



'I WISH I'D TALKED TO MY DAUGHTER about drugs'

When 18-year-old Ellie Rowe died suddenly at a music festival, her mother, Wendy Teasdill was shocked to discover she'd taken ketamine

Ellie was the star of our family – the one all our hopes were pinned on. She was so lively and intelligent, she wanted to be a lawyer and would have been the first in her generation of the family to go to university. It never crossed my mind to talk to her about drugs, I didn't think I needed to. She was always such a sensible girl.

In the summer of 2013, Ellie had just completed five A levels and she was planning a year out to volunteer in Nepal when she announced she was going to BoomTown, a festival in Winchester. Ellie and her sisters Iona and Belinda have been to Glastonbury Festival every year of their lives as I run the yoga tent there. So the thought of her attending BoomTown didn't worry me at all, especially as she was going with a friend to volunteer as a steward with Oxfam.

The Wednesday before the festival, I hugged Ellie goodbye before she got into the car with her dad, my ex-husband Bradley, on her way to the festival. I was headed off to teach at a yoga camp a few miles away, and the next day we exchanged a couple of mundane texts – Ellie even asked me to order her some more contact lenses.

The worst wait

The following evening, I was heading for a sauna after teaching my classes when I received a text from my youngest daughter, Belinda, to say the police had been at the house looking for me. With little reception in the field, I managed to ring the police, but the signal was bad and they insisted on coming to see me. I sat down beside the campfire alone, waiting, knowing that something terrible must have happened.

When the police car eventually pulled up, I ran towards it. They made me sit down and told me the news I'd dreaded – Ellie had been found unconscious in her tent and paramedics were unable to revive her. My daughter was dead.

You'd think you would scream or howl, but you go into shock. I even found myself



Happier times: Ellie with mum Wendy and, below, in festival mode



feeling sorry for the policeman as it was the first time he'd had to break such news. I tried calling Bradley, but couldn't get an answer as it was so late. The policeman insisted I wake up some friends to keep me company and we sat by the fire all night staring into the flames and chanting.

It seemed so unreal

At 7.30 the next morning, I went straight to Bradley's. He was groggy with sleep and went into deep shock. We phoned our eldest daughter, Iona, and she came to meet us on our way to my house. I just remember hugging and crying in the middle of the street. When we told Belinda, she was inconsolable. None of it seemed real.

That afternoon we drove to Winchester

'If any good can come from my daughter's death, I want her story to be known'

to see Ellie all together. I'm glad I got to see her that one last time. The police said they couldn't yet confirm the cause of death, but there was an indication she had taken ketamine.

We later found out that Ellie had bought two grams of ketamine for £40 at the festival;

apparently it was the third time she'd taken the drug. I'm told she was having a great time and had been singing all afternoon before going back to the tent to take the drug. Ellie lay on her back and fell unconscious. By the time her friend tried to rouse her, she was cold.

People don't usually die from taking ketamine, so instead of blaming that, I tried to blame myself. Ellie's tonsils were very swollen when they tried to revive her and as she had an allergy to ant bites,

I worried that I hadn't made sure she'd packed her antihistamine. I even blamed myself for deciding not to have her tonsils taken out years before.

Six months later, an inquest confirmed the cause of death was a mixture of ketamine and alcohol. Ellie had snorted one line of 200mg and drunk a few cans of lager, but combined it was enough to kill her. I was so shocked – my beautiful, genius girl – how could she have been so stupid? I didn't even know what ketamine was, or how you'd take it. But now I think why didn't I find out? Why didn't we have those conversations?

When people say to me, 'My child wouldn't do that,' I think, well, neither would mine. Ellie would never have wanted her name out there as an example of what not to do, but at the same time, she would have wanted to help people. So if any good can come of her death, I want her story to be known. I'd tell parents to keep talking to teenagers – have the conversations I didn't. Don't tell them not to do it – that doesn't work, but make sure they know the facts, so they are aware of the risks. Yes, Ellie was unlucky, but anyone can be unlucky. Losing a child is the worst thing that can happen and I don't want it to happen to any other mother.

*** To donate to the charity Ellie planned to volunteer for in her gap year, visit umbrellanepal.org/ellierowe**