



Alistair

Alistair John Grawert
19 May 1989 – 15 March 2004

Anne and Helmut are German/Australian expatriates who have lived in Singapore for 10 years. The bottom fell out of their world when their youngest son Alistair suddenly died, peacefully, in his sleep, having shown no signs of any illness. One year on, the family miss him terribly and are still in a state of shock.

Written by Sonya Szpojnarowicz, from an interview with Anne Grawert, Alistair's mother

At 14, Alistair was still the baby of his family, much loved by his parents and his older brother and sister Christopher and Yvonne. As the others had left home, he was the only baby left in the nest and he was the centre of his parents' world. He was a happy, intelligent boy with a tremendous sense of humour, who exuded a quiet confidence and inner strength. He had a full and happy life, and loved his school, his pet cat and his tennis, as well as going for long walks in beautiful surroundings such as Sungei Buloh with his father Helmut.

On Sunday 14th March 2004, he enjoyed a peaceful, quiet day with his parents. He played tennis as usual at Alexandra Park, and felt a little tired and unwell after the exertion—but after taking a shower back at home he felt fine again, in fact so fine that he ate a whole pizza for his dinner. He had a chat on the phone with his brother Christopher and went to bed as normal.

The following day was Anne and Helmut's 30th wedding anniversary. The day started

just like any normal day, and they talked about what they might do that evening to celebrate. Anne went downstairs for her early morning coffee, then went up to wake Alistair as usual and help him get ready for school (his uniform was already laid out for him in his brother's room). She opened the door—loudly—as she always did, and turned off the aircon. But there was no answering grunt from Alistair. She opened the curtains, and saw that he was lying face down (as he always did) and still. Thinking he must be in a very deep sleep, she talked more loudly to him, and began to feel a rising sense of unease. Something wasn't quite right. She ruffled his hair—nothing. She tried to pick him up and shake him, feeling confused and panicky. This must be some silly joke of Alistair's. But she began to feel that it wasn't funny any more. She turned him over, feeling almost angry with him for not responding—but saw that his face looked abnormally mottled and blue around his mouth.

In that split second of shock and horror, Anne could only grasp that something was terribly, terribly wrong. She screamed for Helmut, who rushed in and shouted, "Call an ambulance!" He knew immediately that his beloved youngest son was dead—but Anne was in such shock that she just couldn't take this in. She ran to the security gates at the condo, to tell them to open the gates as an ambulance was coming, screaming, "My boy won't wake up; he WON'T wake up! Somebody help me!"

Even when she went back to Alistair's room, now already full of people trying to help, she still couldn't feel anything except shock and panic. She was sure he was still going to wake up and open his eyes—she was convinced she could see his eyelashes moving—but they were only fluttering in the breeze from the fan that someone had turned on.

Everything else passed in a horrible blur, and Anne remembers little. She remembers their part time cleaner arriving in the midst of the chaos and confusion, the friendly security guard crying, the police checking Alistair's room, a neighbour who was a nurse doing CPR—and most of all she remembers lying in bed holding her beloved boy close to her, not knowing what else to do. After his body was taken to the mortuary she only remembers wanting desperately to sleep, to escape from this unbelievable nightmare, to wake and find everything all right after all. She still felt all that day that he would walk in through the door, that it was all a big mistake.

Everybody was in a state of extreme shock. How could a healthy 14 year old boy just die in his sleep—with no warning, no symptoms of any illness, no sound? It could not be happening. The whole family was turned upside down. Alistair's brother and sister, who were both working overseas, hurried back to the family home in Singapore, and they clung together in their grief and shock, surrounded by loving friends (also reeling in shock and disbelief).

Alistair's body was brought home for the week before his funeral, and the apartment was bursting with flowers. Anne feels glad that they had this time to be with him in their own home—particularly as they never had a chance to say goodbye to him before he died. A kind and compassionate man from the funeral directors suggested that they might

like to put special things of Alistair's inside the coffin with him—and she is grateful for his thoughtfulness, and glad that they did this.

The autopsy concluded that Alistair had died of “acute myocarditis”—a “normal” virus had suddenly attacked his heart, and he would have died instantly. No symptoms could ever have been seen, and nothing could ever have been done to prevent it.

The family struggle to carry on with their lives, and Yvonne has moved back to Singapore to be with her parents in their family home. Anne and Helmut feel lost without their youngest son, and are both exhausted from keeping up the appearance of coping. But the family will all be together to mark the first anniversary of Alistair's death, to share the grief they all feel so acutely.

Eulogy: To Alistair

Written by Helmut Grawert, Alistair's father

Alistair was a very special person.

At funerals, people are often described as wonderful people—after all, who wants to say anything negative about someone who has died?

But this is different.

Alistair does not need to be described as a wonderful person—he simply WAS wonderful.

Yes, he often withdrew into his own world. He was a very private person. To those he loved, he showed his love in a very shy and non intrusive way. Sometimes almost unnoticeable. Even as an almost 15 year old, he would suddenly come, put his arms around me and say, “Papa, I love you.” Normally teenagers at that age fight with their parents.

He very much loved his mother, who was the real centre of his life, as I travelled so much. He loved his sister Yvonne, his brother Christopher and many other people. But only to a few chosen ones did he really open up.

When his closest friend at school, Martin, left, he wrote a little letter which said, “I am so sad that my best friend left, but I am so happy for him, that he is now back with his parents and siblings.” It was important to him that other people were happy.

When Yvonne left for Australia, and Christopher soon after for Germany, he was so sad—but he accepted it without complaining. He just said that he would like always to be with us.

He was very modest and undemanding. If you wanted to buy him something, he would choose something cheap, or say, “I don't want it, it's

too expensive.” He refused pocket money, stating, “You give me everything I need.” Of the money we gave him for his school trip to Thailand, he only spent 10 baht!

Alistair loved animals, and he decided to become a vegetarian at the age of 10. He said, “I don’t want animals to die for me.” It was his decision and he stuck to it.

He was incredibly adult in his views from an early age. He did not speak often, preferring to listen to other people. If he said something, it was often very smart and sometimes very witty.

He liked his tennis very much, and was getting quite good at it. He was a good swimmer, and sometimes came along with me to play golf. He did not like it as much as tennis and sometimes, I think, he just came along to please me.

When he recently did quite well in a tennis tournament, I asked him later when he came home, “How did it go?” He replied, “Oh, quite OK.” My wife, who came in after him, then told me that he had made it to the semi finals in singles, and had actually won the doubles together with his partner. I would have boasted about this to everyone—he was just very modest about it.

Alistair was never mischievous. He was always straight and honest.

He felt deeply for people, but found it difficult to open himself up and show it. I am sure that there are many among you whom he loved more than you might realise.

Alistair died in his sleep at about 4.00 am on March 15th. The cause is still mysterious as the autopsy showed him to be in good health, only with some indication of a viral infection.

His face was very peaceful and he looked like someone quietly asleep.

He went as quietly as he lived.

We would have loved to have him around for the rest of our lives.

But it was not to be.

He is always deeply engraved in our hearts and thus will always be with us.