

Jules (left) today,
with her sister,
Sally-Anne



When size divides SISTERS

IS ONE SISTER'S WEIGHT THE OTHER ONE'S BUSINESS? HERE, JULES RITTER EXPLAINS WHY IT IS. OVERLEAF, HER SISTER BEGS TO DIFFER

PHOTOGRAPH JENNY LEWIS

How do you tell your sister that you're worried about her weight? Can you? My sister, Sally-Anne, is three years older than me and five inches taller. She's also much larger. "Like chalk and cheese," our mother says, me being the thin, flat piece of chalk, with a BMI of 21 and a 34B bust, Sally-Anne the more rotund Edam, with a BMI I can only guess at and a 36FF bra size.

I say only guess, because I have never known what Sally-Anne weighs. I don't

like to ask, and I'm not sure she'd tell me, even if I did. All I know is that, whatever the number, it's not a healthy one. If she were anyone other than my sister, I'd have no qualms in voicing my concerns, but the heart seems to force the mouth shut with loved ones.

Our father died nine years ago, from a heart attack due to undetected cardiovascular disease, and our mother – although a fabulous hour-glass-figured 70 year old – suffers from diabetes. Not a winning gene pool for either of us. This is why I worry about Sally-Anne's weight. I adore my sister. She has a wacky sense of humour and a kindness towards others that is rare nowadays. Since losing Dad, she has been a wonderful support to Mum, doing far more than I am capable of and, for this, I will be eternally grateful. I want to grow old with Sally-Anne and have the wonderful relationship that our mother enjoys with her sister, but she may not be around when we are older – the risk of premature death increases the more overweight you are.

When we were growing up, Sally-Anne was the older, mature sister always looking out for me, while I was the skinny clown. There's a photograph of us together on the beach in Devon (see over) that, looking back, was the writing on the wall for our future body shapes. I was around eight years old and she 11. We're wearing matching bikinis and she is holding my hand, protectively, while I wave at the camera. I recently had a print made of it and put it up in my living room. For me, it was a tribute to our early years growing up together, while Sally-Anne's only comment was, "Look! I was big, even back then."

As a teenager, I was terribly jealous of Sally-Anne. She was wonderfully tall and had boobs, which meant boyfriends. Constantly going out, while I stayed at home, trying on bras I could barely fill, she was curvy and fabulous. Boys were always knocking at the door, or picking her up in cars. Our three-year age difference felt more like 10.

As the years passed, she left our home, in Hertfordshire, to work in Scotland, while I went to work in Switzerland. There, the combined effect of a healthy diet and a better climate meant that I changed little in my twenties. By the



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:
The sisters two years ago; the snap on the beach in Devon, of which Sally-Anne said, 'I was big, even back then'; at school, aged six and nine

time Sally-Anne moved to work in London, years of partying and not paying attention to her diet had started to show. Her skin looked puffy and she was worn out.

Marriage and pregnancy didn't help Sally-Anne's health. By the time her son, Daniel, was born, her marriage was floundering and she then took on all the parental responsibilities, as well as working full-time. She suffered greatly during those first few years of motherhood, but I think it was even harder for her, as she wasn't in great health.

I am seen as the boring one in the family. My health and

fitness are incredibly important to me and I'm always going to bed early, with a mint tea, lecturing everyone on the ill-effects of white flour and sugar, and watching my alcohol intake. I eat healthy meals three times a day and enjoy the occasional glass of wine, but there are some foods I avoid: pizza, red meat, chips and pastries.

Sally-Anne, on the other hand, has never been one for exercise, claiming that her large breasts make any kind of workout impossible. But her sedentary lifestyle just means her measurements creep ever upwards, which scares me. So, when a friend of mine, who Sally-Anne knows and likes, qualified as a life coach specialising in weight loss, I offered to buy her five sessions. Although she's been through some difficult times, she has now found a terrific partner in Mike, with whom she is very happy. The time felt right to tackle the issue head-on.

So why, after a successful first meeting with the coach, did she ignore all the follow-up emails? Perhaps she felt I'd bullied her into it? Perhaps she just didn't



'I COULD ALWAYS PINCH AN INCH'

Weight was always more important to Jules, says her sister, Sally-Anne Edgell.

If this article gives me a wake-up call, then it will have achieved something for both me and Jules. I'm pleased that she feels our relationship is strong enough for her to write about our circumstances.

Our childhoods were full of laughter and love. We ate what we were given: fish on Friday, roast on Sunday and leftovers on Monday. I was that child who could always pinch an inch.

The first sign that being slim was important to Jules came one Christmas in our teens. We were going to parties, and Jules had a tantrum, because her trousers were too tight – she threw herself down on the bed and sulked.

Even though I was bigger than Jules, my weight was fine until my early twenties, when I moved to Scotland. I worked and played hard seven days a week, and had to entertain clients at good restaurants with fine wines. I had a lot of fun, but it

definitely affected my health and my waistline.

Then, I moved to London and, again, worked long hours – going straight to the pub after work most nights. That sort of lifestyle takes its toll on the body. In 1990, I married and we moved to Dorset. It was after our son was born that I became very withdrawn, and my self-esteem hit such a low that I sought comfort in more food and drink.

When my marriage ended, life became tough. I was single mum to a six-year-old son and had no family nearby to rely on. I gave up alcohol, but my eating didn't get any healthier. Pizzas, Big Macs and milkshakes were just a few of the naughty-but-nice treats we enjoyed.

It is not just mine and Jules' bodies that are so different. The patterns of our lives have been, too. Jules met Pierre when she moved to Switzerland, at 21. Twenty-five years and three kids later, they are still happily married.

Jules' healthy lifestyle reflects the culture in Switzerland, whereas, in Britain, almost everything about the way we shop, entertain and think about food is different.

I have had friends comment on Jules' life: skiing every winter, great husband and three lovely kids, a boat on the lake and slim to boot. They wonder why I have never been jealous but, when I look at Jules, I feel only admiration for my little sister. Physically, we will always be as different as the undulating peaks of Switzerland and the flat fields of Dorset, where I live, but variety is the spice of life and I would never be without my opinionated, small-chested, slim sister with a heart of gold.

Yes, I am overweight but, with the help of Weight Watchers, I am working on bringing myself back to a healthy (but curvy) English rose. Perhaps then we can finally remove the elephant from the room.'

'If she was anyone other than my sister, I'd have no qualms in voicing my concerns'

want to disappoint me by saying, "No, I am not like you, leave me alone"? When I asked her why, she – completely out of character – replied, "If I get skinny, I'll get bitchy, like you and all your friends." I wasn't offended, just saddened.

The past 18 months have been stressful for Sally-Anne, with a health scare that took a long time to diagnose. Finally, one of the medical professionals she was seeing suggested that weight loss would help – you could have heard me cheering from the Alps! She recently joined Weight Watchers and lost six pounds within weeks. We met up two weeks ago and it was wonderful to see her so happy. So, the question is, will now finally be the right time? I hope so. ■
What do you think? Is size ever anyone else's business? Email us at: red@redmagazine.co.uk