

SHE WAS MY SUPPORT IN THE WORST OF TIMES

Vicky Unwin, 55, and Amanda Roberts 56, both live in London. Mandy, a doctor specialising in STDs and HIV, is divorced and has three daughters aged 21, 20 and 14. Vicky, a publisher, is married with a son, 24. Her daughter, Louise, who died from a ketamine overdose in 2011, would have been 23 last December.



VICKY SAYS "When you're told that your 21-year-old daughter has tragically died, it doesn't matter who tells you. You just don't want to

hear it. In our case, it fell to my great friend Mandy, who had been house-sitting for us in London while we were abroad, to call us.

The police had come to our house at 7.30am to tell our son, Tommy, as next of kin, that his beautiful sister Louise had drowned in the bath after mistakenly taking a ketamine overdose. Tommy, then 23, was too shocked to speak so Mandy had called my husband Ross at his office in Geneva. When I heard Ross's key in the lock that day at first I assumed he'd forgotten something, but when he came upstairs I knew something dreadful had happened. I thought one of our parents had died. And then he said, "Louise has died."

Louise was not in any way a regular drug user but while young people understand the dangers of hard drugs, such as heroin, ketamine is so cheap and easy to get hold of that they underestimate the risks. She was just about to start art college and was sharing a flat. We discovered she'd had friends over for dinner and afterwards they'd taken what they thought was a harmless drug. She then ran herself a bath but must have fallen asleep and, as the drug made her lose consciousness, she drowned.

While still desperately trying to make sense of this devastating news, I was also relieved that Mandy had



“Mandy had to break the news that no parent ever wants to hear”

been there when the police had arrived so Tommy wasn't alone. Through the weeks following Louise's death I operated on complete autopilot and it was great to have Mandy there.

It's hard to explain just how someone being there – even if you don't really know what they are doing – is such a comfort. Ross and I were too numb with grief to really talk and we had to deal with lots of necessary admin, so just

having someone to make tea, buy the milk and bread and, most importantly, pour the wine, was a lifesaver.

After she had broken the terrible news to us that morning, one of the first things she did was call our closest friends, so, when Ross and I flew back, we walked into a house full of people and flowers. I don't think we bought or made food for the next fortnight. Mandy cooked wonderful stews and

meals. And she also tended to all the cut flowers that people brought. After the flowers died she took the rose petals and dried them so we still have a potpourri to remind us of the wonderful tributes to Louise.

Our daughter was bright, popular and vivacious. She had everything to live for. No one can bear to imagine losing a child and I've found that although many friends are well meaning they are often unintentionally insensitive to the eternity of such a loss. They chatter away about their children – contemporaries of Louise – yet never mention her. I would love them to mention her name so we can remember Louise together instead of trying to pretend she never existed.

Mandy isn't like that. She will often recall funny anecdotes of life with Louise. And she is one of the few people I can let off steam to when I'm frustrated at other people's insensitivity. She's a great listener and is also one of the rare friends who, almost two years after Louise's death, still asks how I'm really doing. She gets it.

A true friend is someone you can say anything to and call at any time. Mandy is definitely one of those.”

“Vicky's always been there for me when life got hard”



AMANDA SAYS “Calling Ross about Louise's death was the hardest thing I've ever had to do. I was in disbelief that something so tragic could happen to such a happy, loving family.

I've been pleased to be a support in any way during such a terrible time, but Vicky has also always been there for me – especially when my marriage ended. I'd been living in France, and returning to the UK with my daughters was hard. She and Ross invited me to stay, which is why I was house-sitting for them when Ross was working in Switzerland.

Vicky is very sensitive and caring, and has been through so much over the past two years. I've been there for her but I know she'd do exactly the same for me.”

✦ *Vicky is an ambassador for the Angelus Foundation, dedicated to raising awareness of legal highs. If you'd like to donate, visit angelusfoundation.com. w&h*