

Reference – Tina McGuff

I first met Tina as a fellow mum of my daughter's friend in 2011. We would meet each other at parent's nights or dropping our daughters off at friends get togethers, but I didn't really know Tina.

My daughter told me Tina had suffered from anorexia as a teenager, but the woman I met looked a picture of health and far from looking anorexic or ill, so I didn't really pay a huge amount of attention to what my daughter had said.

Last summer my husband and I were going on holiday and I had heard Tina had written a book.

I bought 'Seconds to Snap' out of curiosity, because of our daughters connection, and I read that book without putting it down in the airport and on the plane, with unashamed tears flowing down my cheeks. The suffering Tina had endured when she was our daughters' age was too horrific to comprehend, and I cried for her as a child, as a teenager, and then I cried with happiness when she turned her life around and is now the beautiful woman, wife, mother and ambassador of mental health and eating disorders.

Just before I read Tina's book, I had found out my niece Katie had been bulimic and had suffered from anxiety and depression while at university, and was suffering again. This came as such a shock, and reading the book I cried for my niece too.

As soon as I finished the book, I had to email Tina to tell her how her book moved me, and helped me to understand eating disorders and how I felt enabled to really help my niece through her illness.

I told my sister and Katie about Tina and her book, and asked Katie to come along to Tina's book signing with me. She was fragile mentally and cried when she heard Tina talk, hiding behind the bookcases in Waterstones. We queued to meet Tina, and when Tina met us, she enveloped Katie in an enormous hug, told her she was beautiful and told Katie to contact her if she ever needed help or support.

Reading Tina's book and meeting her, was a real starting point in Katie's recovery, and she still calls Tina her "guardian angel".

My son is 16, and has struggled with his weight all his life. He read Tina's book, then went on to stand up in front of his class and presented his talk on "Body positivity and childhood obesity".

He moved some of his classmates to tears, and has totally changed his outlook on his "fat" issues and is proud to say "this is me, take it or leave it, but I'm happy".

My son met Tina a couple of nights ago and said it was like meeting his hero!

Tina is a truly remarkable, compassionate woman, and her campaign to spread awareness of eating disorders and mental health is inspirational. She is my hero too!

Elaine Butter