

Lauren loved having a glamorous, outgoing mum when she was little



New statistics reveal that in the last five years, cocaine use among women has risen by 65 per cent. Here, chartered accountant Lauren Salmons, 30, tells the harrowing story of her mum Sandra, 50, whose battle with addiction led Lauren to become her mother's mother

'I SENT MY MUM TO REHAB'

'WHILE I STAYED LATE IN THE OFFICE, then went to the gym, my mum had been up all night drinking and doing cocaine. I barely recognised her any more. Once so glamorous, with her glossy blow-dries and glowing skin, Mum now had greasy hair with long dark roots, dirty nails and a waxy, yellow complexion. She was trembling and rocking incessantly. Empty vodka bottles and half-eaten takeaways were strewn around the flat. It was 2pm on a Saturday afternoon.

"This is Ian," I said, introducing drugs interventionist Ian Young, the 30-something former drug addict standing at my side. She turned angrily to me. "You're the one with the problem, why are you nagging and moaning at me all the time?" she screamed. To her I was the perfect, professional daughter who never did anything wrong, so there was no way I could understand.

'Ian sat opposite Mum on the sofa and said, "I've been there, I understand. I can help you." He showed her the track marks on his arms from his years of shooting up and told her he'd been clean for over 10 years. I saw in my mother's

softening body language that Ian was getting through, where all my begging and pleading had for years failed. He asked me to tell my mother how I felt. I had a holiday to the South of France booked with James, my fiancé, the next day but I was about to cancel because I was terrified of leaving her alone. "Mum," I whispered, crying, "I can't leave because I think you'll die." By now, her anger had subsided and for the first time in years I saw in her face that she'd listened to me – really listened. She agreed to go to rehab.

'Growing up, she'd always done all the typical mum things like picking me up from school and taking me to ballet classes. Having an outgoing, glamorous mum made me fun and sophisticated in my friends' eyes. My parents ran a successful business and we lived in a large, detached house overlooking the forest in Buckhurst Hill, Essex, with a Mercedes and a sports car in the driveway.

'I was about nine when I started to find Mum embarrassing – sometimes at parties I'd cringe as she flirted with strange men, slurred and fell about. I got cross with her every Sunday when ▶

she'd be so hungover that she'd lie in bed vomiting. When I told her off, Mum would laugh, saying we were just like Eddy and Saffy from *Absolutely Fabulous*.

'Around my 18th birthday, things happened at home that – in hindsight – made life almost unbearable for Mum. Her parents died, my father had a heart attack and I moved to Exeter to go to university. On the outside it seemed Mum was holding us together. But during my uni holidays I walked into her bedroom and caught her snorting a line of cocaine through a £20 note off her bedside table. She assured me she'd only done it once or twice, but something clicked for me and I didn't believe her. She begged me not to tell my dad, who she'd rowed with earlier that day. Later that week, she was driving to the supermarket one morning and sped through red lights all the way. She admitted she'd done a bit of coke and said, "Everyone does it". "No mum," I said, "Everyone does not do drugs to go to the supermarket."

'Because of Mum's erratic moods, my parents argued constantly, yet my dad had no idea what was happening. They told me they were planning to separate over dinner – though Mum went upstairs to snort endless lines instead of eating roast beef with us. I wish I could have told Dad what was going on but I'd never had that kind of relationship with him and I didn't want to start telling tales on Mum. I felt completely helpless.

'When Mum moved into her own flat she met another man, also a drug user. I tried to make her see they were a destructive couple but she wouldn't listen. By then our roles had completely reversed and I had become my mother's mother. At family gatherings after the break-up I'd know when she was using and search her handbag for cocaine (she later told me she hid it in her socks and bra).

'One Monday morning, a friend told me my mum had been out clubbing and had invited a load of people back to her flat, only to run to the bathroom every half hour, returning each time higher than the last. I was a ball of tension and exhausted from waking in the small hours and calling to check on her most nights.

'About two years after Mum moved out of our family home, she was drinking a bottle of vodka and a bottle of wine every day and spending around £1,000 a week on drugs – a habit supported by her boyfriend and by her new, well-paid job managing a plastic surgery clinic. I don't know how she managed to keep that job, because all the coke she did made her completely paranoid. "Shhh, can't talk," she'd say, convinced her boyfriend had planted listening devices in



Words: Anna Magee Photo (this page): Thomas Skovsø; stylist: Angela Barnard; hair and make-up: Sherrie Warwick; clothes: Whistles and Marks & Spencer Limited Collection Statistics from the National Drug Treatment Agency

«I WORRIED THAT IF I LEFT MUM ALONE SHE'D OVERDOSE OR, WORSE, KILL HERSELF»

my car, or a camera in the loo, and was trying to poison her with bleach in her beef curry. I worried that if I left her alone she'd overdose or, worse, kill herself.

'I was close to breaking point myself. A friend told me about drug interventions where I could bring a trained counsellor to see Mum and together we'd beg her to go to rehab. She introduced me to Ian, who said his intervention and the ensuing 28-day rehab would cost £20,000. I got a bank loan and we went ahead with it. With Mum in The Priory, I finally went on my holiday to France. For the first time in the 12 years of Mum's addiction, I could relax.

'But, though she held my hand in rehab meetings and swore she'd never take drugs again, I discovered she'd smuggled a large bag of cocaine into the clinic. I felt betrayed and hopeless, particularly when the 28 days were up and counsellors said Mum needed more rehab. Thanks to Ian, we found a

cheaper facility in South Africa that cost £8,000 for eight weeks. I couldn't borrow any more from the bank so this time I sold all my jewellery and used my fiancé's bonus to pay for it. My whole life hinged on Mum getting better. When, the night before she left for South Africa, I came back from Waitrose to catch her calling her dealer, I went mad. I grabbed her phone and smashed it with James's hockey stick, accusing her of being weak and ungrateful.

'Eight weeks later, Mum pushed her trolley through Heathrow arrivals hall looking like a different woman. Her skin had cleared and she was slim and smiling. She stayed with James and I for the first two weeks and each morning she cooked us breakfast and every evening went to her 12-step meetings. Still, I found it hard to trust her. One night after a meeting Mum came home chewing gum and I shouted at her, accusing her of drinking and being pathetic.

'But I was wrong. Mum hasn't touched alcohol or cocaine for two years and six months. At my 30th birthday a few months ago I was so proud when she was still her fun self, dancing and chatting to my friends, but not drinking anything stronger than cranberry juice. And recently, I had an argument with a girlfriend and Mum listened while I poured my heart out. It sounds like the most normal thing in the world, but for us it's taken hard work and £30,000 to get to "normal". Having my mum back has made it worth every last penny.' ■

For more information on interventions for drug or alcohol dependency, see soberservices.co.uk