

# In a class of her own — girl who fought against cancer

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## Elleen Brooks

AN 18-YEAR-OLD girl has won five A-Level passes posthumously, after dying from a rare cancer within weeks of becoming too ill to continue her studies.

Claire Khan was gravely ill in hospital when her schoolfriends sat their examinations at the end of the summer term, but examiners awarded the qualifications after reading her course work.

And in a act of courage which could be an inspiration to many cancer sufferers, the young student kept a moving diary of her last days.

Extracts from the diary are reproduced on page 3 of today's *Yorkshire Post*. Her parents gave the diary for publication in the hope that it would help other young people to cope with similar tragedies.

Last night a special memorial service for Claire was held at Danum Comprehensive School in Doncaster, where she was studying for A-levels before her rare and devastating illness struck.

Her mother, Tricia Campbell, and stepfather David Campbell, of Crossways in Doncaster, paid tribute to the girl whose bravery shone through to the end.

Said Mrs Campbell, head of Town Field First School in Doncaster: "Claire kept a diary for the last eight weeks, up until the last week, when she was too ill to write.

"I was worried about reading it at first, but it's given me a great deal of comfort, and I've discovered a lot about her that I didn't know.

"She packed more into 18 years than many people pack into a lifetime. She was an incredible girl, and I've been very fortunate to know her. She was so vital.

"She knew it was serious, and a doctor at Queen Elizabeth's Hospital in Birmingham told her she was an adult, and he would tell her anything she wanted to know about her condition, which was extremely serious. But he said 'Don't ask the question if you don't want to hear the answer'.

She never asked the question."

Claire began feeling ill about a year ago, and a thyroid abnormality was diagnosed. An operation failed to cure the problem, and eventually doctors agreed she had Cushing's Disease.

The rare form of cancer — there are only 10 known cases a year in this country — causes osteoporosis, and a range of unpleasant symptoms including rapid swelling of the body and skin rashes.

Claire, who has a brother, Nigel, 23, at Oxford, and a nine-year-old sister, Lucy, had already been accepted at King's College, London, to study history.

She was unable to complete her A-levels, but was awarded three grade B's and two grade C's by the examining board on the basis of the work she had already done.

Claire had already encountered tragedy in her short life. When she was 11, her best friend died of cystic fibrosis, and when she was 13, her father died in a road accident while lecturing abroad.

But she was determined to make the most of her life. She played the cello, loved theatre and dancing, was playing scrabble and trivial pursuits from her hospital bed only days before her death, and her ambition was to travel.

Last night, her parents said they would be scattering her ashes in places all over the world she dreamed of visiting.

They have also launched an appeal to raise money for a visitors' suite at Doncaster Royal Infirmary so that parents can stay with their seriously ill children.

Mrs Campbell said: "She was 18, so she was considered an adult, but she was my daughter and I wanted to stay with her, which was difficult as the hospital doesn't have a proper visitors' room.

"We want to do this in her memory. We won't ever get over it, but at least some good will come out of it for other people.

**Testament of courage:  
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