

My skull split in two!

Lynda French, 50, has made an amazing recovery after a horrific accident

Looking at the X-ray showing her skull cracked from her forehead to her mouth, Lynda French, 50, can see why her family were warned she wouldn't survive her horrific car crash injuries.

But Lynda has astounded everyone with her recovery. 'I feel as if I'm looking at someone else's X-ray,' she says. 'It's hard to accept that it's my broken skull. There have been tough times, but I'll never complain because it was far worse for my husband and daughters.'

In March 2010, Lynda, a psychotherapist, was driving back to her office at about

3.30pm after a training session in Colchester, Essex. She remembers nothing about the accident but, according to police, another driver ploughed into Lynda, pushing her VW Polo off the road. The car hit one tree at high speed, and then smashed into another.

Lynda's skull was split in two and part of her brain was missing. Her neck was fractured in two places, her right leg was broken in four places and she'd broken 11 ribs. After being cut from the car unconscious, she was airlifted to The Royal London Hospital, Whitechapel. Michael, her husband of 25 years, and her daughters Lottie, 22, and Dani,

20, were told to get there as quickly as possible because she wasn't expected to survive.

But Lynda clung on to life and, over the next few weeks, surgeons battled to rebuild her body. She was kept in a medically induced coma and the family stayed at her bedside night and day. 'Tiny signs gave them hope,' says Lynda. 'My mum called me by my childhood nickname "Lyndieloo" and I squeezed her hand. That made her incredibly emotional.'

Then, six weeks after the crash, Lynda started to regain consciousness. Her family had been warned she might not be the same person because of her brain injuries. But amazingly, she recognised them.

'Coming out of a coma isn't a sudden moment like in films, it happens gradually and I have only snippets of memories,' Lynda explains. 'But I remember a feeling of warmth that my family were with me.'

'Michael, who is an engineer, made a three-hour round-trip to see me every day and my girls travelled from their university in Yorkshire at weekends. Knowing my family were there gave me super-strength.'

Three months after the accident, Lynda was transferred to Homerton University Hospital to start relearning basic skills such as washing, eating and dressing.

Then in June 2010, she was finally allowed to return to her home in

Southend-on-Sea. 'It was lovely to be in my own bed even though my room was upstairs and I was still on crutches. I had to go up and down on my bottom like a baby, but it was worth it.'

But in August, Lynda went back to hospital for more surgery to try to seal the five by two inch hole in her forehead using flesh, skin and an artery from her arm.

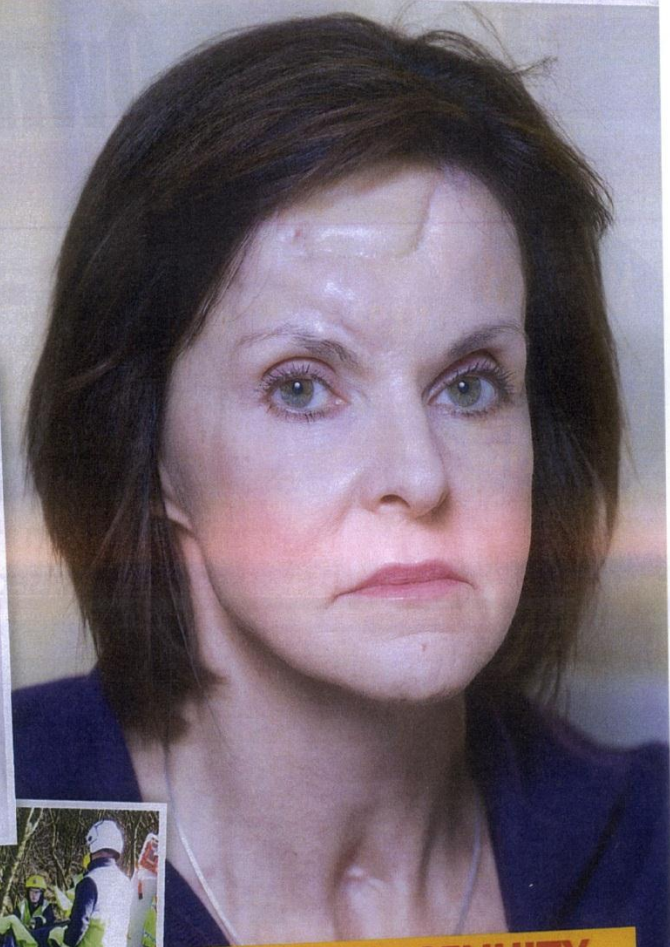
'Tiny signs gave my family hope'

'It was one operation after another,' she says. 'But five years earlier I had been through breast cancer and had a mastectomy, chemo and reconstructive surgery. In a way, that helped me. I knew I had already gone through so much and I felt I could do it again. I never once cried with self-pity and I never gave up hope because I was needed as a mum, wife and daughter. It didn't cross my mind that I might not survive.'

As she got better, the hardest thing was getting used to her changed appearance. 'I'd always liked to make the best of myself,' she says. 'When I looked in the mirror, I could see my face was very swollen and scarred and my hair had been shaved where the surgeons had operated.'

'My daughters were so positive about how well I was doing and kept reassuring me I was beautiful - that helped so much.'

But the skin graft on her forehead wasn't healing properly. Doctors even tried the ancient remedy of blood-sucking leeches. The idea was they would stop the blood supply to the wound, and give it a chance to heal. Two were positioned on Lynda's forehead



MEDICAL INGENUITY

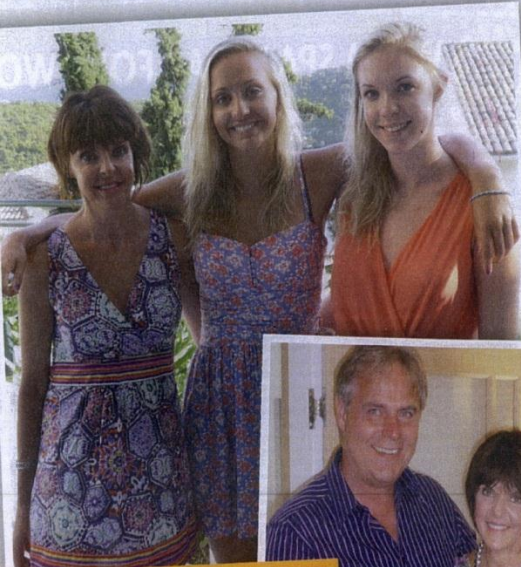
The impact of Lynda's horrendous accident (left) cracked her skull (far left). Although she survived, she was left with a hole in her head until surgeons came up with a more permanent solution

stronger,' she says. 'Now I can wash my hair and face without worrying about breaking the skin, and have started wearing make-up again. I can walk into a room without people taking one look at me and saying, "My God - what happened to you?"'

Lynda's accident has also left her with a changed outlook. She and Michael have now moved to Selby, Yorkshire, to be closer to their daughters. 'The enormity of the accident only recently sunk in and has made me appreciate even the tiny things in life so much more. I know I am lucky to be

able to think, talk, walk. Simple things I previously took for granted thrill me now, like feeling a breeze on my face as I walk the dog or hearing family chatter around the kitchen table,' she says. 'I'm getting stronger each day. I've even started driving again and hope to return to work soon. When I look at that X-ray I feel a sense of disbelief that it's my skull. But I also feel so lucky that I'm here at all.'

● Lynda is donating her fee for this story to the charity Saving Faces, which helps people with facial disfigurements. For more information, go to www.savingfaces.co.uk



REASONS TO LIVE

Lynda says the support of her daughters Dani and Lottie (above) and husband Michael kept her going

