

Christopher's memory inspires charity

by Becky Thornton

THE memorable smile of a young boy who succumbed to cancer earlier this year will live forever in the charity his parents have set up.

Christopher Capel passed away in June after a 21-month battle with medulloblastoma, an aggressive childhood brain tumour.

Last month, parents Karen and Kevin, of Ivy Close, Lightwater, launched Christopher's Smile, a charity raising money for The Institute of Cancer Research (ICR).

All the money raised will go towards funding a higher scientific research officer within the institute's paediatric team.

They will carry out the research to develop new drugs that will be used to treat medulloblastoma and other childhood cancers.

Christopher, a pupil at Lightwater Village School, was diagnosed with the condition in October 2006 after he became very sick.

Neurosurgery and intensive chemotherapy left him with hair loss, a permanent hearing deficit and the inability to walk.

His vision was affected and he suffered fatigue and sickness.

However, Christopher kept his head up and he never complained.

Initial treatment appeared to have worked and in September 2007 he started back at school with a smile on his face.

Despite struggling with a walking frame and not being able to hold a pen, Christopher loved being at school with his

friends. His illness never got him down and he was prepared to keep climbing the mountain to recovery.

But towards the end of October 2007, Christopher began to get sick again and Mr and Mrs Capel received news that he had relapsed.

Months of treatment followed but was unsuccessful and nine days before his sixth birthday Christopher died.

Mrs Capel said his "determination to carry on" would live through the charity.

"He was a real boys' boy," she told the News. "Before all this started he was a child running around, really athletic for his age, which came to an abrupt end."

"He loved doing what all little boys do and he always wanted to be with his friends."

"Even though he could not do anything independently it never took over."

"He was always determined to walk again."

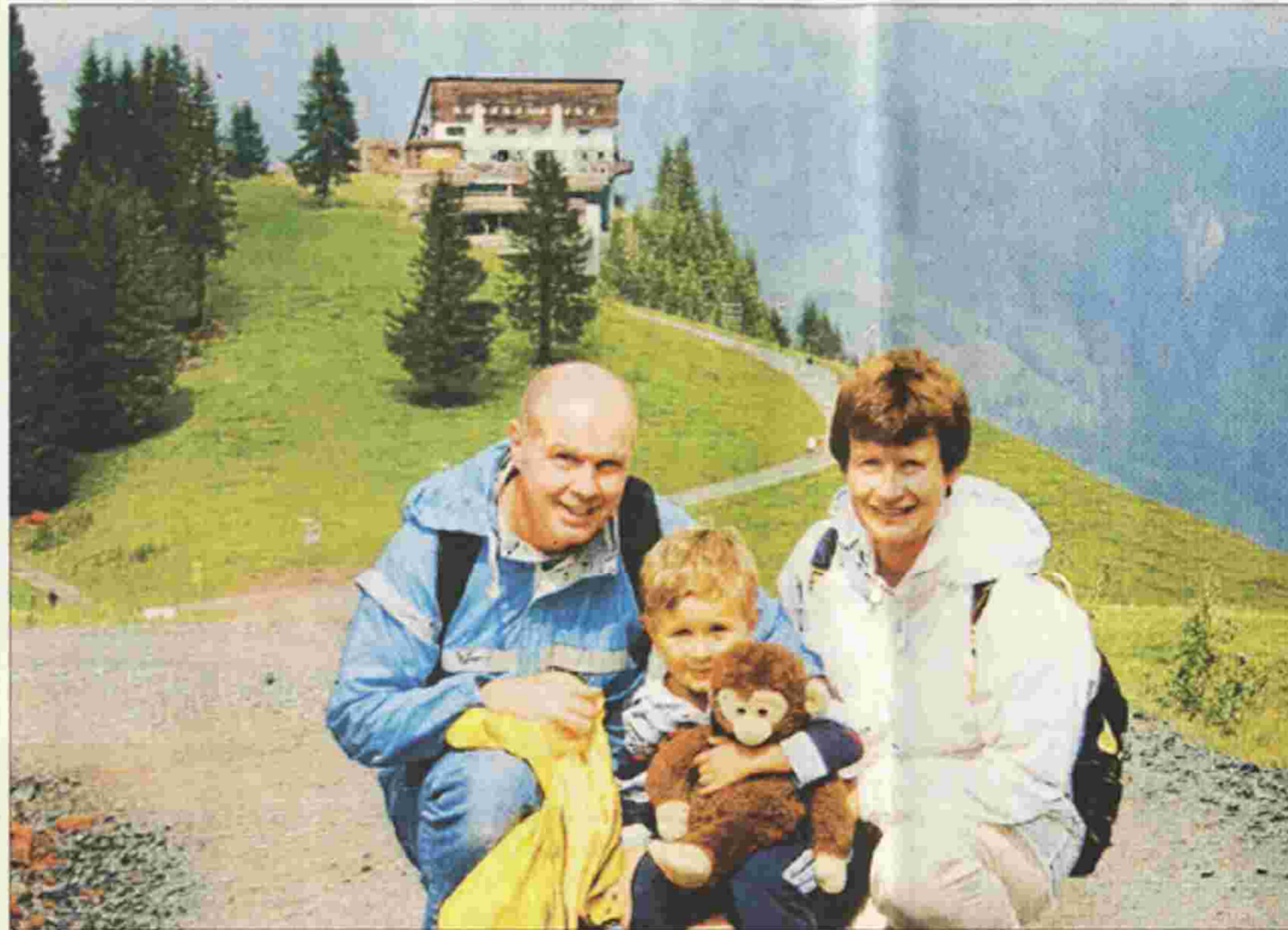
Christopher's Smile will hold various fundraising events over the coming months to start ploughing cash into the ICR.

All the money raised will go to the paediatric research team, which is working to develop new drugs for childhood cancer in a bid to move treatment away from chemotherapy and radiotherapy.

Mr Capel, an IT consultant with British Airways, said the couple, who have lived in Lightwater for nine years, always wanted to give the money to help prevent childhood cancer because its research is underfunded.

Mr Capel said: "The institute is a big organisation but it is one of the only organisations looking at childhood cancers."

"There are a lot of cancer



Parents Kevin and Karen with Christopher in Austria in August 2006.

charities out there, which all do great work, but childhood cancer is not as well known or financially supported.

"The first goal is to get the scientific officer in place within the team. We just wanted to do something."

"If our contributions result in a cure being brought forward by just one day and one family does not have to go through what we did then it will all be worth it."

Mr Capel, 50, came up with the name for the charity and admitted he did not want it just to be all about his son.

"A lot of charities are just names of the individual," he said. "But we wanted this to be able to apply to all those children who have gone through or

are going through what Christopher did. I didn't want it just to be about Christopher."

"We wanted to be able to fundraise for something and for the people who generously donate to see that their money is going somewhere."

Mrs Capel said the funding would also go towards research trying to minimise the side-effects of cancer drugs.

The 47-year-old said: "Even if the child survives the brain tumour they still have mountains to climb."

"We want to raise as much awareness as we can to what these children go through. They need help."

"We strongly believe there's a way to change all of this and there are things we can do to

move it forward to take away the horrors that cancer can have for the children and their families.

The couple have been overwhelmed with the support the charity has already received.

The father of one of Christopher's friends has pledged to run the London Marathon in aid of ICR, and a friend of Mr Capel who is in a band will collect money at gigs.

A children's hairdressing day will take place on Sunday December 7 at Lightwater Village School between 9.30am and 1.30pm to raise funds.

Children can have a haircut while parents take a well-earned break. There will be games, craft stalls and refreshments.



Christopher Capel died in June after a 21-month battle with medulloblastoma.