

Last week, Fifi Geldof revealed she was diagnosed with clinical depression at 11, but kept it hidden from her father Bob. Writer Kat Brown (right), 31, knows only too well what it's like to be smiling on the outside while battling mental illness on the inside

— PHOTO SARAH DUNN

## LIKE FIFI, I KEPT MY DEPRESSION HIDDEN'



Above: Fifi Geldof (above left) was diagnosed with depression during court-ordered therapy sessions following her parents' divorce

**I KEPT THE MONSTER** in my head locked away most of the time, although it escaped one night in my late teens when I was watching *The Usual Suspects* with friends. Out of nowhere I felt like I might explode with the panic rising inside me. Going to the bathroom, I cut myself to relieve the pressure that I felt had been building up inside me. I binned the razor, wrapped my wrist in a T-shirt and went back to my mates. I hid it so well that not even my boyfriend noticed.

Which is why the news that Fifi Geldof kept her depression secret for 20 years doesn't surprise me. She was diagnosed with clinical depression at 11, but only spoke publicly about it last week. The stigma surrounding mental illness is easing, but very slowly. Like Fifi I suffered

from depression since childhood, but hid it for nearly 15 years. With friends growing up – and later lovers – I was outgoing and happy, but for so many years of my life I have felt like a complete fraud.

I can't even pinpoint the exact time I first got depression, but at 12 I felt a grey tide flowing into my head and taking over. I moved up a school year when I was seven and missed a crucial year of socialising, which I think really hit me at secondary school. I didn't know the unspoken rules of fitting in, and being also tall, nerdy and ginger, was bullied from the off.

I industriously tried my teachers' suggestions to laugh along. Nothing worked. Coupled with adolescence, my feeling of otherness got worse. Fifi's memories of this change describe it perfectly. In an interview with the *Mail On* ▶