



LEFT: Yolanda Coetzee's son Danté Chan (RIGHT) was apparently stabbed to death by her former partner's son, Mario Engelbrecht. **ABOVE:** Danté and Mario during a family holiday. They were like brothers.



I JUST WANT TO KNOW WHY

Her partner's son stabbed her boy 36 times, destroying a life – and a family

By GLORIA EDWARDS Pictures: PAPI MORAKE

FOR five years their sons from previous marriages grew up as brothers. They played and partied together on holidays. Sometimes they argued a bit but things never got ugly – until the day her partner's son, completely out of the blue, allegedly stabbed her boy 36 times with a knife.

When she found Danté Chan (14) lying lifeless in a pool of blood he “still had the steak knife in his chest”, his devastated mom, Yolanda Coetzee, says. “I was hysterical. There was so much blood. I can't describe that shock.”

Then, right there at the murder scene, she heard the shocking news there'd been a fight between Danté and Mario Engelbrecht, the 20-year-old university student she'd accepted as her own son.

She couldn't believe it, not until testimony was heard in the Vanderbijlpark regional court that Mario had admitted killing Danté because he was jealous of him.

CCTV footage from a local supermarket showed Mario, a third-year student at North-West University, buying a knife the day before the murder.

Yolanda (37) shakes her head in disbelief as she sits under the thatched roof of a lapa at a friend's home, a short distance from the house where her son died so violently.

“I don't even want to know exactly what happened. I just want to know why,” the mom of three says.

For a long time she couldn't decide whether to talk about that traumatic day. “But if by doing so I can help even one person then

Danté's death wasn't in vain.”

YOLANDA met Marius Engelbrecht (50) five years ago through their work at a horse racing business. It wasn't long before she and her children, Brandon (17), Danté and Chantel (9), had moved into his flat behind his house in Vanderbijlpark, Gauteng, which he'd turned into an office.

He was divorced and his children, Mario and his 18-year-old sister, lived nearby with their mother and came to visit every second weekend.

For years all the kids got on well, Yolanda says. She shows us pictures on her cellphone of Danté and Mario playing ball on the beach and swimming together during a recent seaside holiday.

But there was tension in her relationship with Marius. In January she began working at a new branch in Vereeniging, Gauteng, and decided to move there with her children.

“The real reason was to give us some space to work on our relationship,” she admits. “It wasn't just the kids or just the relationship or just the job. It was a bit of everything.”

Her children still went to school in Vanderbijlpark and spent afternoons at Marius' flat. She'd fetch them after work.

On the afternoon of 31 July Marius was at their company's Drie Riviere branch near Vereeniging and she popped in there before going to fetch Danté. “Danté had called me after cricket to say I shouldn't fetch him too late because he'd left the keys to the flat at home and would have to wait outside.

“While I was with Marius he got a phone call and said he had to go home right away. I thought it was about work. Later I heard it was from his ex-wife. She told him Mario had called her to say he and Danté had had a bad fight. But the details were vague. That's why he didn't realise how serious it was.”

Marius was the first to find Danté and immediately called David Oswald, a friend and colleague who lived nearby. David called the police and an ambulance.

Blissfully unaware of the tragedy, Yolanda arrived at Marius' house just after five to collect Danté.

“I instantly felt something was wrong,” she recalls. “Marius walked over to me and said he was sorry. Then I saw the blood on the wall of the flat and Danté's feet on the ground in the driveway in front of the door. When I ran around the corner my son was lying there in a pool of blood with the knife still in his chest.

‘I spoilt him horribly. Now I know why I had to’

“I shook and shook his lifeless body. I just wanted to do something for him, breathe life back into him. But he was already gone,” she says tearfully. Only then did Marius tell her of the fight between their sons.

She was hysterical and although the emergency services and the police were soon on the scene she says every minute felt like an hour. Meanwhile Danté's father, Dickson Chan, rushed to the scene from his home in Midrand.

Mario was arrested at his mother's house shortly afterwards. Bail was denied and he's still in custody.

“We haven't been able to talk to him yet,” a shattered Yolanda says. “All I want to ask him is, why? If it really was him who did this, what was going on in his head?”

Mario, a B Com Accountancy student, was apparently the first learner from a high school for children with learning difficulties to get university exemption. He was doing well academically and worked hard.

“He was in a clinic for depression a year ago but that was about his self-image,” Yolanda says. “He's a smart young guy, well-mannered and from a good home. It's all so hard to believe.”

She no longer has any contact with



ABOVE: Yolanda's former partner Marius Engelbrecht with his son, Mario. **RIGHT:** Yolanda and her youngest child, Chantel (9).

Marius. “I don't blame him at all. They're good people and he's a good father. But I think something like this would shake any relationship. How do you get over it? How would we be able to look each other in the eye every day with this memory?”

Both Yolanda and Marius are struggling to get over the shock, their friend and colleague David says. “I can see they're both going through hell. They've both been hurt. She's without a son, his is in jail. Their hearts are broken.”

YOLANDA is now focusing on supporting her other two children through the trauma.

She wants to remember Danté the way he was. “I comfort myself with the knowledge he had a strong faith in God. He was a wonderful, beautiful child.

“When I think how many hundreds of people were at his funeral – there were children there from four schools – I realise in his short life he made a huge impact on everyone who knew him. He was really special.

He played rugby, cricket and water polo and was a role model. He was a spontaneous, lovely person, almost too good to be alive. I spoilt him horribly. Now I know why I had to.”

● At the time of going to press Mario's lawyer, Jaco van Heerden of Vereeniging, had applied to the Vanderbijlpark magistrate's court to refer his client for psychological observation. The Director of Public Prosecution will use the psychologist's report to determine whether to proceed with the prosecution. “At this stage Mario is planning to plead not guilty,” Van Heerden says. ■

