

'Everything Was Difficult, Apart From Floristry'

After a devastating brain haemorrhage, Lucy Jones' second chance at life came through bulbs and bluebells

To see Lucy Jones at work, expertly weaving and winding her messy bundles of flowers into beautiful bouquets, you'd never believe there was a time when she couldn't so much as hold a pen.

It was December 2006 when Lucy's life changed forever. She was spending a weekend at a cottage in Wales with her husband Andy, then 54, and their children, Duncan, 25, Gordon, 24, and Sophie, 17.

Gordon was a chef and had to work Christmas Day, so this was the only time the family could celebrate all together.

They'd just enjoyed a home-cooked meal when suddenly Lucy felt something move at the back of her head and travel down her neck. She excused herself from the table, went upstairs and within minutes had an excruciating headache and was violently sick. The family found her in a state

of confusion and called an ambulance. Lucy woke in hospital unable to recognise her husband of 26 years. When he

asked if I was OK I just replied to this "stranger" that the hospital ceiling tiles weren't straight,' says Lucy. Yet she was told she'd probably pulled a muscle in her neck and was discharged four hours later.

Lucy has no memory of what happened next. But her family say she spent the rest of the holiday in bed, before Andy drove them back home to

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Malvern, Worcestershire. He returned to work, while Sophie stayed home with Lucy. But she was becoming increasingly concerned about her mother. 'Apparently I kept falling asleep and wasn't "with it",' says Lucy. Sophie called the doctor and Lucy was taken back to hospital to be given a CT scan. Andy

met them at the neurology department to receive the devastating news.

Far from having a pulled muscle, Lucy had suffered a subarachnoid haemorrhage and two aneurysms, where the artery walls in her brain had swollen dangerously.

The doctors couldn't explain why it had happened, just that it was life-threatening. Lucy

was immediately transferred to Oxford's old Radcliffe Infirmary, where she

underwent microsurgery to insert a coil to stop the aneurysms bursting.

Although the operation was a success, Lucy's memories and motor functions were both distorted by the haemorrhage. 'I had no idea who I was. It was terrifying,' says Lucy.

In fact, the only thing she was certain of was that she couldn't stay in hospital long. 'I was insistent I was opening a floristry business called Shrinking Violet,' she says.

In reality Lucy was employed as an office manager at Malvern Town Council where she'd worked for four years. However

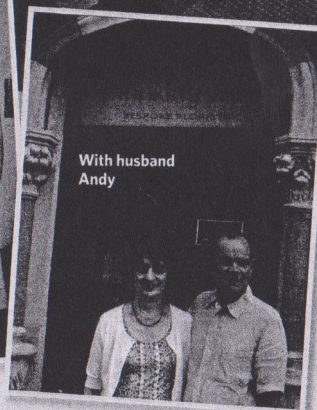
she'd always loved flowers. 'As a toddler I was allowed to pick tiny blue forget-me-nots in the garden,' says Lucy. 'At the council I would do their flower displays for free.'

After spending Christmas week in intensive care, Lucy was transferred to Coventry hospital where she began her physical rehabilitation. 'I couldn't even hold a pen. But they told me that when I could tick what I wanted to eat on the menu, and eat it, they would consider allowing me home.' By now, Lucy could at least remember her family, although her memories of their life before the stroke were foggy.

It took a month, but Lucy was discharged from Coventry



Lucy in her shop



With husband Andy

at the end of January 2007, her motor function sufficiently improved. But she still had to be reminded to do simple things, like getting dressed, eating and drinking.

'Nothing was automatic. It meant my confidence was very low,' Lucy says. But with the help of her occupational and speech therapists, Lucy was persuaded to sign up for an art course with the Acquired Brain Injury Education Service (ABIES) in Worcestershire.

There, she was given a sketch pad and pencil to copy a flower. 'They were the only things I felt like drawing. So I started collecting flowers from the garden, and then arranging

them in miniature bouquets afterwards.'

Over the next year, her confidence had grown so that she decided to book herself on a part-time one year floristry course.

In 2009, she completed her City and Guilds Level 3 Award in Creative Techniques and gained a Level 3 Award for Specialist Wedding Design and Bespoke Tributes.

Now there was no stopping her from pursuing her dream. Andy and

says. Within a few years she was making up three or four orders a week. In 2011, she registered her business, Shrinking Violet Bespoke Floristry.

When she wasn't in her workshop, Lucy would often get the train to Great Malvern to enjoy a cup of tea at the Lady Foley's Tea Room. One day while she was sitting on the train, she noticed a vacant shop unit on the platform. 'I thought I could use that room for my flower shop,' says Lucy. 'So I contacted the estate agent.'

A year later, Lucy finally

'Floristry comes naturally to me. My fingers just know what to do'

son Duncan created a workshop for Lucy with a counter and shelves inside a brick-built shed at the back of their Victorian property. Lucy's mum Sheila, then 75, rang a firm of local flower wholesalers who delivered a selection of blooms and foliage that Lucy used to make up bouquets.

At first it was just for fun. But then she started getting requests from family and friends. 'It was all word of mouth. I didn't advertise,' Lucy

signed the lease. Andy erected shelves and painted the walls white. Sophie and Lucy painted the doors purple, the colour of Lucy's logo, and bought wall units and drawers.

It took one month. On 22 March 2013 Lucy realised her dream and opened her very own floristry shop.

She sourced her flowers from online companies that bought direct from auctions in Holland and from two companies in Cornwall. 'I bought what I felt

Finding Support
Headway - the Brain Injury Association is a charity that helps people improve their lives after brain injury through a nurse-led helpline. You can call free on 0800 800 2244 or visit headway.org.uk

like buying and what didn't sell I dried and used in my artwork.'

Over the years, she built up a loyal stable of customers, including local churches and hotels. But in 2017, she decided to close the shop.

That August, she and Andy moved to Bath where their son Gordon had set up his own restaurant. She now spends her time making floral displays for the restaurant and babysitting Gordon's 2-year-old son, Leo.

'I still struggle with a lot of the basics. But floristry is one of the few things that comes naturally to me. It's like I don't have to remind myself what to do, my fingers just know.'

'I always told myself if I could fight my illness I could start my own business. Flowers bring people together and if I can help people through them it makes everything worthwhile.'