

Statement that Julia Rice gave to the Court on Thursday 16 February 2012

1. I was at home when I was told that the aircraft my son had been flying in as a Cadet had crashed and he had been killed.
2. How can I capture the person that our boy Nik was? He loved us and we loved him.
3. He was a son who was kind, gentle, loving and generous. Courageous and funny, with a sunny smile, beautiful green eyes and the longest lashes I have ever seen on a boy. He was someone who liked sunsets, animals and people as well as motorbikes, electric guitars and heavy metal. He was talented, excelled at many things and I stand in awe of him.
4. Over the course of a few years, he won prizes for himself and his best friend shooting at a local fair, as he called on the expertise gained from the CCF at school; he skied black runs from the age of 8; persuaded horses over obstacles when others failed to manage it; he was good at writing stories, but ended his life an author who would never publish a book; an artist who could sketch pictures of life and vitality, but who would never exhibit a masterpiece; a graduate who would never gain a degree; a father who would never have a child; a lover of jet planes, who was only just learning about flying.
5. He was cool and brave and had done many things of which he was afraid, but in his eyes one only ever would see enthusiasm.
6. He was known to argue over the necessary amount of piano practise and just how late he could extend bedtimes on school nights. He didn't often agree that his room was in dire need of a tidy up, but we always laughed together whilst we cleared it. What is it they say? That the only clear space in a teenager's room is to be found on the ceiling.
7. Nik had such high aspirations. He had a particular talent for science and he excelled at school on Biology, Chemistry and Physics. His dream was to become an Aeronautical Engineer with the RAF and I have no doubt that he would have succeeded.
8. Nik's Grandfather and Great Uncle were both in the RAF, something that we as a family were very proud of.
9. He also loved Art and English at school, and was even writing his own book.

10. As parents we could never be certain that we were doing the right things – we could only do what we believed to be right and we encouraged him in all that he desired. We laid before him the opportunities to indulge his passions. That one of them finally took his life leaves me bereft and struggling with devastation. Without him it doesn't matter what success we achieve in our lives, nor how happy we manage to be, it will only ever be second best.
11. Nik loved us and we loved him and it seems so very strange to me that something so wonderful and special could end so abruptly and without warning. As his mother, I should have known that he was frightened; that the danger in the last 25 seconds of his life was colossal; I should have known that we had finally lost him.
12. I signed Nik's log book in the complete understanding that the RAF knew what they were doing and would take care of him, otherwise I would never have signed it. My belief now is that they failed him on both counts.
13. My own father suffered from Ankylosing Spondylitis, so I am aware of what it is like to live with this condition. If had known that my son would be flying with someone with such severe difficulties I never would have allowed it.
14. How can I capture the person our boy Nik was? Perhaps just to say he was the very best of us and he made our world a much, much better place to be.