she's realising that she can't do that if she wants to stay well. It helps that she talks to schools about her experience of mental illness. Although sometimes, she says, she feels like a fraud because people assume she has come through it, when she is still struggling.

Her book, *Running Like China*, gives me great joy. When she was 15 we stood in a bookstore and she said, "One day, mum, we'll pick my book off the bookshelf." I said, "I've no doubt that we'll do that, Sophie." I knew if she decided that's what she wanted, that's exactly what we'd do.

**SOPHIE:** Mum's the strongest person I know but she is also extremely empathetic. She never backed off looking after me. She was coming to the hospital every morning and every night, even though at times I'd tell her I didn't want to see her. She'd try hard not to cry and stay there anyway.

When I came home I was so heavily medicated that it was hard getting out of bed. Mum would take me for a walk along the beach every morning, and the entire time I'd complain, saying I wanted to go home. I resented her a lot then.

Mum and I used to be so open with each other. When we went on road trips to surfing comps, we'd talk about everything. During the last two years of school, I had this attitude that I was doing whatever I wanted and no one could stop me. I'd never been able to lie to Mum before, ever, but I lost respect for her and Dad. I was sneaking out and being so reckless and I didn't care enough to be honest with her. I was driving up to Long Reef [on Sydney's Northern Beaches] and sitting on the cliff contemplating suicide. I was in such pain. Mum got really angry with me, I think, because she wanted to fix me and couldn't.

I first went to hospital in June 2011. After that Mum looked after me full-time. That's one of the biggest challenges to our relationship; it's unfair to put that on Mum. In January 2012 I went to hospital for three weeks and that's when the doctors decided I had bipolar. After that I was much better.

Mum has a way of soothing me when I'm manic or depressed. She will be there for me and she never complains. If Mum asked me a question today, I couldn't lie. If I'm ill, I think it changes. Before I was admitted to hospital in June this year I lied to Mum about the depth of my depression.

When I was a baby, Mum used to walk with me along Collaroy Beach every morning and when I was sick she made me walk along the beach. It was like tapping into that ritual we had when I was little.

It hurts when I see the way my illness affects her. When I was writing *Running Like China*, with the eyes of someone who was sane and able to grasp the severity of the situation, it was so painful. We lost each other for a while, but I feel now I can talk to Mum the way we used to talk in the car, when I was 15, and we were driving to surf comps and were like the best of friends ■

INTERVIEWS BY  
ROSAMUND BURTON

Lifeline 13 11 14