

THE FULL STORY. ALL THE FACTS. YOU DECIDE.

City Press

TO SUBSCRIBE SMS 'SUBS' TO 33117

City Press

Search...

Search Archives

Navigation ²

Just In ASA, SABC bring athletics back to television

Politics

The day Mario Oriani-Ambrosini stopped the pain

Carol Coetzee @City_Press

21 September 2014 15:00

Like 97

Tweet 36

9



Mario Oriani-Ambrosini's widow Carin and their seven-year-old son Luke at the family's home in Hout Bay, Cape Town. Picture: Nasief Manie

His wife, sister, a friend and a nurse stayed up talking to him all night and, shortly before dawn, put on his favourite opera – Verdi's Aida – when he asked to be left alone.

The birds had started singing outside, ready to welcome another fine day, when the report of a revolver shook the entire house, followed by deathly silence.

It was just before 6am on August 16 in Hout Bay, Cape Town, and Mario Oriani-Ambrosini was dead.

The shot came just 15 months after the fiery IFP MP was diagnosed with terminal lung cancer. He spent a large part of that time mounting a fierce campaign in Parliament to legalise the medical use of dagga oil.

In the living room of their beautiful home, Oriani-Ambrosini's wife Carin (38) speaks publicly for the first time about his courageous fight against cancer.

"No one can quite imagine the trauma. That shot, and blood everywhere you looked. It shocked every bit of humanity in you. It's something that will always haunt you," she tells City Press' sister paper, Rapport.

"Mario tried everything. He could do no more. The cancer was everywhere – his lungs, his stomach, his legs, everywhere! Everything in him stopped working. It robbed him of his dignity, especially for his child [the couple's seven-year-old son Luke] to see him like this. He was in emotional conflict, in unbearable pain ... on the brink of death that would not come gently and quickly.

"It could have been so different. Imagine if we who loved him could hold his hand, hug him for a last time, while a doctor injected him and released him peacefully from all this suffering? That's what we do for our animals when they suffer. Why not also for people?"

The couple met 11 years ago when Carin was an air hostess on a flight from Joburg to Frankfurt. She saw him sitting next to IFP leader Mangosuthu Buthelezi.

For him, it was love at first sight. He was on his way to a wedding in Venice, but soon made contact with her. Barely two weeks later, they were on their first date. Nobody else was dancing and the shy Carin reluctantly gave in when the flamboyant extrovert led her on to the floor – and there and then he swept her off her feet.

Laughing, she says: "Mario always gets his way!"

"Three months later, he wanted to marry. For me it was too fast. We hardly knew each other."

There were great differences between the woman from Standerton and the international legal and constitutional law expert, who was also 15 years her senior.

Oriani-Ambrosini, a product of Harvard and Georgetown universities, became known in South Africa in 1991 when he was appointed as Buthelezi's adviser. He also has a law practice in Washington and in 2009 became an MP for the IFP.

"I knew nothing about Mario's accomplishments or even his

crucial role in the drawing up of our Constitution," Carin confesses.

"Mario was exciting, but did not boast. He was always bubbling over with ideas, theories and solutions for mankind."

Their relationship blossomed with exotic dates across the world, from Milan, Paris and Frankfurt to New York; and when he asked for her hand 10 months later in the Laurel Caverns in

Talking Point



Xenophobia: Not in my name!

The current spate of violence characterised by attacks on foreigners is by all accounts the most difficult to comprehend and painful to witness.

[More Talking Points](#)

We Like

- 1 [Gauteng steps up school security amid fears of xenophobic violence](#)
- 2 [Arno Lamoer gets R5000 bail, remains on the job](#)
- 3 [Picketers demand consultation on state's food policy](#)
- 4 [How does SA cope with load shedding? Laugh, of course](#)
- 5 [Patricia de Lille rules out nomination](#)

Vote

President Jacob Zuma's son, Edward, says government must stop unnecessarily accommodating foreign nationals. His comments are ...

- Shameful. He is promoting xenophobia
- Harsh but true. SA needs tighter immigration policies
- His views are irrelevant. He shouldn't be commenting at all

Vote

View Results

Polls Archive

Pennsylvania, she could no longer decline.

They married in September 2005 and just more than a year later, Luke was born. Oriani-Ambrosini was elated and never hesitated to change a nappy or get up to feed his little son. But Carin makes no secret of the

fact that they had serious differences when it came to their newborn.

"Mario was a genius and one could feel intimidated, but nobody knows everything and he was not always practical. He was not someone with whom you cross swords, but I learnt to hold my ground."

In a move that would prove to be an ironic prelude to his ultimate approach to cancer, Oriani-Ambrosini did not want to have Luke vaccinated, not even against polio or measles. He lost that round, but there were other disagreements, Carin says.

He was a workaholic, closeting himself in his study with its dark green walls and red carpet. They holidayed in Italy for two weeks a year and in the US for another two.

"On the one hand, he had a great sense of humour and liked to socialise, but at the same time he worked and stressed like a maniac. Stupid and lazy people with whom he could not have a conversation sent his blood pressure soaring."

The stress took its toll. He had not once taken ill from the time they met until Christmas 2012, when a pain under his arms and on his sides worsened. Doctors could not explain it.

Three months later, a scan showed fluid on his lung. "It was a Friday in March 2013. They wanted to operate on the Monday, but Mario first wanted to fly to London for Margaret Thatcher's funeral."

Carin couldn't stop him.

When the operation was done a week later, they received the devastating news that Oriani-Ambrosini had between six and nine months left to live if he didn't get treatment.

He would live a little longer if he had chemotherapy, doctors said, but there were side effects and death was certain.

Oriani-Ambrosini desperately started reading everything he could about cancer and within days, the family travelled to Rome – first to see his cousin, an oncologist, and then on to the notorious Dr Tullio Simoncini, who believes cancer is a fungus which he treats with bicarbonate of soda.

"I understand why Mario grabbed at straws," says Carin. "Dr Simoncini gave him something to believe in, while doctors could not promise anything. It broke my heart to see how he suffered. They drilled a hole in his lung and inserted a pipe through which the bicarbonate of soda was injected into his lung daily and then sucked out again after they had rolled him around so that it could spread."

She and Luke returned to Cape Town after three weeks and Oriani-Ambrosini came back in September. By then, the Dalai Lama had heard of his sickness and in November, the Tibetan spiritual leader sent his personal physician to treat the MP with Chinese medicine.

It was one in a string of alternative treatments and supplements – everything from mistletoe injections to ozone therapy, a ketogenic diet supplemented with turmeric and fenugreek to hyperbaric oxygen therapy and ultraviolet light.

"My husband became weaker and weaker. It was a shock to see him deteriorating and I felt helpless. I admired him for trying so hard, but sometimes I wondered whether he would not have been better off just relaxing instead of rushing around looking for a miracle cure.

"In November [2013], there was also a mysterious person who had special capsules containing dagga oil delivered to us. It comes in the form of a capsule or suppository that does not make you high."

By February, she knew the benefactor: Advocate Robin Stransham-Ford, who had been diagnosed with advanced prostate cancer and, according to him, was given "a few months" to live.

He and Oriani-Ambrosini became close friends and together started the Cancer Treatment Campaign. They also tabled the Medical Innovation Bill in Parliament – an attempt to make it legal for doctors to prescribe alternative medicine.

In a debate on President Jacob Zuma's state of the nation address, Oriani-Ambrosini was widely quoted as telling the president: "I must admit, I have just smoked dagga because if I hadn't, I would have had to use morphine and then I would not be standing here."

This isn't correct, says Carin. He might have said it in that way for the shock effect to wake sleeping parliamentarians and get their attention or to amuse them. Her husband was quite provocative, but he was not a junkie.

"He did not even smoke cigarettes and we suspect his lung cancer was caused by exposure to asbestos many years ago. He definitely did not smoke dagga, but he took the suppositories, which made him feel better – probably the best of all the other things."

In January, Carin and Oriani-Ambrosini agreed that she and Luke would move in with a friend down the road. He didn't want his son to go through the trauma of his illness.

Carin went to see him every day, and Oriani-Ambrosini's sister Mirta also arrived from Italy.

In March, he travelled to London with a friend to attend another friend's 60th wedding anniversary celebration. After that, it was the beginning of the end.

By June, his feet and his stomach had swollen and he spent a month in hospital receiving the radiotherapy he'd been so opposed to.

In July, he was in hospital again for about two weeks.

[Google+](#)[Print](#)[Email](#)[Settings...](#)[AddThis](#)[Privacy](#)