As the first anniversary of her daughter Amy’s death approaches, Janis Winehouse shares treasured memories of her ‘wonderful girl’.

As she struggles to come to terms with the loss of Amy, Janis takes some comfort in her daughter’s musical legacy, though she isn’t ready to play her music. Janis also wears Amy’s Star of David necklace, which her daughter wore as a child: “She nibbled on it all the time,” says Janis, “so it’s got lots of marks on it.”
With the one-year anniversary of the death of Amy Winehouse fast approaching, her quietly spoken mother Janis admits that: “It doesn’t get any easier. There’s a huge hole in my life – I used to speak to Amy every day.”

The loss of a child is every parent’s worst nightmare and Amy is certainly never far from Janis’s thoughts.

“Sometimes I wake up sobbing,” she says, as tears well up in her eyes. “I have dreams of Amy, of her as a child, where it will be just like normal, with me saying, ‘Amy, don’t do that.’”

Talented singer Amy passed away on 23 July last year, aged 27. Her death was recorded as misadventure as a result of alcohol poisoning.

Janis will mark the anniversary in the Jewish tradition, with prayers and the lighting of a Yahrzeit memorial candle. She will be joined on the “very tough day” by her husband Richard, her ex-husband and Amy’s father Mitch, Amy’s older brother Alex and other close family members.

Janis firmly believes that Amy is still with her in spirit. “Just knowing that gives me strength,” says the petite retired pharmacist, who exudes warmth and kindness. “I’m pretty sure she has come back as a butterfly because she would love the freedom of flying.

“She also loved her late grandma Cynthia and I’m sure they met up when Amy passed,” adds Janis, referring to Mitch’s mother, whose name Amy had tattooed on her right arm. “Cynthia would have probably said, ‘You see – I told you not to drink.’”

It’s almost impossible for Janis to describe the range of emotions she has felt in the past year about Amy, who had previously battled with drug addiction. There are times when the grief just knocks her for six.

“We went to New York in April to launch the Amy Winehouse Foundation over there,” she says. “We got on the plane at Heathrow and one of Amy’s songs was playing and I was inconsolable. Then we bowled into a restaurant in New York and Back to Black was being played and the emotions came again.”

Janis finds it too difficult to play any of Amy’s music, but the home she shares with Richard in North London is decorated with memorabilia from her daughter’s career, including two Grammys, an Ivor Novello Award and Amy’s guitar. The late singer’s two cats also roam around the unassuming semi-detached home, which Richard has owned for years.

Janis wears one of her daughter’s rings, along with a Star of David necklace that the singer wore as a child.

“She nibbled on it all the time, so it’s got lots of marks on it,” says Janis fondly.

Janis gave Amy’s other Star of David necklace, which her daughter had worn as an adult, to her son Alex’s wife Riva on the couple’s wedding day last November.

“Sometimes I wake up sobbing... I have dreams of Amy, of her as a child, where it will be just like normal’
from secondary progressive multiple sclerosis for more than 30 years, which makes walking difficult.

“I think she knew the grief the drug episodes caused us, which is why she took herself off them,” says Janis. “When we would go to see her, she would light up a cigarette and say, ‘Excuse me, Mummy,’ or ‘Do you mind, Mum?’ Or, if she swore, she would say, ‘Sorry, Mummy, I didn’t mean to swear.’

“Because of my condition, she didn’t want to upset me. She could battle with Mitch, but she wouldn’t do that with me. I’m not an authoritarian by any means, I’m too gentle.”

DOTING DAD

Last week, Mitch’s biography of the singer, Amy, My Daughter, was released. In it, it’s clear just how much he tried to help her.

“From the release of her first album Frank onwards, as Amy’s career was going up, my health was going down,” says Janis. “To Mitch’s credit, I think he protected me from some of her worst excesses.”

Does she think Amy kept things from her, too?

“I believe she did,” she says, before reflecting: “But we will never be able to ask her that question, unfortunately.”

The last time Janis saw her daughter – at Amy’s Camden home the day before she died – they had a cuddle.

“Amy’s last words to me were, ‘I love you, Mummy. I love you, Mummy. I love you, Mummy,’” says Janis sadly.

She recalls that Amy had seemed “okay-ish” that day: “There didn’t seem to be anything particularly untoward. I think that’s why it took me time to actually accept it.”

Mitch phoned Richard at home to break the news. Richard then called Janis into the bedroom, where he said simply: “She’s gone.”

“I thought he was talking about his mum, who actually passed away a month later,” explains Janis. “I just sat there, gobsmacked. It wouldn’t sink in. Then Alex turned up and more people arrived. But it wasn’t until we went to Amy’s house and saw all the tributes and the people outside that it really hit me.

“It’s your worst possible nightmare. You just never

‘I’m pretty sure Amy’s come back as a butterfly. She’d love the freedom of flying’
Janis celebrates her daughter’s life by filling her home with memorabilia, including photos and posters of Amy, and a teddy bear that was left by a fan outside Amy’s house after her death. One of Janis’s most precious items is Amy’s guitar.
Imagine that a child will go before you. It’s not the natural order of things. Has Janis had any form of therapy to help cope with her grief? “No, we do all of that in-house,” she says. “We talk to each other. It’s our way of dealing with it.”

At Amy’s funeral service at Edgwarebury Cemetery in North London, Janis says there was a clear sign that the singer was looking over them.

“Mitch was giving the eulogy and a butterfly flew in. I think it was a red admiral because, when they close their wings, they are black.”

The butterfly settled on Kelly Osbourne, then flew around Mitch.” The logo of the Amy Winehouse Foundation, which supports various charities that help improve the lives of young people, is that of a butterfly and a bird.

There have been other signs since: “We were at JFK airport [in New York] shortly after she died. We were eating some food when, all of a sudden, one of Amy’s songs came on and a feather dropped onto our table.”

EARLY TALENT
Janis’s face brightens when she recalls happy memories of her daughter – of a girl who had a unique talent and an indomitable spirit from a young age. “Amy was so gifted and actually very, very, very intelligent,” says Janis. Amy caused her mother plenty of worry from a young age, however. “She was very defiant,” says Janis, who separated from Mitch when Amy was nine years old.

“If you said, ‘Don’t do that, Amy,’ then she would do it. She was a very naughty child, very disruptive, but also very loving. She would be singing all the time, bless her. We would say, ‘Amy, shut up, stop singing.’”

Amy attended various schools, including the Sylvia Young Theatre School and the BRIT School for performing arts.


Janis still keeps in touch with some of Amy’s friends, including Tyler James, who was a finalist on BBC1’s The Voice. “Out of all the people, I think Tyler was the most supportive to Amy over the years.”

Janis also occasionally bumps into Reg Traviss, Amy’s boyfriend at the time of her death. Amy had been excitedly planning a future with Reg and Janis believes that her daughter would have been a good mum.

“That’s why she found that big house in Camden,” says Janis of Amy’s decision to buy the four-bedroom property in 2010. “She wanted a family home.”

In May, Janis and Mitch made the tough decision to sell the 2,500sq ft property, which is now on the market for £2.7 million.

“We drove past it recently and there were still fans outside,” says Janis. “The house had to go. It’s just too emotional for us to go back to.”

She and Mitch speak regularly and maintain a strong relationship. He even gave Janis a copy of Amy, My Daughter, with the handwritten message: “I hope this book gives you some peace. I have tried to show what a fantastic mother you are.”

Does Janis have any advice for parents of addicts? “Just be there for them,” she says. “The thing about addiction is that there is only one person who can do anything – and that’s the addict. So you’ve just got to give them strength.”

During Amy’s later years, Janis had to face the extra agony of watching her daughter’s troubles make front-page news.

“They didn’t always know the truth,” she says. “People were too focused on the bad and they didn’t see the Amy who got her dad to give a couple of grand to a poor old man in St Lucia so he could have a hernia op. She was always concerned for others.

“I would like to think that she’d be incredibly proud of what we’re doing with the foundation,” adds Janis. “Amy was just a kid from Southgate, happy as a waitress or singing in a jazz club. She never sought fame – it sought her.”

How would Janis like her daughter to be remembered? “I want people to learn about the loving Amy – the lovely child, the daughter, the friend. She was just a regular kid who had a special talent. She was a wonderful girl.”

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In lieu of payment for this interview, HELLO! has made a donation to the Amy Winehouse Foundation: amywinehousefoundation.org