

Girl, 5, shot in Christchurch mosque attack awakens from coma unable to see

Wasseim Alsati and his daughter Alen were shot outside Al Noor mosque in March

CBC Radio · Posted: Apr 15, 2019 6:59 PM EDT | Last Updated: April 16, 2019



Five-year-old Alen Daraghmih was shot in the Christchurch, N.Z., mosque attacks and spent several weeks in a coma. (Submitted by Wasseim Alsati)

[Transcript](#)

The last thing Christchurch mosque shooting survivor Wasseim Alsati remembers before he lost consciousness is his daughter's tiny belly covered in blood.

The New Zealand barber had a rare morning off on March 15, and he decided to spend it with his then-four-year-old girl Alen Daraghmih and take her to mosque with him.

"That was her first time in life to come with me to the mosque," Alsati told *As It Happens* host Carol Off.

But before they even got inside Al Noor, both father and daughter were shot and left for dead.

Monday marks one month since a gunman slaughtered 50 people at two Christchurch, N.Z., mosques. For the survivors, the road to recovery has been a long one.

'Look after my daughter'

Bystanders found them and drove them to hospital.

"I realized as soon as we come into the hospital that my daughter was dying. She was absolutely dying," Alsati said. "Then I said to the doctors, 'Leave me and go look after my daughter.'"

Hospital staff assured Alsati that both he and Alen would be treated with the same urgency and care. Then doctors started to cut the blood-soaked clothes from his body, and he slipped into a coma.

When he awoke two and a half weeks later, he kept repeating: "I couldn't save my daughter. I couldn't save my daughter."

But he was wrong. He did save her. Alen was unconscious, but alive, at the children's Starship Hospital in Auckland.



Wasseim Alsati, left, is pictured here before the Christchurch shooting with his four children, including Alen in a striped sweater. (Submitted by Wasseim Alsati)

The shooter had aimed his automatic rifle at the little girl's head, but her father scooped her up and shielded her. She took a bullet to the stomach and another to her toes.

"They told me, 'Your daughter's fine,'" he said. "I didn't believe them. I didn't believe even my wife."

He kept slipping in and out of consciousness, he said. And every time he woke up, he started screaming, certain his youngest child was gone.

Father and daughter reunited

Alsati was eventually moved to Auckland City Hospital, across the street from Starship, so he could see Alen with his own eyes.

"When [the nurse] took me there, I start crying, and I asked to hold his hand and hold my daughter's hand. And I thank him a lot, and I say to him, I say to my daughter's nurses, 'Look after my daughter, because I cannot,'" he said.

"We all start crying — me and the staff and the nurses."



Alsati, left, his family and New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, third from the left, gather around Alen's hospital bed in Auckland. (Submitted by Wasseim Alsati)

Alen awoke from her coma during the first week of April. She turned five while she was still unconscious — a birthday her father thought she'd never live to see.

She's had eight surgeries so far, and doctors say it could be another six months before they can assess just how bad the damage is.

She can't see anything and is just barely responsive, he said. On Monday, she spoke, answering simple questions with "yes" or "no."

"It's amazing news to me, but I don't want to rush things," Alsati said. "I do believe she will get better."

Alsati, meanwhile, took a bullet to the hip and is unable to walk. He still has bullet fragments in his body. Doctors tell him it will be at least another 18 months before he's back on his feet.

'He united us'

The family is getting by on the support of their neighbours and fellow New Zealanders, Alsati said.

They have received letters and gifts of support from all over the country. As of Monday evening, more than \$49,000 had been donated to the family's Givealittle.co.nz crowdfunding page, titled "Extra funds for Wasseim and little Alen."

Meanwhile, Brenton Harrison Tarrant of Australia faces 50 murder charges and 39 attempted murder charges in the March 15 attacks.



Alen turned five in her Auckland hospital bed. (Submitted by Wasseim Alsati)

"The shooter, he didn't succeed. He will never succeed. Even if there's a hundred shooters like him, they will never succeed," Alsati said.

"He united us. He showed us the love in this country, the actual people here. So we love it, and we want to stay here. We're not going anywhere because we call New Zealand home. Christchurch is home."

Written by Sheena Goodyear. Interview with Wasseim Alsati produced by Ashley Mak.