

real life

# 'I lost 13 stone in my sister's MEMORY'

## When tragedy struck, Shayna Fernando, 33, knew she needed to make a drastic change...

As I walked down the aisle at my wedding, my sister Jemma, had the biggest smile on her face. 'You look amazing,' she mouthed. It was April 2014 and I was about to marry my boyfriend of three years, Andy, 27, and Jemma was right by my side. She was my best friend and I was so pleased to see her happy.

After she'd returned from travelling around Europe a few

months before the wedding, she seemed a bit lost and had stopped going out. We'd both struggled with anxiety over the years and confided in each other, but I felt Jemma wasn't reaching out to me as much. So I was relieved now that she seemed so happy on my big day.

But afterwards, she retreated again. I could tell she was struggling but that she didn't want to burden me. She was

staying with my aunt and cousins when one day my aunt called me to tell me that Jemma had been admitted to hospital for her mental health. 'I hope she gets the help she needs,' I said to Andy. When she was discharged six weeks later, I spoke to her and reminded her that I was always there. 'I'm okay,' she said. But I was still concerned.

Shortly after, I was at the school where I worked as a teacher when

Behind her smiles, she was struggling

I got a message from my aunt. 'Please call me,' it read. I knew deep down something was wrong so I asked Andy to get in touch with my aunt as I rushed home. When I got in, he broke the news to me. 'It's Jemma,' he said softly. 'She's passed away.' She had died by suicide at just 24. I was devastated and bawled in pain. I struggled to understand or believe that she was gone.

In the following weeks, I went into autopilot as we planned and held her funeral. She was loved by so many, and as the days passed, I was numb with grief and guilt. Needing a distraction, I went back to work so I could try to feel a sense of normality, but each day was a struggle. It barely felt like I was existing. The grief caused my weight to balloon. I'd always struggled with my weight and was a size 22 and 5ft 4. I began to comfort eat to help me cope, bingeing on takeaways and huge portions of home-cooked meals

like pasta in rich sauces and nachos. I was soon a size 26 and weighed 23st.

Five months after Jemma's death, my manager intervened when they saw how much I was struggling at work and drove me to the hospital, where Andy met us. I was hospitalised for my mental health and given medication. 'How had I got to this

point?' I wondered. 'We'll get through this,' Andy soothed when he visited. It was terrifying but I knew I was in the right place, getting the help I needed. When I left hospital two weeks later, I vowed that my life had to change. I quit my job and decided to pursue a role in graphic design. Three months later, in 2017, I fell pregnant with our son,

Oliver, and was thrilled. 'Your aunty would've loved you so much,' I said to my bump. After having Oliver, I fell pregnant again just a year later. But at 38 weeks, something was wrong. 'I can't move my leg,' I said to Andy. I was quickly rushed to hospital, where it was discovered I had a blood clot. Doctors said it had travelled through my lungs,

liver and legs, and could have been caused by my weight. I was lucky to be alive. While in hospital, I gave birth to our daughter, Luna. It was a huge wake-up call. I weighed 24st and had come close to dying. Comfort eating and side effects from my mental health medications meant the weight had piled on and, as a mum of two little ones, I had to do something.

When I left hospital, I joined a gym and started by slowly walking on the treadmill. Not long after, I enlisted the help of a personal trainer and food coach who helped me exercise and eat healthily. I swapped greasy takeaways for home-cooked foods, and whenever I felt down, I reached out to my counsellor rather than reaching out for food.

When I hit 15st 10lb after two and a half years, I punched the air with joy. 'I'm so proud of you,' Andy cheered. It was amazing to be able to jump on the trampoline with my kids, knowing I wasn't too heavy for it.

Nutrition and eating healthily became a huge part of our family, too. In total, I managed to lose 13st 5lb, and weighed 10st 3lb. My life was completely different and I did it with Jemma at the back of my mind and in my heart. On what would've been her 27th birthday in July 2021, I shaved my head to honour her and raised £1000 for Lifeline's suicide prevention programmes.

I was left with a lot of excess skin, so in May 2025 I booked in for surgery to remove it. However, just two weeks before I went under the knife, my mum passed away. I was heartbroken but it made me even more determined to live life to the full in her memory as well as Jemma's.

I still battle with my mental health, but counselling, exercising and eating a healthy diet helps. I only wish Jemma could have met my children, but we talk about Aunty Jem often. I know she's with us in spirit. I want to share my story to show others that if I can do it, then so can they. If I can help someone else who is fighting a battle with mental health to feel not so alone, then my precious Jemma won't have died in vain.

**AFTER**  
11st 11lb  
Size 10

**BEFORE**  
25st 9lb  
Size 26

### DIET BEFORE

**BREAKFAST** Large tin of baked beans and four pieces of bread and butter

**LUNCH** Large bowl of leftover spaghetti Bolognese and cheese

**DINNER** Nachos with tomato salsa and cheese

**SNACKS** Chocolate biscuits, chips, soft drink, bread

### DIET AFTER

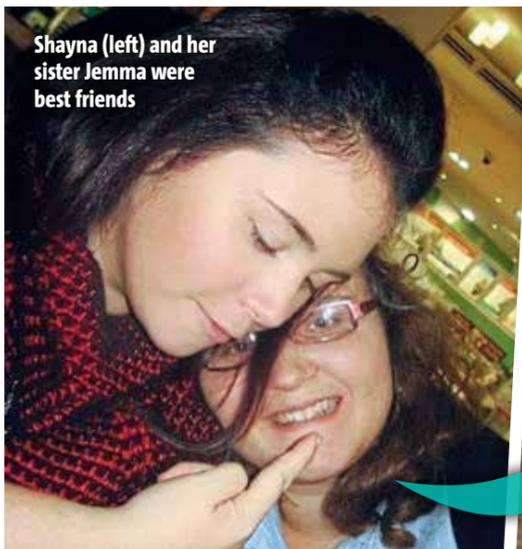
**BREAKFAST** Cottage cheese, yogurt bowl and fruit and bran

**LUNCH** Chicken and veg omelette

**DINNER** Steak, steamed potato and greens

**SNACKS** Protein bar, banana, Greek yogurt and berries

She has overcome so much



Shayna (left) and her sister Jemma were best friends



With her family now