

'Out of a terrible loss, we've created a friendship to treasure'

**SARAH JOWSEY, 39, from Pontefract, West Yorkshire, says:** 'Curled up in my dressing gown in front of the TV, I felt utterly alone and miserable. It had been eight months since I'd lost my darling husband Paul, and it seemed like no one understood what I was going through. Paul was only 32 when he lost his battle with leukaemia and it felt like our whole future had been snatched away. I was 30 with two kids, and I didn't know how we were going to make it.

But that day in March 2007, as I tuned in to *This Morning*, I had a light-bulb moment. On the show was a warm and lovely sounding woman called Sharon, a young widow, just like me, talking about a support group called WAY – Widowed & Young ([widowedandyoung.org.uk](http://widowedandyoung.org.uk)).

I immediately googled the organisation and when I discovered that Sharon was my local rep, it seemed like fate. Nervously, I went along to a coffee morning at her house the following month, and we hit it off.

At that time, I was consumed with grief and just wanted to talk about Paul. With Sharon, I felt completely at ease. Her husband Ian had passed away very suddenly seven years earlier from a heart attack, aged 36, so she'd been through exactly the same emotions and worries.

Our son Max was two when Paul died and I was desperate to make sure he would remember his dad. Sharon's younger son was just a baby when she was widowed, so she told me she'd made memory books and kept on talking to her boys about him to keep his memory alive. Keeping her words in mind really helped.

Over the following months, it became such a comfort to have Sharon in my life. I came to realise that she is a very thoughtful and caring person, always going out of her way to make me smile. Once she sent me a special necklace out of the blue – it was made of three interlocking circles, one engraved with "Paul and Sarah", one with "Max" and one with "Toni-Mae", my 18-year-old daughter. I was so touched; I keep it close to my heart.

Sharon's been a huge part of helping me get through my grief and she's helped keep my memories of Paul alive. She was a rock for me at the hardest time of my life, and now I don't know what I'd do without her.'

**SHARON WHITEHEAD, 49, from Leeds, says:** 'Sarah thinks I'm the one who's done all the supporting, but I don't feel that way at all. She has always been there at the end of the phone, cheering me up and listening when I needed it.

Despite her own heartbreak, Sarah never fails to make me giggle. We both share the star sign Leo, and this year we're planning a big bash for my 50th and her 40th.

I found out about the charity WAY soon after Ian died, and when I realised that there wasn't a branch near me, I set one up. Now, whenever I meet a new member, Sarah comes along with me. She's a wonderful friend and we're very close. We've shared so much together and out of such terrible loss, our friendship has been something to treasure.' →

Sharon (left) has been a rock for Sarah (right) since her husband Paul passed away

London, Catia Fashion; Sarah wears: Dress, Blue, Jovial; Sharon wears: Dress, Blue, Next; Sharon wears: Ring, Katie's Own; Anna wears: Top, Eileen Fisher; Jeans, Oasis; Ring from a selection, Pebble London; Shoes, Next