



Extracts

I am so grateful for all the wonderful experiences that I have been lucky enough to have in my life. It's only when you face the prospect of losing it all that you start to realise the value of what you have.

It was while I was on holiday in Greece that I first noticed a small mark on my wrist. It did not make me feel worried at the time. I just thought it was a graze that hadn't healed. When the sun is burning hot and the sea is crystal-clear, it's easy to relax and think about nothing else.

Long days in the sun can make you feel exhausted and I often used to return to the hotel for a few hours to sleep in the afternoon. Everything was so peaceful and I was grateful that my parents had allowed me to have my own room. Previously, they had sometimes let me take a friend but not this year.

That holiday will always be unforgettable, not only because of what happened to me there – but also because that is when I met the friend who would be my strength and support throughout all the difficult times that lay ahead.

Friends can be many things: someone who will listen to your thoughts and feelings (and tell you when you're talking rubbish!), someone to share experiences, someone to just spend time with without talking. I value friendship. I wouldn't have survived without it.

Greece is such an amazing country with such friendly people. The culture is so different to the UK and there seemed to be a much more relaxed attitude to the time it took to get things done. It was while I was standing in the foyer waiting for the receptionist that I saw her for the first time.

She was on holiday too and judging by the way she looked at her parents, was getting a little bit irritated at the way they were arguing about who had packed what. Entirely by accident, I caught her eye and she smiled. It was smile that I can never forget.

I had been unconsciously rubbing my wrist because the mark was a little painful but her smile took all the pain away. I had the courage to speak to her and she laughed at my poor attempt at a joke (which I won't bother to repeat). I saw her on the beach later in the afternoon and we talked about everything until the light began to fade.

All those years later, she was the one who held my hand to give me reassurance as we listened to what the doctor had to say about the mark. It hadn't been just a graze and I was stupid to have ignored it. Kate had been curious that first day on the beach and was the one to remark that it was still there two years after the holiday.

Her smile has got me through a lot and I still cannot stop myself from smiling when she bursts into a room.