

25th Annual Remembrance Ceremony: for those who lose their lives to illicit drugs

Weston Park, Yarralumla; Monday, 26th October 2020

Reflection by Jennie Ross-King

First and foremost, I would like to thank Marion, Bill their families and all of those at Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform for having me here today.

Alex was born on 25th May 1999 and went to the angels on 12th January 2019. Alex was 19 years old.

Alex had a reasonably uncomplicated life. She went to year 12 at school. She worked a casual job from the age of 13 starting at “the Chicken shop” for a little spending money and after leaving school Alex worked in the family business. She had no immediate plans on what she was going to do for a career, however in the first instance Alex had plans to see the world and restore her beloved 1970 VW Beetle back to its original glory, or at least as much as her savings would allow in the short term.

Alex, like many 19-years old, went out partying on weekends, slept in till midday, had an untidy room, and rest assured she could be a cheeky brat. Alex is your typical, teenager. Alex is your, mischievous, outgoing, boundary pushing, free spirited, loving and caring teenager. She restored a little humanity, fun, sunshine but most of all craziness back into your life. Alex was everyone’s best friend.

I am still in a world of disbelief that this has even happened and that I am even standing before you today, because THIS doesn’t happen to us. This happens to some other family that we read about in the newspapers and listen to on the news. We are a family like any other which has had good times and not so good times...BUT NOT THIS!

Our story is not one of addiction, a struggled life on drugs, a torn apart family or that of mental health. Our story is one of pushing boundaries, rites of passage and experimentation. Ours is a story just like your story, our children are exposed to drugs in their everyday life. Some just say no, but many will push boundaries. Many will experiment and nothing bad will happen. That was our story, that was Alex’s journey. That was until things went terribly wrong and nobody knew what was happening, not even Alex.

Rather than talk about Alex today, which don’t get me wrong I love doing at any opportunity. I thought I would try and set up lots of other opportunities later down the track for myself and quite possibly another Mum, Dad, parent, family or friend to talk about their special person.

This conversation starts when, I recall the day my beautiful friend Nik lost her daughter Chole. Chole died by suicide. I remember so clearly when I said to my sisters shaking my head, ‘My God, how do you come back from something like this? How do you lose a child and keep living?’ I would think about Nik and Chole every day. I wanted so much to reach out to her and talk. But in most cases, I didn’t. I didn’t because I thought I would be disturbing her in some way, I thought what she needed was space, I didn’t want to bother her. What if she was having a bad day? Nik would call if she needed me, I told her to call me

if she needed anything let me know how I could help, anything she needed. Thing, is she never called, and I rarely called or messaged? I have since learned you don't come back from losing your child, it changes you forever. It's not something you get over, ever. The loss becomes a part of you.

So now I am my friend, I now know I should have called, I should have messaged. I now know that she would have said if the time wasn't right or if I didn't get a response, the time wasn't right, and that's OK! I now know she couldn't tell me what she needed or how I could help, because she didn't know herself. We live everyday one moment at a time the smallest thing can and will trigger a flood of emotion. What can you do? A small grocery shop, a precooked, reheat meal, a little note to say I am with you, or even better, share a memory of our child. Please don't ever be scared of saying our child's name! We long to hear it in conversation, in a story, in someone else's memory.

How do you say their name how do you bring that into a conversation? Our children had a life, they experienced things just like your children have, are and will. When telling us about how fussy your children are with food, or how they love or dislike school. Ask us, 'gee did Alex have any foods she hated or refused to eat'? Alex would tell people she was allergic to baked beans just so she didn't have to eat or even touch them, and no, I have no idea why, I don't even think I ever tried to feed them to her.

My point is we treasure every moment we had and every moment you had with our Angels. We treasure every photo and every memory and we want them to be apart of our future in those memories even though they are not physically here.

When you see us looking – normal, we are anything but – we just want to be seen as being normal.

Illicit drugs, law reform, drug policy, I will tell you these words bring our some very interesting comments and conversations, usually amongst our elected officials. There comments are dangerous and unfounded.

One NSW State Minister claimed – when referring to strip searching and pill testing in music festivals. He **would want** his underage sons to be striped searched if police 'felt they were at risk of doing something wrong'.

So just to clarify, this minister would prefer his sons to be 'strip search' if a police officer had a feeling, they were doing something wrong, just a feeling no evidence? Or maybe they possibly had a sniffer dog (which have less than a 50% accuracy rate) sat next to his son in a group of people.

All instead of concurring with a wide range of health professionals including, The Royal Australasian College of Physicians, Australasian college of emergency medicine, Pharmaceutical Society of Aust and the list goes on. This is simply negligence on the governments part, simply because it fits their political or moral agenda.

By prohibiting and restricting parents and young people from knowing more, they are effectively preventing them from having meaningful conversations about the effects some drugs have on people, physically, emotionally, environmental factors and how to get help.

Certain drugs are not illegal because they are dangerous, they are dangerous because they are illegal.

I quote the Dalai Lama to you, our elected officials – ‘When you talk, you are only repeating what you already know. BUT when you listen you may learn something new. I appeal to our elected officials across the states and country, please start to listening.