

Reflection by Mackenzie Leecroft

I would like to pay my respects to everyone here today who has lost a family member, friend or loved one to drugs. I know this pain too well, and I am sorry for anyone who has had the same experience I did.

It was a warm sunny day in January, and we were excited to be heading to enjoy a day out with mates at a music festival. Unfortunately, I wouldn't know until that afternoon, it would be the worst day of my life. Alex looked stunning, wearing a brand-new golden lace dress she had purchased for the day. Her luscious blonde hair was shining in the sun as I first saw her before we boarded the bus to take us there. She was shitty with me for some reason I can't even remember, which wasn't unusual! She gave me a half-arsed hug, but I was just happy to see her.

Fast forward to the party bus, we were about halfway there when Alex came to me and mentioned that she was taking her first MDMA cap for the day. I said no worries, just remember to pace yourself. I wasn't worried, as we had done this before, and nothing horrible had ever happened. The bus continued for another half hour until we reached the festival in Parramatta. We hopped off the bus and walked a short distance to the venue. As we were nearing the entrance to the festival, Alex came to me in a bit of a panic as she realised there would be sniffer dogs at the entrance to the festival. I was also carrying in caps for myself and another friend and pleaded with Alex to give me her caps, and I would carry them in for her. But she stubbornly refused and said we couldn't afford to get caught, as we were heading off on a trip to Bali in a week's time. Alex then consumed the other MDMA caps she had. Alex had never taken that many caps at once before.

Eventually, we got into the festival without any issue or consequence with law enforcement or sniffer dogs.

In hindsight, it makes me angry; Alex didn't even need to take the rest of the caps.

The day was going well at the start. The drugs were starting to take effect on Alex and me (in a good way at first). We were all having a great time at that point, enjoying the music and amazing atmosphere of the festival.

It got to around early noon when the sun was at its hottest burning everyone who wasn't under the only big tree in the park with shade. The day started to take its toll on Alex; it was hot, the sun was beaming down, and things began

to go from bad to worse. Alex had been drinking alcohol during the day and had several water bottles.

Alex became hot, bothered and agitated as the drugs started to peak. Alex's body began to react negatively to the side effects of the MDMA, extreme heat and alcohol concoction.

She was rushed to the medical tent by friends as she started to faint. I ran to the tent to find she had been taken inside to be treated. The triage nurse tried to calm me down and sugarcoat what was happening, but I somehow knew what was happening. I just had this feeling in my stomach I had never felt before and knew whatever was happening was serious and not good. I asked the nurse impatiently and firmly, "she is overdosing, isn't she?". She looked at me with a sort of surprised expression on her face and gave me a tiny sigh and nod of the head. I don't remember what happened next; what she said? Everything became a blur then it froze. My world just stopped. Every emotion I could possibly feel, I felt. It was the second worst feeling I have ever had.

After gathering myself some, I knew I had to call Jen, Alex's mum. Although I didn't know what her reaction was going to be or what she would say, I did know Jen would be able to calm me down and ground me. At this point, her parents didn't truly understand the actual seriousness of the situation and were saying it was ok. We are on our way. We will bring you all home. They thought she was going to be ok. We all thought that she would be ok?

Alex didn't come home with us that day.

Our day started on a party bus and ended in an ambulance to Westmead hospital. The emergency doctors worked so hard for several hours to reverse the effects of the MDMA, but later that night, on Saturday, 12 January 2019, I lost my best friend and first love.

Nothing can ever prepare you for moments like this in life. We never took drugs thinking of the consequences of taking them; nothing terrible had ever happened to us or anyone we knew. Alex was a vibrant, outgoing soul with her whole life ahead of her. We all took drugs that day, and we all messed up, I guess, BUT nobody, none of us, deserved to die because of it, least of all Alex.

Alex wanted to travel and experience everything the world had to offer. She had recently bought herself a vintage VW beetle and had plans to restore it. Just like us, Alex wanted to live her life like any other 19-year-old and enjoy it to the fullest. She certainly didn't expect it all to come to an end when she set

out that morning. Unfortunately, neither did the other 2 young people whose lives were taken unexpectedly by drugs that summer.

If instead of sniffer dogs at the gate, there was credible real-time information available. If there was a drug-checking service that analysed the contents of drugs to help young people understand the unknown and potentially dangerous substances in their illicit drugs. Give us information, peer to peer advice based on our test results, and encourage us to choose and make better choices AT THAT MOMENT!

Put information in the hands of us young people so we can be better informed, and we all come home from a day out with nothing more than sunburn.

In conclusion, I leave you with this question...

Who is committing the bigger crime?

Young people who choose not to listen to the government and law enforcement or the government not listening to the experts and the evidence, and young people die because of it.

Thank you