

**BRAVE SURVIVOR**

# Birthday secret

Having a ball, and (right) with my family



Larking about with my brother Phil



**Amy's 18th didn't turn out quite how she'd planned...**

**S**himmying on to the dance floor, my favourite *Glee* song played. 'Don't stop believin', I sang, glammed up to the nines in my favourite black and white dress for my 18th birthday party.

'I love this one!' cheered my friends.

'And me!' I beamed - my smile hiding my terrifying secret...

Back in May 2009, a keen gymnast, when I started getting crippling back, shoulder and stomach pains, I thought I'd pulled a muscle.

When the pain persisted, though, I saw my GP, who said, 'It's just growing pains and stress.'

Juggling gymnastic competitions with my A level studies at Sele School sixth form college in Hertford was quite stressful. But after resting, when I struggled to get out of bed, I panicked.

'What's wrong?' I cried to my mum, Valerie, 48, and dad, Dale, 47. After physio sessions, blood tests



With my dad

and X-rays, in March 2010 I had an MRI scan at the QEII hospital in Welwyn Garden City.

The doctors said, 'We've found fluid around your spine. We're going to need a biopsy.' Oh, my God...

It was just eight days before my party, and I tried to put the tests out of my mind as I got blonde and purple highlights done.

'It's going to be the best day ever!' I cried, excitedly.

But on 17 March, two days before my birthday, I got the results I'd been dreading.

'It's cancer,' said the consultant. *Cancer - for my 18th birthday...*

As Mum gasped, I asked, 'Will I die?'

But they couldn't answer. Still, I didn't want my friends to know.

'I want to be a normal 18-year-old - not one with cancer,' I told Mum.

And now, dancing away, for one night. *I was...*

But two weeks later, on 16 April, it was confirmed I had non-Hodgkin lymphoma - a cancer of lymphocyte cells in the lymphatic system.

I told my friends, before Mum and

Dad drove me to London's University College Hospital for bone marrow tests and a lumbar puncture - where fluid is taken from inside the lower back for testing.

Then I was admitted to their Teenage Cancer Trust Ward, where I stayed for three months - undergoing four rounds of chemo and 15 more lumbar punctures. Each morning, more clumps of my long purple and blonde hair fell out.

'Please, cut it,' I said to Mum. I put my purple and blonde ponytail into a box, before trying dozens of wig styles - from a bob and a Mohican to a bright pink one! Friends sent me coloured bandanas to try, too.

I also befriended two patients, Billy Gilbody and Liam Unwin. 'You're like The Three Musketeers!' nurses said.

We played bingo, spent hours on the Xbox and watched films - never discussing cancer.

Then, a few weeks later, on 21 June, Liam died at just 16.

Three more friends lost their battle, too. *It was heartbreaking.*

On 28 June, my family came in to celebrate my grandma's birthday. My brother, Phil, 19, put a blob

of cream on top of my bald head, topped with a strawberry!

'Say cheese!' he laughed, posing behind me.

And on 9 July, when my consultant told me I'd beaten my cancer, I was ecstatic - but also sad that others hadn't been so lucky...

So, back home, me and Grandma started making a patchwork quilt from my bandanas.

'I'll have the names of friends I've lost, so I'll never forget them,' I said.

It took 12 months to make, during which time I passed my driving test, retook my A levels and started at Sheffield Hallam Uni, training to be a secondary school maths teacher.

I have regular check-ups and am now in remission.

This March I'll be celebrating my 21st. But at this party, I won't be keeping any secrets...

**Amy Wrangles, 20, Bengeo, Hertfordshire**

● You don't have to face cancer alone. The Macmillan team is here to support you every step of the way. For more information or to donate, visit [www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk) or call 0808 808 00 00.



Me with Grandma and the quilt

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ON SALE Thursday 21 Feb

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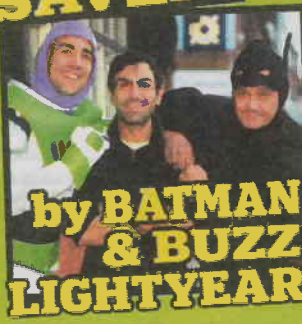


**for a HAM SANDWICH**



**NAKED!** As I fought a BURGLAR

**SAVED!**



by **BATMAN & BUZZ** LIGHTYEAR

**Gutted!** After losing **19 STONE**

