



Kelley McEnergy Baker

Died Age 23

Ecstasy

It was the evening of November 14, 1999. Two police officers and my sister came to my door in suburban Chicago to deliver the horrific news: my 23-year-old daughter Kelley was dead.

I felt numb; my younger daughter—Kelley’s only sibling—fell into my arms, crying hysterically at the news her sister was gone. Somehow, I gathered up all the strength I had to ask, “How?” The officers told me Kelley had overdosed on Ecstasy. They did their best to explain to me what Ecstasy was, but that night it was falling on deaf ears. It had to be a mistake, I thought; this couldn’t possibly have happened to my sweet Kelley.

When Kelley was young it was just the two of us. Her father left when she was just two. I was in sales and on the road a great deal, but Kelley and I were close and enjoyed spending the time we had together. When Kelley was seven, I married again and my daughter had the family she’d always wanted. I was able to quit work and be a stay-at-home mom for the first time, and four years later, I was blessed with another daughter. Kelley seemed so very happy—until high school.

High school is a trying time for parents and teens, and we were no different. Kelley was a typical teenager—she was on the pompon squad and had an active social life with lots of friends coming over just to “hang out.” She dressed in the latest fashions, and she got a job at the local movie theater that gave her all the free movie passes she wanted. But like all teens, Kelley pushed the envelope at times. I always knew that drugs were out there, and I knew I had to talk to Kelley

about alcohol, drugs and cigarette smoking. But, it was a hard subject for me because, plain and simple, I didn’t know what I was talking about.

Kelley knew I had never done any drugs—I just never had any interest in them, and besides, my parents threw the fear of God into me about trying any sort of drug. Still, Kelley and I did have the “drug talk,” and Kelley told me there was some drinking and marijuana use at her school but that I didn’t have to worry about it because she wasn’t involved. I believed her until that night in 1991 when I got a call from the ER of our local hospital.



I was told I should come down immediately. Apparently, all of Kelley’s friends had been drinking and they wanted her to try some too. She drank 100-proof vodka shots. Kelley was lucky; she just had to have her stomach pumped.

Unfortunately, it was about this time that I was divorcing Kelley’s stepfather. In the midst of the divorce, Kelley asked me, “Who am I going to call Dad now?” It broke my heart to hear that. I knew she was hurting and so very vulnerable, and looking back, I feel it was then, early in 1992, that Kelley began experimenting with other drugs. It started with smoking pot and went on to harder drugs. Kelley’s demeanor seemed to change drastically and her attitude toward just about everything took a turn for the worse. At times I felt I didn’t even know her. Drugs had robbed me of the daughter I knew.

After she graduated high school in 1994, Kelley spent some time overseas with her birth father, trying to make up

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for lost time. After she came home, she spent a year or two taking some college classes before deciding that wasn't for her. She wasn't a kid any longer and she wanted the freedom to come and go as she pleased. Ultimately, Kelley hooked up with a group of people that traveled around following the Grateful Dead.

There wasn't a day that I didn't worry about her—about what kinds of people she was with and what drugs she might be using. When I asked her about it, she'd tell me that she had tried just about everything but didn't like anything except smoking marijuana. I told her, "Kelley, I don't like you smoking marijuana, not to mention the fact that it's an illegal drug." She looked at me as though I had two heads.

I wanted to believe Kelley was telling me the truth, but part of me was scared to death she was involved with God only knows what. The idea that she was involved with Ecstasy never crossed my mind. I never even heard of the drug until that night the police came to my door.

Weeks after Kelley died, I found out there was more to the story than I'd been told. Not only was Kelley taking Ecstasy, a dealer had taken advantage of her vulnerability and gotten her involved in selling the drug to others. I was shocked and ashamed, and I just kept thinking, "How could something with a name as innocent as Ecstasy be so evil?"

Since Kelley died I've learned plenty about Ecstasy. Intellectually, I know it was Kelley's decision to start using

drugs and to get involved with Ecstasy, but my heart asks, "Where did I go wrong? What could I have done differently?" I think I'll feel this way until the day I die. What I know now is that parents need to become information junkies when it comes to drugs and their children.

There are so many drugs out in the world that can harm and kill our children, or perhaps land them in jail for a very long time. Parents have to become as knowledgeable as they possibly can about all of these drugs so they can do what I couldn't do with Kelley: talk intelligently with their kids. I say "with" rather than "to" because as parents we need to open up the lines of communication with our kids.

Kelley will always be my oldest child. I wear a silver ring I had made with the word "Always" inscribed on it, just to keep her close to me at all times. But it took losing her for me to become an expert about Ecstasy. My younger daughter saw first-hand the way Ecstasy can shatter lives as well as dreams, and she's determined not to make the same mistakes Kelley made. I'm not willing to take that for granted. I'll be talking with her often about Ecstasy, and about other drugs. I'll be asking her over and over who she's hanging out with, what she's doing and where she's going. I've already told her I plan to be so involved in her life over the next several years that she may well hate me. That's all right. I only wish I could have had Kelley hate me.

~Kate Patton, Forever Kelley's Mom

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