

Commemorative Account of Samantha Cook
Regarding Paula Parretti (DOD 6.01.22)

My sister, Paula, was more than just her mental health. She was a daughter, a sister, an aunty and a friend.

She was 9 years older than me, and I'm not going to lie, sometimes it created a bit of friction between us. But she would always protect me. She would get her friends who were a couple of years younger to look out for me at school if I was getting bullied or hide me under the bed [if there were serious problems at home.]

Being much younger, I didn't quite understand mental health, and to be honest, I don't think she understood it herself. But as I got slightly older, we both started understanding it and our relationship became better than ever.

I started to understand that when she was struggling, sometimes she would verbally lash out and this understanding made it possible for me to sit and talk to her about it, and she started doing the same. This made our bond so strong. My mum, Paula and I would call ourselves the 3 musketeers, us against the world.

Paula would reach out to me, my mum, or her best friends if she was struggling and these long conversations would always end up in laughter. And what a laugh she had! More of a contagious, mischievous giggle!

I had to drive past her flat on my way to and from work, so I would pick her up on my way home and bring her back to mine and her mood instantly lifted, especially when she saw my children. We used to all like going to a quiet little beach together and more often than not I would pick her up and she would be wearing the same shorts and t-shirt as my little son, although we have no idea how this happened!

She was a fantastic aunty. The total definition of 'the fun aunt' and was so proud of her niece and nephews. She would sing and dance with them, play games and would quite happily buy them the noisiest toys she could so she could sit back and chuckle.

I miss being able to sit there with Paula, rum in hand, singing our heads off to a bit of Fleetwood Mac, laughing till the tears ran down our cheeks.

Very shortly after Paula passed away, I was blessed with the most beautiful granddaughter, and I was so proud, but at the same, that special moment was clouded by the heartbreak that Paula didn't get to meet her and become a Great Aunty.

Our lives changed forever the day that she died on the 6 January 2022 and the last image I have of her burnt me.

I had taken a day off work. I normally never have day off work. However, I was so busy trying to take care of my sister, mum, the children and working fully time. It wore me down and I became really ill.

On my day off, I slept in. I never normally do this but I was so tired that I ended up sleeping longer and I missed a phone call and missed a text from Paula. The text from Paula said '*thank u for being part of my life.*' I sensed something was wrong. I

had a spare key to Paula's house. I went straight to her and walked into the house. She had hung herself. I saw her hanging.

This last image of Paula is what I see whenever I think of her, instead of the happy memories. My children talk about her all the time with all the funny memories but then I catch that glimpse in my mum's eyes of sadness and helplessness and I get this overwhelming feeling that she could still be here if she got the help she begged for.

As a result of what happened to Paula, I can't now watch certain TV shows if it has something to do with someone hanging themselves. Christmas and New Year is now messed up for life due to the proximity of Paula's death anniversary.

My mental health has completely deteriorated and I just hide myself away during Christmas and New Year and try to avoid people. It has taken a toll on my relationship with people in my life.

Photos of Paula





Paula and Myself

