

Almost nine full months have passed since a medical mystery suddenly cut short the life of a South Milwaukee High School junior, known by his mother as a ‘dream’ and by his football coach as a ‘leader.’ Although still deeply saddened by his death, friends and family rejoice in

Remembering Albert

By Tracy Marhal
Staff Writer

It is still difficult for Albert Nazifi’s mother, Sedaet, to finish a sentence without tears. And although his father, Sadik may seem a bit more collected, he too has a difficult time keeping composed while remembering the life and death of their eldest son.

“He was in the hospital for 20 days,” said Sedaet. “It seemed like 20 hours.”

Her Younger son, Robert, now her only child, sees her eyes tear up and hands her a box of tissue like a reflex. Rob himself tries to voice a memory of his big brother, but also gets choked up.

Mom speaks for him.

“They used to play golf in the house and break the heads off of my porcelain dolls,” she said with a smile

The brothers also would play football in their apartment in the 1000 block of Madison Avenue, “Albert used to call him (Rob) a beast because he’s such a strong kid,” Sadik said.

Sadik recalls the time he and Albert arm-wrestled and, as will happen, the younger generation won.

“We laughed,” Sadik said. “I told him I let him win, but I really tried”

In his short life, Albert Nazifi set the groundwork for a long legacy of memories. The South Milwaukee High School junior died Dec. 19, 1999, after suffering a series of brain aneurysms.

South Milwaukee senior Nick Kehoe remembers when his best friend Al scored his first touchdown in a varsity football game.

“We get to the end zone, he turns around, and we don’t know what to do,” said Kehoe, a receiver for the team. “It was our first varsity touchdown, so he just puts up his hands and shouts ‘Yes!’



CNI File Photo

As a running back for the South Milwaukee Rockets, No. 33, Albert Nazifi, Battles across the line in a game against Muskego High School in 1999.

And then we ran back to the huddle,”

Fellow seniors and friends, like Brienne Farina, Joe Hager and Jessica Mettelmann, also have a place in their hearts where they keep Albert, thanks to events like late night basketball in the back yard and battles fought with Silly String, shaving cream or mashed potatoes.

“It was a guys against girls food fight,” said Mettelmann, insisting that the girls won.

although Kehoe and Hager beg to differ.

“It was a tie,” said Sadik.

“That was before he died,” slips from someone’s lips.

Otherwise normal day

In a letter written by Sedaet, she describes the beginning of the end of Albert’s life as “an average Monday morning after Thanksgiving”



ROCK33T
FOOTBALL

“Al was the type who was always positive and a leader in class. He never looked down on people. He enjoyed being a high school student. It was that, that I saw from him that made me happy”

Brad Knoche
Head Football coach

It was so until her son, who she said “never got sick,” had a severe headache, slipped into a coma and was rushed to St. Luke’s Hospital for a bleeding vein in the brain, or an aneurysm.

During his stay, thousands of cards, letters and banners were received and the “endless” amount of visitors that came daily overwhelmed her, Sedaet said.

But eventually, Albert’s brain gave up.

“God couldn’t do this to me,” she said, recalling what she thought at the moment.

Sedaet decided to keep Albert on life support for 24 hours because “God’s going to give me a miracle,” she said.

There was no miracle. On Sunday of that week, the family put 16 -year-old

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

Albert

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Albert to rest.

Sedaet knows she provided Albert with the best life she could, and that provides some comfort.

She recalled him asking, "Mom, what do you want from me and Rob? Everything you do for me and Rob, how do we pay you back?"

Sedaet's response was simply she wanted her sons to say their mother left nothing out of their lives.

"You've done that," replied Albert. "What else do you want?"

Remembering moments like that make healing a bit more challenging.

Sadik said it will take "the rest of our lives" to fully recover from the tragedy.

"Al was as good as it gets," his mother said.

Because of Albert's kind and mature personality, Sadaet often referred to him as a "golden boy" or a "mother's dream." She recalled that she often said to herself, "This is too good to be true."

Leader in sport and school

Although Albert participated in volleyball and basketball, football was his main focus. He played running back. Many thought he had a future in the sport after high school.

"Al was the type who was always positive and a leader in class," head football coach Brad Knoche said. "He never looked down on people.

"He enjoyed being a high school student. It was that, that I saw from that



Albert excelled in academics and sports. He got eared up for baseball games between fourth and fifth grade (left), but football (right) was his favorite sport.

made me happy."

District officials accommodated friends who would visit Albert at the hospital and closed school on the day of his funeral. South Milwaukee High School has organized a scholarship fund, along with a display case, to honor Albert's memory.

"I want everybody to know how satisfied I was by what the school did," Sedaet said. "They are the most wonderful leaders."

Knoche said the school also will remember Albert by using some of

the funds collected in his honor to purchase a projection device that the athletic department can use to study game tapes. It will replace the television-videocassette recorder system now used.

The school also changed its T-shirt logos for the year. Instead of the usual "Rockets," the logo will encompass Albert's jersey number, 33, to be read a "Rock33ts."

All the varsity guys have a helmet sticker with 33 on it, too, Knoche said.

Sedaet recalled a worker from the funeral home telling her that in more than 40 years of his employment there, he had never seen so many people at a funeral.

Power to unite

But there is a deeper kind of memorial aside from the trees planted, the display case set up in the high school and scholarships awarded in Albert's honor. There is the bond he helped to create between people who may otherwise have been strangers.

He created colorful memories in the minds of people he left behind, like Rob's last meal with Albert at the hospital - fast food, or the AJAPAN Open, a golf game created in Albert's back yard, titled using the first initial of the names of all who participated.

"Last night they had a girls' night," Sadik said jokingly. "They kicked me out. I had to sleep outside."

Sedaet believes in angels.

"There's angels on the earth. You have to find them," she said.

"I was lucky enough to find all these wonderful people," she said, referring to Albert's group of friends who she calls "the best apples from the tree."

"We know he's in a better place," Sedaet said.

She admits for awhile she was mad at God for taking Albert away, but also said she doesn't know why God does what he does.

"I'll find the reason when I die," Sedaet said.

She thinks maybe part of God's reason for Albert's life on this earth was to unite these people with a common bond, a sort of preparation for the inevitable.

"Al was as good as it gets."

Sedaet Nazifi, Albert's mother

Albert's Maxims

(as created by Albert in Mr. Lareau's English class in November 1999)

1. To be the best person I can be
2. To be successful
3. To be honest
4. To work hard
5. To die a happy man



Albert Nazifi; the son, brother, the friend, the student