

# Alvin's last w

**A**LVIN Stardust's widow Julie is an astonishing woman. Four hours before our meeting at the home she has shared with the Seventies pop star for a blissfully happy 27 years, she was lying beside him as he struggled through the final, painful minutes of his life.

'Go to your mum, my darling,' she had urged him. 'She's waiting for you. I need you to know you can go now and be at peace and that I love you and you don't need to worry about us.'

'Us' is Julie, 44, and their gorgeous 13-year-old daughter Millie Margaret Mary. They were both there in the bedroom alongside Alvin's grown-up children from two earlier marriages when the legendary glam-rock singer, who has been battling prostate cancer for 18 months, mouthed 'I love you'.

Within an hour, he had died. He was 72 years old. Julie wept, raged then dried her eyes and now here she is, showered and buoyed with a cup of strong coffee, pulling upon every last ounce of strength she has to give this interview.

The undertakers have not even been to collect Alvin's body and some of their dearest friends have yet to be told, but this is of the utmost importance to Julie. She says it was to Alvin.

He had, you see, arranged this interview himself after learning on Monday the cancer he'd been battling for a year-and-a-half had spread to his liver. As his oncologist explained, 'you have to prepare yourself. You're coming to the end of the journey.'

'That was the hardest moment because we both looked into each others' eyes and were kissing each other saying, "I love you, I love you, I love you,"' says Julie, her eyes streaming with the tears that are a constant throughout our discussion.

'I said: "Now is the time to stop fighting, darling. Now is the time to be peaceful and calm."

'Luckily that happened at 7.10 this morning. What day are we now?' Thursday, I tell her gently. Does she want to stop? Perhaps I should come back another time?

'No, I want to do this for him,' she insists. 'At 3am this morning he was still determined he was going to

**I lay beside him and said: 'Go now and be at peace'**

give this interview himself. But he was so weak. I was worried in the middle of the night thinking: "Oh what will I do? I'll have to talk for him and he'll just nod."

'If that had happened you'd have seen in his eyes whether or not I was interpreting what he felt and thought correctly. He had the most amazing eyes. They were so honest. He was such an honest and decent man...'

Again, she weeps. 'What am I going to do? I've been loved by the best. What now?'

This lovely family home in Ifold, West Sussex, is filled with the couple's close family. Perhaps Julie should be with them instead of sitting here surrounded by the many family photographs of happier times? What about their daughter, Millie? Doesn't she want to comfort her?

'Millie's with a friend,' says Julie. 'She's not good. She's had five minutes on her own with him, but she said, "Mum, I don't want to see him being cold." So I sent her off.'

'But she's the point of this, don't you see? If Alvin had been diagnosed earlier, our 13-year-old daughter would still have had a father. That's why he wanted to do this. He wanted to tell people to get checked.'

'But sadly, it caught him before he could say it, so I have to be the voice for him. I want to do this for him because I know he'd have wanted me to. He wanted people to know he'd battled on and that you can keep fighting.'

Indeed, as recently as five days before his death, Alvin was on stage in concert in Evesham, Worcestershire,

by **Rebecca Hardy**

blasting out his top ten hits such as My Coo Ca Choo, Jealous Mind and I Feel Like Buddy Holly. The only clue he was so desperately ill was the fact that he had to sit on a stool instead of stand up.

'The cancer was in his spine and his back was so painful, he couldn't stand for long,' says Julie. 'Only his family and a few very close friends knew.'

'Alvin's instinct was the show must go on and, as long as he kept fighting, it would. He wanted to say to his fans in this interview today that they might have noticed he'd been a little dodderly and this was the reason why.'

'He didn't say anything earlier because if everyone had been wonderful and kind to him, he wouldn't have been able to go on stage because it would have been too emotional. The love would have just wiped him out.'

Alvin Stardust, born Bernard Jewry, was that rare thing in show-business: a thoroughly decent man.

While his dear friends included the likes of Eric Clapton, Gary Brooker of Procul Harum, The Who's Kenney Jones, Suzi Quattro and Cliff Richard, who is godfather to Millie, a glitzy lifestyle wasn't really his scene.

Instead, he preferred to spend time with his family, pottering around the garden and playing with his little girl. Julie was just 18 when she met 45-year-old Alvin — who was by then separated from his second wife Liza Goddard — in a 1988 production of Godspell.

Her parents, who are here in the house this morning, were horrified she'd fallen in love with a man so

**'What am I going to do? I've been loved by the best'**

many years older and took the best part of a year to warm to him.

On Wednesday, when his condition began to rapidly deteriorate, they told him they wouldn't have 'changed a hair on his head for the world'.

During Alvin's lifetime Julie never gave a thought to the fact he would probably leave her a widow. He was, she says, 'such a vibrant, young man'.

'The age thing never ever came into it because as he grew older and slightly frailer towards the end, I just grew to love him more.' She snorts a half laugh.

'We did have a wry smile at the beginning of the week after we'd been told it was the end of the journey. I said: "well there is one thing about it, darling. I'll remember you like this.

**In an interview that'll tear at your heart — speaking just four hours after losing the man she adored — Alvin Stardust's wife reveals his deathbed wish... and why he hid his fight with prostate cancer**

You're still handsome — which he is — and I'm not going to be remembering taking you here, there and everywhere in a Zimmer frame.'

'He could have lived to the ripe old age of 88 and I'd have been there, because I adored him, but I might have resented it.'

'The only time I've thought about the age difference is my guilt surrounding Millie now,' she says. 'I thought, if I'd been with a younger man, this wouldn't have happened to her at such a young age because prostate cancer usually happens to older men.'

'We've just got to find a way through this together. I've said to her, "we've got to be a team so Daddy can see us as a team".' The many lovely photographs in this warm, lived-in home show the close bond between father and daughter.

'Millie used to say: "Daddy, why am I called Millie Margaret Mary?" and Alvin used to say, "because you're mmm, mmm, mmm delicious." She had this thing where she called him Superdad.'

'If I was tickling Millie or whatever, she'd shout out, "Superdad, Superdad, help me", and he'd come in and pretend to throw me off...'. She stops to collect herself. 'He talked about Superdad on Monday. He cried about it. He said: "I can't be Superdad anymore." That was hard. I said: "You'll always be Superdad to me." Sorry...'. She wipes her eyes with the back of her hand.

From the moment Alvin set eyes on Julie he knew, as he told her many times, 'this was it'.

Not proud of the fact he'd been

divorced twice — the second time from actress Liza Goddard, with whom he had a daughter Sophie and stepson Tom as well as two sons, grammar school headmaster Shaun and DJ Adam from his first marriage — he insisted he and Julie renew their vows every seven years.

'He said we're never going to be in that position where after seven years it goes funny. We won't have the seven-year itch, we'll have the seven-year hitch.'

They renewed them three times — in Barbados, the village church near their Sussex home and, most recently, in Portugal. Their 22nd wedding anniversary was last Saturday, the date Alvin performed for a final time. These coincidences

**He performed on stage days before he died**

assume an importance of sorts in Julie's grief.

Alvin was diagnosed with prostate cancer 18 months — perhaps two years — ago. Understandably, Julie is struggling with that sort of detail this morning. The symptoms, though, were there for several years, unbeknown to both of them.

'Years before he'd had a well-man thing done and had his prostate checked,' says Julie. 'We were told

his PSA [a protein produced by the prostate — raised levels in the blood can be an early indication of prostate cancer] was up a little bit but that it was completely normal in a man of his age. I won't blame anybody for this but if I had anything to say it would be, "please don't say that again to somebody".'

'I was naïve. Alvin was naïve. I wish they had said "keep an eye on that". But they didn't and he didn't have a lot of symptoms. It didn't affect his sex life and he didn't have any urinary symptoms.'

He did, though, begin suffering three years ago with a nagging hip pain.

'We were in Paris walking down the Champs-Elysees when he started complaining about his hip. I now know prostate cancer can present itself as hip pain — if only I'd known that then.'

'I can't say it is connected and I can't say it isn't, but perhaps if I'd known how significant it was, things might have been different. What do you think?' I tell her there is no point torturing herself over the 'what ifs'. She shrugs.

'We had to get a cab that day, which is unheard of for Alvin,' she continues. 'I've got to be honest with you, there were times when I thought "if this was a woman we'd just be getting on with it".'

The cancer was only diagnosed a





# ords of love



Devoted: Alvin with his beloved wife Julie and daughter Millie and, inset left, the singer in his glam-rock heyday

year or so later, when Alvin underwent a barrage of test and X-rays after suffering what Julie believed to be a panic attack.

'I was in London for three days in a show when Alvin got a call from his doctor to say: "You need to come in because the radiologist has found some stuff on your X-ray we need to discuss."

'There were lesions on his spine. He'd had the cancer for quite a while and it had spread. Being the sort of

protective person

Alvin is, he waited for me to come home and asked my mum and dad to come up from Swansea so they'd be there when he told me.

'They sat me down when Millie went to bed. He said they'd found some lesions and they were 99 per cent sure they were cancerous. My life just fell apart at that point. I think I was in disbelief for a few days — a bit like now.' I ask again if she'd like to stop the interview. Again she refuses.

'It was an aggressive cancer. They did that Gleason test [tests providing a score between two and ten predicting the aggressiveness of the cancer]. He was about a seven. I was in denial

about that, I should have seen the grim picture but I just hated everyone for telling me that because I didn't want to hear it.

'Constantly, it's in your mind, "if only they'd discovered it sooner". There were times I'd look in the paper and see somebody having an operation to remove it and I'd say "whoopee for you". I'd feel angry because Alvin didn't have that chance.'

Alvin's cancer was too advanced for surgery. Instead, doctors attempted to treat it with hormone therapy — which was unsuccessful — and chemotherapy.

'He sailed through the first round of chemotherapy,' says Julie. 'But the second round wasn't so good. That's why it all went pear-shaped, because his bone marrow never really recovered properly. He wasn't strong enough because the cancer was getting to him.'

Unbelievably, Alvin continued to perform throughout his treatment as well as co-writing and recording his first album since 1984, on which he has dedicated two songs to Julie, *It Had To Be You* and *Love You Until I Die*. The second of the two will now play at his funeral in the church where their marriage was blessed in Swansea.

'He knew when he wrote it he was dying,' says Julie. 'They stopped the chemotherapy in July. They just had to observe him to see if his body got strong so they might be able to give him

some other clinical trials they were doing.'

Alvin, remarkably, performed in a concert with The Who at drummer Kenney Jones's polo ground Hurtwood, in Sussex, to raise money for prostate cancer, which his friend Kenney had successfully beaten. Few of those present were aware he was going through the final stages of the disease himself when he stood on that stage.

'August wasn't so good. He was getting very stiff,' says Julie. 'The

## 'He so wanted to warn men to get checked'

last eight weeks it's been worse. He's been in constant pain.

'I've cried myself to sleep in his arms until it got to the point where I couldn't be in his arms any more because I couldn't even do this to him (she brushes my hand) because he was in so much pain.

I asked him if he was scared. He said he wasn't scared. He just didn't want to leave me and Millie. He was petrified of leaving us.

'On Monday he said: "I don't want to lose you Jules. I don't want to leave you. I won't hear your voice. What am I going to do?"' She sobs. 'That's what

I feel: I'm never going to hear him talk to me again.'

Julie contacted Alvin's children this week. They all joined them — Adam flying from California where he works — at the family home. 'Adam was the last to arrive, on Wednesday night at 7pm. Alvin opened his eyes and gave him the biggest beaming smile because he adored him — he adored all of his children.

'This morning I was in lying in bed with him at 6.30am and he was breathing oddly. That's when I told him not to worry any more and to go to his mum. We had half an hour of funny breathing then at 7.05am the noise stopped.

'I looked him in the eye and knew he was taking his last breaths. So I ran out of the bedroom, grabbed my mum to get Sophie and I grabbed Millie.

'Millie was holding one hand, Sophie the other and, just as one of his sons walked into the bedroom, his breath went. I had my face next to his, saying, "I love you darling" as he died.'

The sitting room falls silent. There is no more to add. Julie looks exhausted but as if a weight has been lifted. She has done as she feels Alvin would have wished. It is a hugely poignant moment that ticks seamlessly into the next until the undertakers arrive.

When they carry his body down the stairs, past the many happy photographs charting this lovely family's life together, Julie's words reverberate: Get yourself checked.