

SHARING OUR SCARS - My daughter's bravery during spinal operation gave me the courage to have

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Mum Tanya, 32, and Olivia, eight, both struggled with scoliosis for most of their lives.

Tanya Kater made the decision to have life-changing spinal surgery after seeing the bravery of her daughter Olivia

PROUD mum Tanya Kater and her little girl show off matching scars from life-changing ops to fix their twisted spines.

After struggling for most of her life with excruciating pain from scoliosis – curvature of the spine – Tanya, 32, found the courage to go under the knife thanks to daughter Olivia, now eight.

At five, Olivia's spine started to curve. She was in pain and struggling to breathe. Tanya was determined to help and Olivia had surgery last year.

Seeing her girl bounce back pushed Tanya to have surgery herself, though she was told at 20 her case was too risky. After two major ops in a year, they both stand tall.

Tanya, from Southampton, says: "All of Olivia's major organs were at risk because of the way her back was twisting.

"She was having trouble breathing as her lungs couldn't reach full capacity. Surgery was the best option and I felt inspired to go ahead with mine after seeing how brave she was.

Mother and daughter now proudly show off their scars together

"She kept saying afterwards she would look after me like I had looked after her. Olivia inspired me to have the operation and I kept hoping I was as strong as she had been.

"The surgery has been life-changing for us both. We're not afraid to show our scars. Whenever we look at them, we are reminded of how lucky we are to be here and active."

Tanya, who is also mum to Michael, 14, Â-Jessica, 13, and Daniel, six, has had scoliosis and kyphosis, which causes her to hunch forward, all her life.

She says: "As a child I had to wear a back brace. I managed quite well until I was 17, but after that the pain got worse.

Tanya had struggled for most of her life with scoliosis and began to see her daughter having the same problems

“When I was 20, I was referred to a consultant for surgery but I was declined. He said it was too high-risk. I came out of the appointment in tears. I was in a huge amount of pain every day.

"When your spine twists, it's not just your back that suffers. It affected my hips and my ribs. It hurt to walk."

When Olivia was five, Tanya started to notice the familiar S-shape in her spine. Knowing the pain Olivia was going through, she was determined to get her seen by an expert.

Tanya, a hospital admin worker, says: "I'd massage her and give her a hot water bottle as I rubbed her back. She'd cry as the pain in her legs was so bad.

'IT'S HEARTBREAKING WHEN YOUR CHILD IS IN PAIN'

"It breaks your heart as a parent when your child is in pain and you can't help. I knew the pain she was in. I knew her shoulders were aching, her legs were hurting, her muscles were burning."

In December 2016, Olivia saw Evan Davies, consultant spinal surgeon at the University Hospital Southampton NHS Foundation Trust.

Tanya says: "Mr Davies said, "Let's get your daughter fixed, then we'll fix you". For the first time in years, I felt positive.

"They monitored her for a while and she spent a year wearing a brace but her back was not improving. It was getting worse. Mr Davies said we had to operate."

In March 2018 Olivia had surgery to insert titanium rods and screws that can extend and move as she grows

In March 2018 Olivia had surgery to insert titanium rods and screws that can extend and move as she grows. Tanya says: "She went to theatre smiling and happy but when she came back she was covered in tubes.

"Doctors had to break her ribs to operate on the front of the back. She got an infection, a common side effect, and was quite poorly in hospital.

"We took her home 11 days later and 14 days after the operation she was right as rain. She's never complained since. She was ready to go back to school after three weeks."

But Tanya's back was getting worse, her spine bent at 90 degrees. Mr Davies was willing to operate "but warned there was a high risk of paralysis.

By 2018 Tanya's spine had bent to 90 degrees and she was in excruciating pain

Tanya says: "My neck was hunching forward and my shoulders were arching over. Most of the time at work I sat at a desk, which was hard.

"Mr Davies took some X-rays. He said if he hadn't seen me before the results, he was convinced I'd be left paralysed.

"He wanted to do CT and MRI scans so he could have a detailed look at my back. When people look at those images, they stare in disbelief. They think it's impossible I was living like that and still walking.

I thought about how much worse it had got between 20 and 30 and wondered what it would be like when I was 50.

'SEEING HER COURAGE SPURRED ME ON'

Mr Davies explained how risky the operation was. I couldn't decide what to do. I could still do anything I wanted to do in pain. Did I take the risk when I could have another ten years of being active?

But as months passed, her pain became unbearable. At the start of this year she decided enough was enough.

She says: I started to get tingling in my feet and the side of my right leg was numb. I wouldn't have felt it if someone poured burning hot tea over me.

"That scared me and in January this year, I asked to go on the waiting list. Seeing how well Olivia was doing spurred me on. My girl was my inspiration. And I wanted to show the same courage she had."

Olivia's amazing recovery made Tanya decide to have the surgery herself

Concerned over the increasing numbness in her legs, doctors secured Tanya the earliest possible date for surgery.

She says: In February I had the surgery. I wasn't scared of the operation or the pain. The only fear I had was ending up in a wheelchair.

I remember walking to the operation and thinking it might be the last time I ever walked again, my last steps. I was in theatre all day. My right leg was temporarily paralysed during the surgery.

"They give tiny electric shocks to your feet throughout the surgery but my brain stopped reacting to the ones on my right leg. Fortunately, the feeling came back and they were able to carry on.

During her surgery Tanya's right leg was temporarily paralysed

The doctors had to remove some vertebrae and chisel away at others to try to straighten my spine. When I came to, I was relieved to still have feeling in my feet.

I was dazed and in pain, but I gave Mr Davies a thumbs up to let him know I was OK. I looked down at my feet and wiggled my toes. From the word go I knew I was going to be OK.

“I kept thinking, “I’m going to have a really happy life now” I’m going to be a better mum.”

Tanya was up and about within 48 hours and although the recovery has been tough, life has improved for her whole family.

Tanya says having the operation has improved her whole family's life

She says: “The bit I hadn’t been scared of was a lot tougher than I’d expected.

“I couldn’t even lift my head at first. I had no strength. I was in hospital for two weeks but after that I started getting better.

“I still have aches and pains and there are days when I have to remind myself to slow down a bit, but I’m smiling all the time.

“I feel so positive. I used to ask my children to help me with my back. They’d rub it for me and on my bad days they’d fetch things for me.

Tanya says she can now be the mum her family deserves after having the surgery

“I feel bad that they used to have to do that. Now I can be the mum they deserve.

“We took Olivia to Disneyland Paris at Christmas and she went on the rollercoasters. She’s even been rock climbing.

“And I can now think about normal things, like where I’m going on holiday and what we’ll have for dinner.

“I can’t thank Mr Davies enough. The care he and his team provided was incredible and he was brave enough to take on a surgery other doctors wouldn’t do.

“I’ll always look at our scars with pride. It’s a huge reminder of how far Olivia and I have come.”

Brave Olivia says: “I hated having a bendy back, as it didn’t look very nice and it hurt a lot.

“I’m happy now it doesn’t hurt. I did worry a bit about having a big scar but now that Mummy has one too, I’m happy we are the same.”

-Â The Sun
