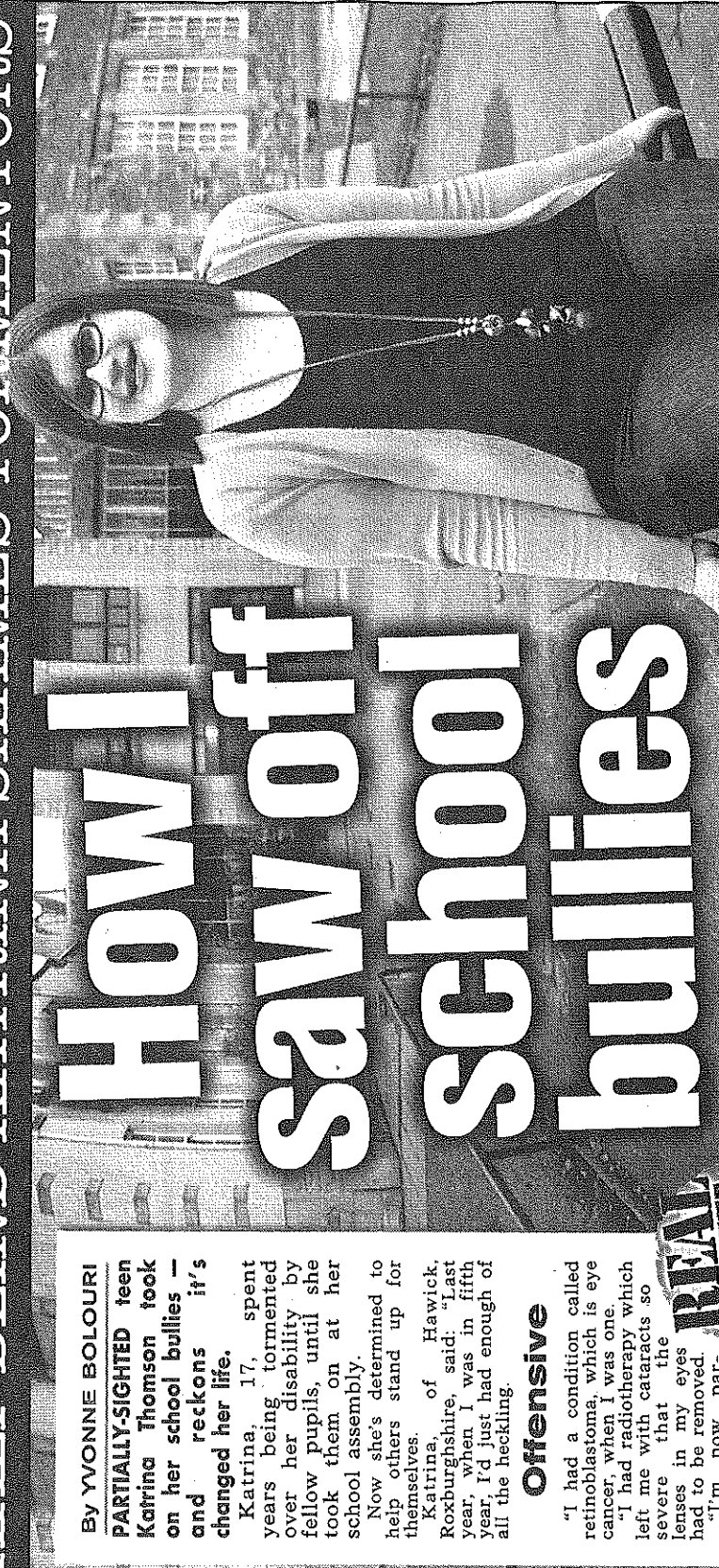


HALF-BLIND KATRINA SHAMBERS TORMENTORS



By YVONNE BOLOURI
PARTIALLY-SIGHTED teen Katrina Thomson took on her school bullies — and reckons it's changed her life.

Katrina, 17, spent years being tormented over her disability by fellow pupils, until she took them on at her school assembly.

Now she's determined to help others stand up for themselves.

Katrina, of Hawick, Roxburghshire, said: "Last year, when I was in fifth year, I'd just had enough of all the heckling.

Offensive

"I had a condition called retinoblastoma, which is eye cancer, when I was one.

"I had radiotherapy which left me with cataracts so severe that the lenses in my eyes had to be removed.

"I'm now partially sighted and because my glasses are much thicker than normal, some pupils thought this was hilarious.

"They'd bump into me and call me Bo Selecta, after the comedy character with thick specs.

"It went on and on, until one girl called me something extremely offensive.

"I was so shocked and hurt by her comment that I decided it really wasn't on.

"I told my headteacher

How I saw off school bullies

what was going on, and asked if I might address the school assembly. I wanted to talk to my school about living with a long-term disability.

"I don't believe ignorance is any excuse. People have to be responsible for their own actions, especially when they are specifically targeted against others."

You could have heard a pin drop when Katrina stood on the stage at Hawick High School to tell her fellow

pupils how damaging bullying can be. She said: "It doesn't have to be physical. Verbal bullying is just as bad.

"I told them what had happened to me, why I was partially-sighted, why I had to wear thick glasses and what living as a partially-sighted person was like."

Those responsible slunk deeper into their chairs. At the end of her talk, the pupils clapped and cheered. Katrina added: "The bullying stopped from that minute. The bullies them-

elves didn't apologise — they were either too scared or too ashamed — but no one targeted me again."

Katrina is now at Borders College studying social care. She said: "I want to work with people like myself."

"I work with Haggye, a Scottish youth forum for people with sight loss, and I've just launched my own project called Tackling The Borders, where I will go to schools and groups to speak about living with sight loss."

Katrina believes tackling

the bullies has increased her confidence and self-esteem. She said: "Before, I always worried about what people thought about me.

"Now I put myself first — and in helping myself, I'm also helping others."

© The Long Term Condition Alliance Scotland has launched a campaign with the message, "My condition, My terms, My life" to show that having a long-term disability does not stop you being in charge of your own life. For details, text SELF to 64446, call 0800 993 0124, or visit www.myconditionmylife.org

