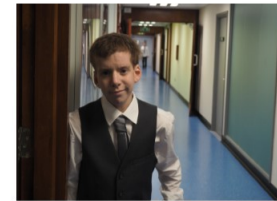
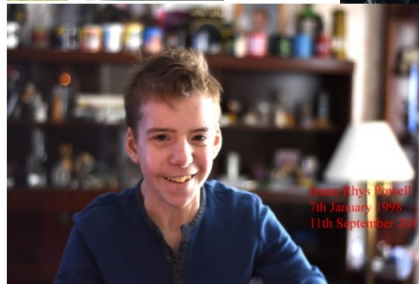
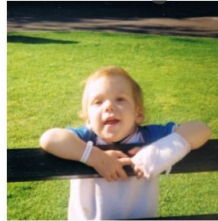


The Final Journey

By Jenna Powell



Rhys Powell: 7th January 1998 - 11th September 2017



In Memory of Our Beloved Young Man

Ieuan Rhys

No matter what you went through in your 19 years, you did it with a smile on your face, and

Never, Ever, Gave Up



My name is Rhys.

Since I was two I've been very poorly with cancer. Today is my Dad's birthday and we're waiting to hear the results of some tests I had done recently.

Right now, I'm standing on the deck of a steamship and holding onto the wheel that lets you steer it. The ship's name is the SS Great Britain and she is in Bristol.



The doctors phoned my Dad yesterday when we were in Bristol. They wanted me to come into the dental hospital, so they can take a bit more from the lump I have in my mouth. They can then find out what it is.

We know what it is but the doctors need to be sure.

We think it's another tumor. I've had these before, this will be the fifth and the operation to remove it my sixth.



It's Easter and we're in Wales. Last year my Grampy died. Nanny died a few years ago. We are sorting through everything in their home because we have to sell it.

It's sad that we have to do that but it means I get to see my cousins Charlotte and Jessica, and my Aunty Netty.

It's been a lovely weekend, we went ten pin bowling and to the museum. We even got to play in the park and climb on the old bandstand.

Today we're in Bristol at the Oncology hospital. I have to meet some of the doctors and nurses who are going to be looking after me when I have radiotherapy to try and get rid of the lump in my mouth.

They have to do that before they operate on it.

Something isn't right though.

I keep having moments where I can't move and can't talk. My eyes don't focus properly. When I try to speak just noises come out, not words. It passes after a few minutes and then I'm fine.

The doctors have got some medicine for me to take which will stop it happening, but I have to have a scan tomorrow to see what is causing me to go like that.



My scan results have come back.

The doctor has come to see me. I've met him before and he's nice.

It seems that I have another lump, this time it's inside my head and sitting on my brain and they aren't going to be able to treat it.

The doctor mentioned something called palliative care but I'm not sure what that is. I'm sure I'll find out what it is in time, but before then I've got to have my course of radiotherapy so that they can operate on the lump in my mouth and take it away.

The good thing is that they are going to speed up my treatment, I'm only going to be here for two weeks now and not six, which means I can go home and see my friends sooner.





Today I met up with some of the nurses from the hospital here. The nurse, from home, that has looked after me since I was two was there too.

We talked about the lumps and they asked me if I understood what they'd told me about the new lump on my brain. I wasn't sure so they explained it to me.

I'm going to die.

They can't treat that lump with radiotherapy and they can't operate to remove it like they did with another one I had on my brain a few years ago. That means the lumps will get bigger until eventually something will happen and I'll die.

They asked me if there was anything I wanted to do.

Going to Disneyworld in America wouldn't be a good idea in case I get poorly so I have to stay in the UK.

They asked me if there were any shows I wanted to see so I'm going to have a look when I get back to Sam's House where we're staying.

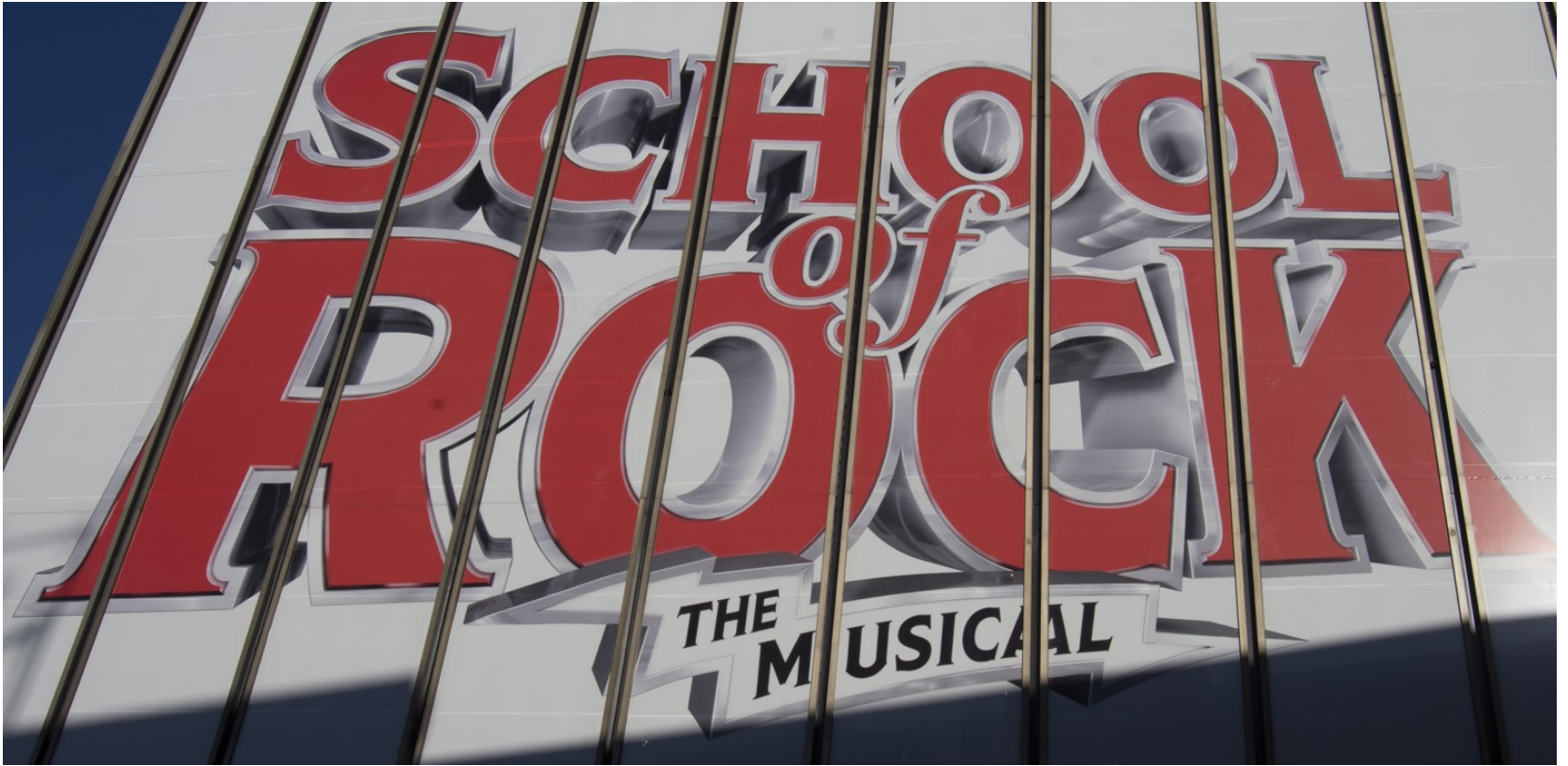
There are no shows on at the Hippodrome that I want to see. I've looked on my iPad.

Dad has asked me if I want to go to see School of Rock but it's not on.

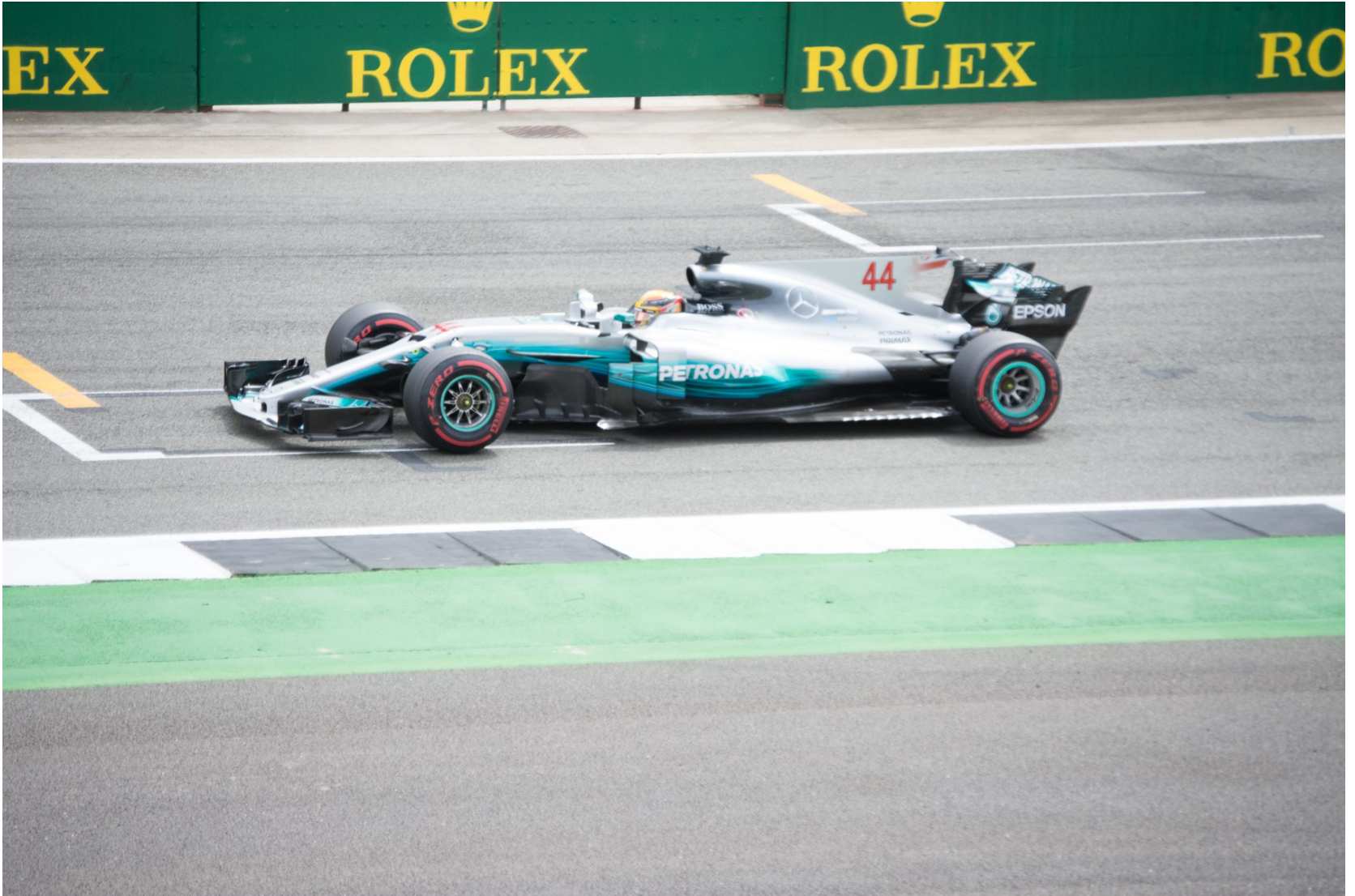
Dad's just said it is on.

In London.





We're going to London for a weekend to see School of Rock and see some of the other sights while I'm still well enough.



Mum and Dad have organized for us to go to Silverstone and see the British Grand Prix.

I've always wanted to do that. I'm looking forward to it but it's still some time away.

We're back home now.

My radiotherapy is complete.

I just need to have medicine to stop me from having any pains and help keep me from feeling too poorly.



Some friends from the church organized a music concert to raise money to help me to fulfill any dreams I might have. It was great seeing everybody and was fun listening to people I know playing keyboards, guitars and drums, and singing.

I had a great time.





We went to London this weekend. It was amazing. I've been before but it was great being there with Mum and Dad. We had a brilliant room with its own fridge and kitchen. I had a double bed to myself.

On Friday we went to see School of Rock and it was as good as I thought it was going to be. It rocked!

On Saturday we went on the London Eye, a big wheel that lets you see for miles and mile over London. It moves slowly so you have plenty of time to see everything.

After that we went to the Sea Life Centre and looked at all the fish, sharks and other marine animals.

In the afternoon we went for a walk to Buckingham Palace. We didn't see the Queen but I sat in my wheelchair outside the big fence they have around the outside.



Oh yes, I use a wheelchair now because it's hard for me to walk long distances.

Today I got to do something else I've always wanted to try. I had a golf lesson. It was fun and the instructor told me I'd done brilliantly because, when I stand, I have to be very careful of my balance. That meant that I had to concentrate on swinging the club properly and not swing wildly at the ball.

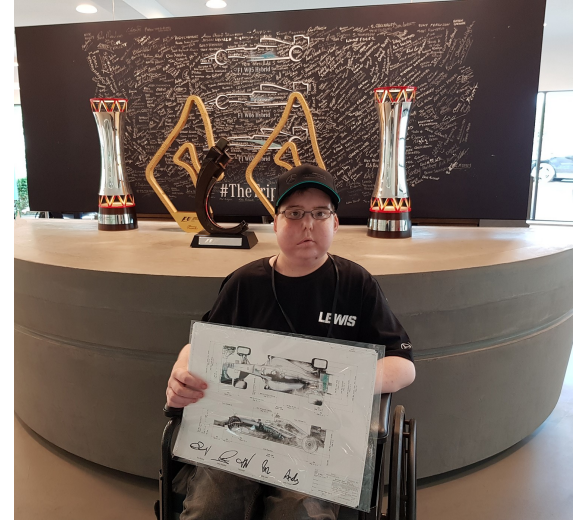
Dad said I'd have been really good if I'd started having lessons a few years ago.





We went to Longleat Safari Park today. We've been before but this time we went in the house as well.

We saw lots of animals in the safari park before having lunch. Afterwards we went and looked around the house. We got to ride in a special lift between the floors because of my wheelchair. We even got to see some of the house that people don't get to see when they aren't in a wheelchair. That was special.



Last weekend was amazing. We got to the British Grand Prix. I know Mum and Dad have been worried that I wouldn't be well enough to go but I was. My favourite driver Lewis Hamilton won. He did so well that nobody was going to catch him.

Some of the cars we saw were noisy but we had these things to put over our ears that made them sound quieter.

On our way back home, we stopped off at the place where they design and build the car that Lewis Hamilton races. We got to see the whole factory and where they help the team on race day.

I loved the whole weekend.



It's Mum and Aunty Annette's birthdays.

For Mum's birthday we went and had another golf lesson. This time Mum had a lesson too. It was so much fun playing golf with her.

We also went ten pin bowling. I love bowling and played in a league until I was too poorly to bowl. I had to use the ramp today though because I don't think I'd be able to bowl properly and would have fallen over if I tried.



Today I fell over.

Dad was making dinner and when I went into the kitchen to eat I fell over and hurt myself. Dad rang 999 and asked for an ambulance because I couldn't move my right arm and leg very well. I also found it hard to talk.

The doctor thinks that the reason I fell over was because the lump in my head is pressing on something and that's stopped my arm and leg working properly. My arm and leg are better and I can talk easier now.

Since there's nothing the doctor can do for me we're going home.





I slept on our new sofa bed last night because it would have been too difficult for Mum and Dad to get me upstairs and into bed.

When I woke up this morning I couldn't move my right arm or leg and so we're going into the hospital for the weekend until I can go into the hospice on Monday.

The doctors and nurses were so good at looking after me over the weekend.

Mum and Dad got to have a break from giving me medicine and helping me when I had little accidents. I'm having those quite often now. I think it's because I'm getting more poorly and my body doesn't always do what it should.





St Margaret's Hospice. My home for the next few weeks.

It's quite peaceful here. The doctors and nurses know how to look after me and help me to be comfortable and can give me medicine to stop me being in pain. I just need to tell them when things hurt and they will sort it.

My room has a door that opens out onto the gardens. When the weather is nice they can wheel my bed out onto the small patio outside my room and I can lie in bed and enjoy the sunshine.

I also have a bathroom of my own but it's difficult getting into the shower so I think I'm going to let them wash me in bed.

The nurses are good at doing that.

Today I had some visitors who were out of this world.

As I was lying in bed a Jedi Knight walked into my room. It was my Dad dressed up. I could tell as the hood didn't cover the bottom of Dad's face.

Then in walked three Stormtroopers. What a surprise!

One of the nurses had arranged for them to come visit me. They were amazing, they even let me hold their blasters. I tried not to shoot people with them.

They gave me a present. A mini Stormtrooper. I was so happy.



I get lots of visitors. My friends come to see me and so do their Mums. I like seeing my friends. Their Mums are like second Mums to me so I like seeing them too.

I know it must be hard for them seeing me in here but I'm Ok. I'm not in pain and I get to eat whatever I want and sleep whenever I feel tired.

My family have also visited me. Lots of them. They've travelled long ways to come and see me since I've been in the hospice.





I had some special visitors today. Owls!

One of the volunteers at the hospice had asked someone to bring some owls for me to see and to hold. There was an Eagle Owl, a Snowy Owl and even a Barn Owl.

The Barn Owl was quite small and the people who brought them got it to fly around the room. Everyone was so impressed, my room was full of people, Mum and Dad, one of my friends and lots of nurses.

One of my friends and her Mum came to see me today and they brought their dog Pebbles.

Mum decided that Pebbles looked tired so lifted her up and put her on my bed where she curled up.

I'm sure Patrick, the cat that lives at the hospice, would be jealous if he'd known that a dog had been curled up where he normally settles down.





I get tired a lot now and spend most of my time sleeping. I'm not eating much. I had a cheese spread sandwich the other day. Mum and Dad are here all the time now. They sleep in my room with me at night.

I'm not worried. I've been ill so many times and even when things have looked bad have gotten through it.

I am scared.

I told one of the nurses that came to see me when I was at home that I was scared when she asked me how I was. I'm not scared for me though. I'm scared for my Mum and Dad and what will happen to them when I'm no longer here.

I'm not scared of dying. When I die I'll get to see my Nanny, Grampy and Grampa again. I'll get to be free of the lumps and the pain. I'll be at peace.

My funeral is going to be amazing. Just after the doctors and nurses told me I was going to die we went and saw an undertaker. He asked me what things I liked and when I told him that I liked racing cars he said I could have racing cars on my coffin. I like that idea as it was really cool. I even like the music that will be played at my funeral because I've chosen some of them myself.

People are going to really enjoy themselves.

I've told Mum and Dad that people aren't to wear all black. I don't want people being sad, I want them to be happy.



I'm tired now. It's hard for me to breath at times.

Mum is here, so is Gran and Grandad.

Dad has popped home for a bit.

I'm so tired that I think I'll just sleep for a little while.



Background to The Final Journey

The story you have just read was based on the last six months of my son Rhys' life.

Ieuan Rhys Powell was born on the 7th January 1998 at 12:16pm. Shortly after he was diagnosed with a condition called Neurofibromatosis. A healthy, young baby he brought joy to his Mum and I.

When Rhys was two and a half he developed some problems which led to us discovering that he had Acute Lymphoblastic Leukaemia. Over the next eight years Rhys underwent cancer treatment at Bristol Children's Hospital and Yeovil District Hospital. This culminated in him having a bone marrow transplant when the leukaemia returned aggressively at the end of 2007, just months after he'd completed treatment after his first relapse.

The transplant worked and Rhys was able to get on with his life, learning to swim and ride a bicycle; and re-joining the local youth ten pin bowling club.

Unfortunately, following some tests when Rhys was complaining of a bad back, a large tumour was found in his stomach. This was to be the beginning of him receiving treatment for many more tumours.

The first tumour was a difficult one to remove and it was while he was undergoing treatment for this that a brain tumour was discovered. After a second operation to clear up the stomach tumour, Rhys eventually underwent further surgery to remove the brain tumour and replace part of his skull with an acrylic insert.

During this time, Rhys had a few years tumour free, during which he was able to finish school and go to college to study childcare. A career that he wanted to go in with because of the rapport he had with young children, particularly those that he'd met in hospital.

But the cancer hadn't finished with him and eventually we discovered a lump in his leg which turned out to be another tumour. Surgery followed during which the tumour was removed as well as a portion of his thigh muscle.

Rehabilitation was a slow process but between the use of wheelchairs, then a crutch and finally his Grampy's walking stick, he was able to walk unaided once more.

At the end of 2016, a lesion that had been detected in a scan was found to have grown when a routine x-ray was taken. Surgery again followed and the tumour, along with a portion of lung was removed.

In March 2017, the story told here begins, when he found a lump inside his mouth. The moment we were referred to Bristol for a biopsy we knew what the results would be and Rhys was faced with radiotherapy and major reconstructive surgery in order to remove this new tumour. Unfortunately events took an unexpected turn when another brain tumour was discovered, this one untreatable.

In May 2017, Rhys underwent radiotherapy in the hope that it would reduce the mouth tumour, which it initially did before coming back.

In August 2017, Rhys went into St Margaret's Hospice in Yeovil, something that had been planned in order to fine tune his medication. Following a fall at home, however, Rhys' stay at the hospice was to last for the short, few weeks he had left.

On September 11th 2018, at 12:10pm Rhys quietly passed away surrounded by his Mum, Gran and Grandad.

Throughout his life Rhys never let his illness stop him. When he had his leukaemia he went to school, played with friends, all the things young children do.

Even when the tumours started, he continued to enjoy life as much as he could.

During his 19 years he packed in so much.

He received his first computer and camera when he was still quite young, thanks to Make A Wish foundation.

He spent a morning at Yeovilton Naval Air Station being shown around, getting to sit in the cockpit of various helicopters and even flying the Lynx Mark 3, although only the simulator; receiving pilot's wings afterwards. The day having been arranged through his friend Abigail's mum Karen.

Rhys got to fly in a real helicopter a few years later when we took him to Yeovilton Air Day and booked a flight as a treat.

A few years before he died Rhys fulfilled another wish, thanks to Rays of Sunshine, who organised for him to go to the World Snooker Championships in Sheffield. Rhys, his Mum and I were given a tour back stage and then had VIP seats for the last session of the rounds and the first session of the Quarter Finals. Of the two the sessions, the rounds was the best as the matches finished early and so we found ourselves enjoying an exhibition match between Ken Doherty and Stephen Hendry.

This year Rhys was very busy after he was told he was dying, he went to see School of Rock, a TV series he had enjoyed watching. Seeing the stage version was something he loved.

The one wish we were never sure he would be able to fulfil was to see a Grand Prix but fortunately his health held out long enough that he was able to attend the British Grand Prix at Silverstone. Watching his favourite driver Lewis Hamilton win made the day for him. The weekend was made all the more special when with a tour of the AMG Mercedes team headquarters on the Monday. Something arranged by the wonderful staff there.

Rhys' funeral was amazing. Everything was perfect, from the coffin, through the readings and the songs. The style of coffin, the location of the services, church and crematorium, the song choices, all were either decided by him or were described him or the things he loved in life.

Rhys was a quiet, unassuming, young man. Liked by everyone how came into contact with him. By sharing his story I hope that others will be able to draw strength from what he went through and how managed to enjoy life, despite everything that he had thrown at him.

He will be missed by everyone who had the honour of knowing him.

Thanks

We have a lot of people and organisations that have helped and supported us over the years.

These include:

St Margaret's Hospice

CLIC (particularly Sam's House and CLIC House in Bristol)

Yeovil District Hospital (particularly the staff and doctors on Ward 10)

Bristol Children's Hospital

Bristol Royal Infirmary

Southmead Hospital

Bristol Oncology Hospital (particularly the Teenage Cancer Trust team)

Ray's of Sunshine

St James Church, Yeovil

There are so many others that it's impossible to list everyone but to those I've not listed. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

