

## Lydia's story

Coming to university was something I knew I would do from a fairly young age; but I had no idea that I'd be making the journey without my mum. She died when I was 16, and she never saw me pass my GCSEs, A levels or my Art Foundation course. She wasn't there when I checked UCAS to find I had been accepted to study a degree in Fine Art at the college of my choice, something she knew I had wanted to do for a long time. Not having my mum around has been hardest at these important moments in my life's progress; she was the person who had fuelled and encouraged my interest and passion in the arts, and had taken me to exhibitions, classes and shows for as long as I can remember.

Not having her there to see me living out my ambition has been heartbreaking, but I've always had a part of me which believes she is watching me and accompanying me in my endeavours. Knowing how proud she would be of me is a massive help when I'm feeling down or unmotivated, and the encouragement I get from 'doing it for her' is a comfort. Since my mum died I have found that I have got better at doing things for myself; my dad has a lot on his plate much of the time so I've learned to be quite self-sufficient, and this has helped me in the preparation for coming to uni, as well as some aspects of student life. I didn't, however, refuse help that was being offered left, right and centre- my sister had graduated three years previously so she helped me write a list of all the things I needed to pack, and gave me some pointers on shopping as budgeting, as well as a hand-written recipe book. I was lucky enough to have friends who helped me pack my things too, and plenty of advice from others who had already completed a year of study. I learned that even though I can easily look after myself, and it's something I'm proud to be able to do, if people around me offer to help or share advice, it's always a good thing to take.

The reality is that I can't do it all on my own, even when I feel like I can. I was nervous about making friends, because of the inevitable moment where I'd have to tell them my mum was dead. I was worried about awkwardness if someone asked me about her, or made a joke, or if I got sad about it. The truth is, as soon as the subject of parents came up, and I took the chance to tell them, they were fine with it. A couple of them didn't really know what to say, but that was fine by me, and I just reassured them that they didn't have to say anything. This has avoided potential future awkwardness, and they're all mature enough to realise that this doesn't change how they should treat me. Obviously not all people are this understanding, and my advice to anyone who meets someone who reacts adversely to this would be not to give them the reaction they want. Every situation is helped by a mature approach and a level-headed response.

If things start to get too much, EVERY university has a student support team who will offer guidance and counselling if a student is having a hard time. Universities want

their students to have a great time, and it's never a bad idea to go and ask for help if it's needed, however small the problem.