



## Appendix C – Address on the death of Annabel Catt by her brother Antony<sup>1</sup>

Good morning. My name is Antony Catt and Annabel Catt was my little sister.

On Sunday the 18th of February, just after six am, I was lying in my bed telling myself to get up. I'd moved to Canberra three weeks prior and had decided the night before that I would drive to the South Coast and go surfing.

When my phone rang I didn't think anything of it. My girlfriend was on holidays in the US and I just thought that it was her. When I picked up the phone there was a stranger on the line. His voice was shaky and he told me that he was from the intensive care unit at Mona Vale Hospital. It was obvious that he had really bad news because he couldn't find the words to say what it was he had rung to tell me. I told him to just give it to me but instead he put Dad on the phone.

Dad told me that Annabel had taken ecstasy and that she was gone. He then passed the phone on to Mum who offered words of comfort. I told both my parents that I loved them and they said how much they loved me. The phone call was very brief; none of us really knew what to say.

That is how this nightmare began.

Some people will always think poorly of Annabel because of the manner in which she died but defending Annabel isn't why I am here today. Annabel had everything to live for and those that knew Annabel well will always remember a happy person, beautiful in every way, and that is what is

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<sup>1</sup> House of Representatives, *Debates*, 28 May 2007, pp 69 – 71.

important to me. I am here to tell you about the tragic death of my little sister to illustrate the very real dangers of drug use, in the hope that what happened to her, doesn't happen to you.

On the 17th of February Annabel went to the Good Vibrations music festival with her best friends. I want to pause at this moment to let you know that my family is very close to Annabel's friends and we bear no grudge toward them. They loved her and she loved them. They are devastated just like us.

This is what Annabel took the day before she died—a capsule. It looks harmless enough doesn't it?—

I know what's in it, but do you? Annabel didn't know what was in the capsule that she took at Good Vibrations either. She thought that it was ecstasy. It wasn't—it was the far more toxic substance PMA. Street names for PMA include red Mitsubishi, Dr Death, red death, red killer and death. Because of its lethal reputation, PMA generally isn't a sought after drug. Despite this, drug manufacturers sometimes pass PMA off as ecstasy because the chemicals that go into ecstasy are harder to obtain. The great worry with PMA is that when it kills, it usually kills in clusters. I am extremely grateful that nobody else has died as a result of taking a capsule from the same batch as Annabel.

After Good Vibrations Annabel went to a friend's house to stay the night. Annabel and her best friend had a temperature and were acting a little weird—but they had taken what they thought was ecstasy; these were not abnormal symptoms.

Sometime after four in the morning, Annabel's friend was awoken by Annabel suffering violent fits. An ambulance was called but by the time it got there my little sister was effectively dead. Annabel's temperature was so high that her body just couldn't cope anymore. To put it bluntly, this tiny little capsule had cooked and destroyed Annabel's body from the inside out.

Like all of our family, Annabel was on the organ donor register. We would have been pleased if every part of Annabel's beautiful body could have been used to save the life of another human being. Despite this, there was only one part of Annabel that the doctors could use to help someone else—the corneas in her eyes have restored the sight of two people. Her corneas could only be used because they do not receive any of the body's blood flow. Every other part of her body had been so destroyed by the drug rushing through her system that it was useless to anyone else. It's horrible and it's extremely scary, but this is perhaps the best example of how much damage this little capsule can do to your body.

I can just imagine what was going through Annabel's mind when she took the capsule that killed her. She would have realised it was dangerous, but she wouldn't have believed that of all the people who took ecstasy that day, that she was holding the capsule with the deadly dose of poison.

The people who made the capsule that killed Annabel knew how deadly it was but they didn't care; they just wanted to make a quick buck, even if it killed someone. That's the thing with these types of drugs, you have no idea what's really in them and there is no way you can trust the people making or supplying them, no matter who they are.

It wouldn't have mattered if it was the first, second or hundredth time Annabel took ecstasy, the result would be the same, she would be dead. Annabel's death demonstrates that you can experiment with drugs just once and end up in a coffin. What happened to Annabel could happen to anyone.

While Annabel's death proves how easily drugs can kill, it would be dishonest of me to stand here and try to convince you that instant death is a common result of taking ecstasy, I'm not. People do die from taking ecstasy, but it wasn't ecstasy that killed Annabel—it was the similar yet far more toxic PMA; but don't let this make you think that ecstasy use is safe. The long-term effects of ecstasy and other drugs are almost as frightening as what happened to Annabel.

I'm twenty-five now and have been around long enough to see the long-term effects of drug use on people my age. I have seen physical sickness, mental illness, accidental death and suicide. It's terrifying, it's real and I'm not exaggerating— these are the consequences of frequent drug use.

What I really want you to take away from this point is that most people I know who have suffered the long-term effects of drug use started their journey at your age, experimenting with friends. Some stopped, but others were always looking for a new rush and searched for it over time by moving from one drug to the next.

You might be one of those people. If you are, I am asking you to seriously think about the path you are taking, because you're not going to have any fun if you wind up debilitated, institutionalised or in a coffin.

It is sad fact that no matter how well the dangers are known, people will continue to use drugs. If you or any of your friends ever take drugs and suspect that something is going wrong, please, get help. Ambulance officers are only interested in saving your life; they won't call the police and they won't get you into trouble. Annabel's friends did call an ambulance but unfortunately for everyone, she couldn't be saved.

Annabel had also taken the so-called precautions with ecstasy use the day before she died. The toxicology report showed that she had no alcohol in her system and she had drunk plenty of water throughout the day. Annabel's death really demonstrates that no matter how much care is exercised, using drugs is never safe.

You'll make up your own mind about drug-use but there is one last thing that I want to emphasise. Annabel was a very special person, she was very much loved and she is immensely missed. You too are very special; you too are loved and if you too departed today, you would be grieved in exactly the same way as we grieve for Annabel. If you ever consider taking drugs I urge you, think about what has happened to Annabel, think about what has happened to those who are dependent on drugs and think about what impact their death or dependency has had on their loved ones. Think about whether you want to be dead or dependent. Then ask yourself, is this really worth the risk? Thank you for listening.