

Nicola's chapter



'If anything ever happens to you Nicola, I don't know what I'd do.'

'Don't ever worry about me, Mum, I'm always with somebody who will look after me and if I'm in a car, the drivers never drink and drive.'

On 11 December 1984, Nicola and I had a 'pretend' birthday day.

The 18 December was a bit too close to Christmas to 'go up Oxford Street' to buy her birthday gifts and have lunch together. We started out after the rush hour – from Potters Bar to Oxford Circus – to make the most of a full day. As soon as we walked out of the tube station the first move was in the direction of 'Top Shop'. We went up the escalator and into the store, the music was blaring, and a voice came over the loud speaker advertising the bargains.

'I'll have a look at the tops then and see if they've any ski-pants in my size', my size being suitable for a 4'10" modern fast mover. No, the tops were not suitable. Oh, here we go I thought everything is not small enough.

'How about this Nicola, it looks like you.' I showed her a white fluffy short dressing gown.

'Like it', she replied, picking out a night-shirt at the same time.

Oh thank goodness – that was two items towards the £50 allowance I had made – we had found something she liked.

I imagined the state the dressing gown would be in a few weeks time – splashed with make-up and drips from her hair lightened by a blonde rinse.

Nevermind, it was her birthday.

'It's your day Nicola, have whatever you like. There's so much misery about but we've made a good start.'