

# 'I was born without a womb'

WHEN TABITHA TAYA, 26, WAS DIAGNOSED WITH A RARE CONDITION, SHE STRUGGLED TO COME TO TERMS WITH WHAT IT MEANT FOR HER FUTURE

**Y**our first period is a milestone most girls experience with the support of their mum. But by the time I was 15, mine hadn't started and Mum wasn't around to guide me. In February 2003, she collapsed and died suddenly, aged just 35. She'd been suffering from an undiagnosed aggressive soft-tissue cancer. One minute I had a mum; the next I didn't. I was devastated, and was left to face life without her.

Before she'd gone, Mum had confided in a family friend that she was worried about my periods not starting. It didn't particularly bother me, but she urged

me to see my GP. He did tests, including a laparoscopy – where a small camera was inserted into my abdomen.

When I came round, I was told the shocking news. I had MRKH (Mayer-Rokitansky-Küster-Hauser syndrome), a congenital disorder that meant I'd been born without a womb. Although I produced eggs, I would never conceive or carry my own child.

Just a few months after losing my own mum, my chance of being one myself naturally had been ripped away. I'd always been quite a girly girl:

I loved makeup and fashion, and was

signed to a modelling agency.

But now I felt incomplete, as well as shocked and angry.

Hadn't I been through enough?

When my friends picked me up from hospital, I didn't want to show how upset I was, so I joked I was lucky – no awful periods for me! But, inside, I was confused and terrified. The hospital had given me a leaflet about MRKH, but other than that I was offered no support.

Without Mum to confide in, I turned to drinking and

self-harm. One night, feeling especially low, I cut my wrists. I didn't want to die; I just needed a release. But I knew I'd gone too far. I texted a friend and, thankfully, she took me to hospital. The next thing I remember is waking up surrounded by friends and family, feeling lucky to have woken at all. I didn't want to die young like Mum.

I realised I couldn't change my body, but I *could* learn to be strong. Mum had urged me to study despite the modelling, so I knuckled down to pass my A-levels. After that I moved from Wiltshire to London, where I launched a business, TayAshon Entertainment, and met my first serious boyfriend.

Although he was supportive about my condition, I knew he wanted a family.

I couldn't cope with the guilt. So, although I loved him, I ended our relationship after three and a half years. Heartbroken, I felt so alone – single, with a new career in a new city, and dealing with a condition I didn't know how to handle. But, when I was 21, I changed GPs and was referred to a hospital that specialises in MRKH. At last, I had support and information – around 6,500 women in the UK are affected. For the first time in years, I didn't feel alone.

I wanted to make sure that no other sufferer would feel so isolated, so I set up a charity called Living MRKH. Contacted by women across the

world, we call ourselves 'MRKH sisters'.

Two years ago, I met Peter, 29, a publishing director. I told him about my condition almost immediately. He showed me that if someone loves me, it's because they want to be with me, not because I can give them a child. Even so, we hope to try for a baby in the next few years through IVF surrogacy. If that doesn't work, we'll consider adoption. Being born without a womb hasn't made me less of a woman – it's just made me a stronger one.

For more information, visit [Livingmrkh.org.uk](http://Livingmrkh.org.uk).



Top: Mum Niki, who Tabitha lost at 15. Above: with boyfriend Peter

