

Skin deep

'I'm white – and my sister is black'

They have different skin colours but grew up feeling and being treated the same. However, when *Grace Timothy*, 32, joined the beauty industry, she realised the difficulties facing her sister *Katey*, 42

PHOTOGRAPHY: KITTY GALE



I'm eight, a gangly child with long blonde hair, freckled cheeks and blue eyes framed by fair, stubby lashes. My skin is milky white, almost see-through – never more obviously so than when I hold my 18-year-old sister's hand. Katey's skin is the deepest chocolate brown – flawless and beautiful. And it smells divine, which I now know is thanks to Palmer's Coconut Oil. I don't see her all the time – Katey and my other half-siblings live with Dad's first wife in Surrey, while I live in Sussex with my parents – so this scent takes on a mystical quality. It's this that stood out for me as a kid, not the colour of Katey's skin.

My dad and his first wife adopted Katey when she was six months old. They also had four biological children and adopted a son, David. The marriage ended a few years later and I was born a year after Dad married my mum. I don't remember a moment where someone told me Katey and David – who is also black – were adopted. I remember conversations about who was studying what, who was smoking and who had a new girlfriend, but I'm not sure it occurred to

anyone to explain why they'd joined the family or about their skin colour. And I never thought to ask. Thanks to a shared love of clothes, eye-rolls over Dad's jokes and identical denim jackets, Katey and I seemed the most similar of my seven siblings.

It might sound naïve, but I genuinely didn't see more difference in her than I saw in the others. My sister Tab's undercut with bleached tips, my brother's reddish hair, Katey's afro... we all looked different. For Katey, there was similar nonchalance growing up. In such a family of adopted and biological kids, siblings and step-siblings, our personalities, tastes and lifestyles were diverse. What we looked like didn't matter. Her mum used the same shampoo on all her kids, cut their hair herself and forced the same plastic combs through Katey's tight curls – she and local hairdressers had no idea of the gentle care an afro requires.

When I talk to Katey about this now, she says it was a blessing, that she never felt singled out. It wasn't until she left school that she first encountered racism – a man in a club called her the n-word; she broke his

nose. 'I had lots of people behind me who had my back,' Katey says. 'It's worse for my son. He was with me when a carload of men shouted racist abuse as they drove past and he couldn't believe it. It rarely happens where we live in Epsom.'

University was where I heard my first racist joke. I was used to a TV version of racism by then, but hadn't heard it in real life. It was the kind of 'innocent' joke told by an idiot who was at pains to say he had black friends. But I couldn't be complicit. I don't recall a lesson from my parents on racism – maybe it came in the same breath as teaching me not to hit, steal or jump on the sofa, before I was old enough to remember the moment. In my mind, it was just obviously and innately not OK.

'My sister is black,' I replied, because I had no idea how else to respond. 'How?' the boy asked, followed by silence when I said she was adopted. I've now experienced this reaction so many times it no longer surprises me. In fact, I find it satisfying. A reminder to anyone tempted to throw in a racist joke: you never know where a black person's siblings are lurking.

But now, as a beauty editor, I think about

Above Sisters Grace and Katey share Christmas dinner in 1990. Right The sisters are still close today



her skin more than I ever did growing up. It's notoriously tough for black women to find suitable foundations, whole categories of make-up simply don't cater for the deepest skin tones, and afro hair requires such specialist attention, it's often left out of mainstream media altogether.

When Katey and I discuss our regimes, the differences become clear. She has the loveliest, least demanding skin, which she's cleansed and moisturised with Johnson's Baby Lotion forever. That's one product in place of seven in my cabinet. She began using foundation only a few years ago, mainly because of its SPF, and mascara even more recently. I, in contrast, have worn



foundation since my first breakout at 13 and, thanks to pores, broken veins, dark circles and pigmentation – classic hallmarks of pasty skin like mine – am never without it.

I am paler than most cosmetic companies care to imagine, especially once the SPF50 is on. I'm not thrilled about stepping out in hemlines above the ankle without a slick of self-tan to even out my skin tone, or without shaving my legs – something Katey has simply never had to consider. I don't hate my skin but it is high maintenance.

But ultimately, whatever issues I have, there's a solution on any beauty counter. Katey, not so much. 'I have to travel for specialist conditioners, weaves and combs,'

option to experiment

she says. 'And it isn't just a case of finding the right shade of foundation – I don't want to be stuck with rubbish texture and no SPF because only one shade comes close.'

Katey never wears lipstick or eyeshadow, as the pigments are rarely deep enough. 'It just doesn't show up on my skin,' she shrugs. 'At school, I felt left out when everyone was trying on make-up. But I never wanted to change myself. I just wanted the option to experiment. So I did it with fashion and hair extensions instead.'

Our approaches to hair couldn't be more different. I wash and blow-dry in under 10 minutes, with whatever I pick up from the supermarket. 'I do my own weave,' says Katey. 'I brush out my hair with an afro comb, plait it in circles, sew in a weave net to protect my natural hair, then weave in specialist hair. It takes about an hour and a half, but then it's done for up to 12 weeks.'

Things are getting better. 'I read about afro hair in a glossy mag the other day and was like, "Oh my God! It's happening!" I can even get the odd foundation at Boots and Superdrug now. The high street must be getting the message. But it's not perfect unless you want to spend a lot of money.'

Thankfully, it's set to improve further. Becca, Vichy, Illamasqua, Laura Mercier and Lancôme are among the brands extending their shade range and Estée Lauder has employed a UK head of cultural relevancy to ensure shopping for beauty products satisfies everyone. That's something both my sister and I are celebrating. ☺

THE SISTERS' BEST BEAUTY BUYS

For pale skin, by *Grace*



Intensive Skin Serum Concealer in Warm Ivory, £28, Bobbi Brown (bobbibrown.co.uk)
A concealer that vanishes on my skin, and doesn't crease beneath my eyes or flake. It's pricey, but cost per wear is low.

Gradual Tan Tinted Body Lotion, £15, St Tropez (boots.com)
Not as gradual as it used to be, this gives a shot of warmth from the first use. There's a colour guide when you apply – key for stopping pale skin streaking.

Illusion Hyaluronic Skin Tint in Shell, £50, Hourglass (hourglasscosmetics.com)
Just the right ratio of hydration to coverage, in a shade that leaves no tidemarks.

Anthelios XL Ultra-Light Fluid SPF50+, £16.50, La Roche-Posay (feclunique.com)
Experts say I've got to wear SPF50, but it's taken a while to find one that doesn't make me look ill.

Beautifying Composition Oil, £24, Aveda (aveda.co.uk)
My skin can be really dry without proper care, so I use oils in the shower and afterwards to lock in moisture.

For black skin, by *Katey*



Vitamin E Superdrug Skin Oil, £2.99, Superdrug (superdrug.com)
Just a drop of this stops my skin feeling tight in the winter.

Strong Roots Spray, £3.49, Palmer's Coconut Oil Formula (superdrug.com)
This is one of a variety of oils and serums that I use to stop my hair becoming brittle or breaking.

Studio Fix Fluid SPF15, £22, Mac (maccosmetics.co.uk)
Maybelline and Sleek do good colours for me, but the best is Mac. It has the added bonus of SPF, too.