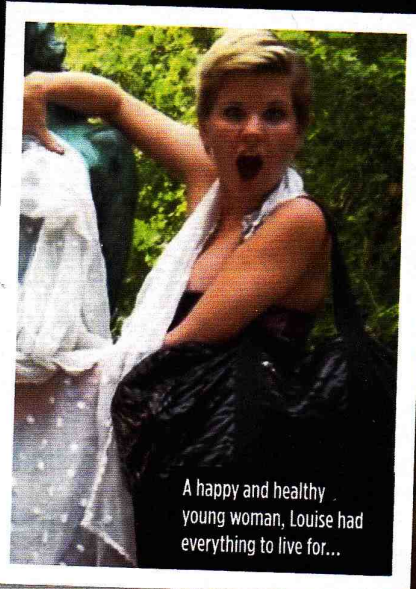


# Ignorance KILLED MY CHILD

*All parents worry their kids are trying drugs – but you probably haven't heard of ketamine. This powerful and often misunderstood drug, that can cost less than a bottle of wine, killed Vicky Unwin's only daughter, Louise. Now Vicky, 53, is determined that no other parent suffers the same heartache...*



A happy and healthy young woman, Louise had everything to live for...

**T**o describe Louise in just a few words is impossible. She had a huge personality and could talk to anyone. She was just 21 when she died.

According to police, Louise had spent her last day gardening with her best friend and housemate. Some friends had come over, Louise had cooked dinner, they'd drunk beer and, at some stage, they also took ketamine. Later that evening Louise had a bath. Three hours or so afterwards, her housemate found her dead in the bath. She called an ambulance then tried to resuscitate her but it was too late.

The verdict of an inquest into her death was 'death through non-dependent use of drugs'. Ketamine is a powerful horse tranquiliser and it's thought Louise had fallen asleep in the bath and the drug would have made her lose consciousness and so she drowned.

When Louise died she'd just returned from a holiday in Australia and I think she may have been

slightly low when she took the drug. We'd talked about drugs and she'd told me that she knew they messed up lives and wasn't interested. So hearing how she died really hit me. It's too easy for young people to think that 'a little bit won't hurt' but, as Louise's death shows, even dabbling with drugs can be lethal.

## Foolish mistake

As all parents know, you can't stop your kids from doing anything. All you can do is love them and help them make the right decisions so that they don't die through ignorance, like I believe Louise sadly did. It breaks my heart to know she lost her life because of a foolish decision.

While young people Louise's age understand the dangers of hard drugs, like heroin and cocaine, ketamine is so easy to get hold of and so cheap that they tend to underestimate the risks. Had she been more aware of the effects of this drug, Louise might still be alive.

The last time I saw my daughter was a week before she died. I'd gone

around to her flat with ingredients to make a curry. I remember how she'd asked me to go outside in the dark to look at the kiwi fruit she'd been growing. She had so much to live for. She had so many friends and had just applied to go to art school. She was also a talented photographer and a DJ, and she loved to come home and cook for my husband, Ross, and her brother Tommy, who's 23. However, despite her grown-up qualities, she was still my little girl. And this makes knowing that she cut her life short with a sad mistake, so unbearable.

## Final goodbye

In the weeks following Louise's death, I existed in a daze. The hardest moment was going to see Louise's body at the coroner's office. That was when I had to accept that she was dead. Tragically, there was glass between us so I could only see her and not kiss or touch her. But she looked so peaceful.

Eight days after Louise's death, we held her funeral. Through

WORDS: CELIA BACK. PHOTOS: ANNE-MARIE BICKERTON





Louise at 14 with mum Vicky, grandmother Sheila and brother Tommy, 15

## LOUISE'S LIFE WAS SADLY CUT SHORT AFTER JUST ONE BAD DECISION

### WHAT IS KETAMINE?

- \* Ketamine is a tranquilliser used on horses and large animals.
- \* It's also called Special K, Vitamin K, Super K and just K.
- \* There are around 125,000 users.
- \* It can be snorted, swallowed and injected.
- \* Users can become withdrawn and paranoid. It can also lead to memory loss, hallucinations, increased heart rate, kidney and bladder damage.
- \* Users can become psychologically addicted.
- \* The price of ketamine varies from £6 to £20 for one gram.
- \* For help, go to [addaction.org.uk](http://addaction.org.uk) or [talktofrank.com](http://talktofrank.com).
- \* To help us educate people on the dangers of ketamine email us at [ketcam2011@gmail.com](mailto:ketcam2011@gmail.com) or visit [louiseccattell.com](http://louiseccattell.com).

Ketamine is an illegal Class C drug but can be bought for as little as £6



Facebook and word of mouth, over 400 people attended, all dressed in their brightest colours, just as Louise used to wear. It was wonderful to see how much she was loved. But as the coffin arrived the reality hit that I was at my child's funeral and I felt my legs buckle. I had to be steadied by two of my oldest friends. Surrounded by friends and family I listened to the moving poems and tributes.

### Raising awareness

A few weeks later, some of Louise's friends helped me with the painstaking task of sorting through her belongings. I held a 'keepsake day,' where I invited them to take clothes, bits of jewellery, bric-a-brac or wine glasses. It was a lovely day.

Since Louise's death, I've felt as if I'm in a different world. It's just so hard to believe that she'll never again walk through the front door.

As a family, we talk about Louise a lot. We've also made a makeshift memorial to her under our stairs, with scented candles, flowers from our garden and photos.

To help something positive come out of this tragedy, I've thrown myself into raising awareness about the dangers of ketamine, its addictive qualities and the damage it can do to both mind and body.

Ross and I have set up a memorial website for Louise, and asked people to share their experiences with ketamine with us via email. We'd like to use other people's stories, as well as Louise's, to help make a film about ketamine for the internet. If I can also get the film shown in schools, I know that I'll have done what I can to help make sure that another mother doesn't lose her daughter in the same way I have. ☹