

GABRIEL AL-SALEM: TALENT TO LIVE

(Life Story of an Outstanding Man)

“ON NOVEMBER 27, 2010, AN AMERICAN CITIZEN GABRIEL AL-SALEM DIED IN THE MOUNTAINS AS A RESULT OF A PARAGLIDING ACCIDENT.” THIS SHORT ANNOUNCEMENT FROM THE KAZAKHSTAN EMERGENCY MINISTRY CAME AS A SHOCK: IT WAS HARD TO BELIEVE THE TRAGEDY. GABRIEL SPENT ALMOST 17 YEARS IN KAZAKHSTAN AND CENTRAL ASIA. HE WAS RESPECTED FOR HIS SINCERITY, INTELLECT, INTEGRITY AND EXCEPTIONAL OPTIMISM AND POSITIVE ATTITUDE IN ANY SITUATION. GABRIEL REPRESENTED SEVERAL CULTURES; HE WAS TRULY “A MAN OF THE WORLD,” WHO UNDERSTOOD AND ACCEPTED VARIOUS TRADITIONS. HE SPOKE SEVERAL LANGUAGES FLUENTLY AND FELT AT HOME IN THE UNITED STATES, EUROPE, RUSSIA AND KAZAKHSTAN.

**By Viktoria Olskaia,
wife of Gabriel Al-Salem**

Gabriel was born in Oakland, California on February 1, 1967, the son of Bader Al-Salem, a Kuwaiti architect, and Margarete Dorsch, a German teacher. Already as an infant he had lived on three different continents. After a year of traveling around the world, his mother brought him back to the United States, where he spent his childhood and youth. Gabriel was a native speaker of English and German. His German came from his mother Margarete, who wanted him to be able to communicate easily with his German grandparents. Later in his life Gabriel also became fluent in Spanish, French and Russian. In Kazakhstan he learned some Kazakh and often surprised his friends by inserting an appropriate greeting or a toast. Gabriel had an ear for languages, and even when he knew just a few words in a foreign language it often looked like he could speak the language fluently.

In 1978, Gabriel and his mother moved to Lindsborg, Kansas, the town they would always call home. At school he participated enthusiastically in various theater productions and enjoyed playing the string bass in the orchestra. Making music and playing the bass was so important to Gabriel that he always had an instrument wherever he lived. And even now, there is a lonely instrument sitting in our home in Kazakhstan.

As a student Gabriel traveled the world and lived in various countries. He studied in France, Germany and Holland. In 1987, as a student of the University of Kansas, he first came to Russia. Those were the first years of perestroika, and Gabriel, who loved politics, was fascinated by the changes happening in the former Soviet Union. It was at the University of Leningrad (today St. Petersburg), where I met him. After the studies



in St. Petersburg he completely fell in love with Russia and everything that was connected with Russia. As a result, Gabriel became a graduate student at the Russian Area Studies Program at Georgetown University in Washington, DC.

In May 1992 we got married. The small wedding ceremony took place on Coronado Heights in the middle of a vast Kansas prairie. In a month we also had a celebration in St. Petersburg. After finishing our graduate schools, we left the USA and moved to Berlin and then to Almaty, Kazakhstan. Our first intention was to stay in Almaty for

6 months but we stayed for several years working on various economic development and reform projects. Besides Kazakhstan, Gabriel and I also lived and worked in Mongolia, Vietnam, former Yugoslavia, Germany and Russia. At various times he was an employee of Ernst and Young, KPMG Consulting, Barents Group, and AT Kearney.

In 2000 our daughter Anya was born in Washington, DC. After returning to Kazakhstan in 2001 Gabriel worked for the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development as Director of Business Advisory

*One third of a talent is instincts,
one third is memory and one third is will.*

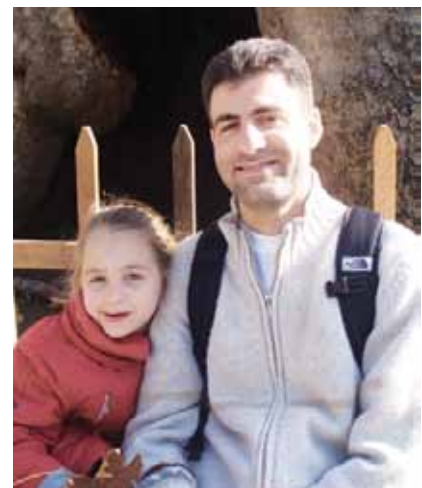
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Services (BAS) Programme in Central Asia. The Programme's headquarters was in Almaty, Kazakhstan, but Gabriel managed to extend the Programme to other countries of Central Asia. The effort he made for the consulting industry in Central Asia is immeasurable as he became the accelerator for the development of business advisory services in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. He made the BAS Programme one of the most effective and innovative programs for the development of consulting industry.

Nowadays consulting services often include a complex series of measures addressing most perspective tendencies in the enterprise development. For example, after supporting over a hundred of ISO implementation projects, in 2010 BAS became actively involved in the promotion of lean production. Placing a special emphasis on developing high professional standards for consultants, Gabriel brought trainings on business ethics to the consultants of Central Asia. In September 2010 Gabriel and seven other consultants from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan received Certified Management Consultant (CMC) professional qualification from International Certified Management Consultants Institutes (ICMCI). Gabriel proved that professionalism has no borders and the world consulting industry is not a closed society for selected individuals. He had big ideas, and his friends and colleagues feel the need to carry on what he had started.

Gabriel was an excellent diplomat, a charming man, a very kind person with a big heart, who did his utmost to support any cause for which he felt a commitment. His colleague from Canada, Heather Osler, wrote after she learned about his death: "He was larger than life. He adored life and lived it to its fullest. And he always seemed to find the sunny side of every moment, even when there were problems."

Gabriel loved and adored his family and always insisted that his time with us was the most precious. He travelled a lot for work, but he always was eager to come back home to be with me and our daughter. Gabriel loved the outdoors and enjoyed so much his time mountaineering, skiing and paragliding. In 2002 he climbed Khan Tengri (the famous and beautiful 21000 feet peak on the border between Kazakhstan and China) and was the first in the world



to fly down from Talgar, a 15000 feet peak in the mountains near Almaty. He flew on a paraglider over France, Turkey, Switzerland, USA, Dominican Republic, and Taiwan. He even managed to fly over the Great Wall of China. An adventurous man, Gabriel always loved to land in new places and meet new people. While paragliding is a dangerous sport, he loved being airborne and enjoying the many facets and beautiful colors of life from above.



After Gabriel's tragic death his friends decided to preserve and further develop his legacy in promoting business consulting. Only a few days after the tragic event his colleagues created Kazakhstan Chamber of Management Consultants "CMC Kazakhstan," which came up with the initiative to establish International Award for Excellency in Consulting named after Gabriel Al-Salem. This independent public Award will recognize outstanding achievements in management consulting and thus promote high professional standards in the industry. The first awards will be handed over to deserving consultants on February 1, 2012, Gabriel's birthday. Also, Viktoria Olskaia is creating a public Foundation named after Gabriel, which will work in Central Asia and later in Europe. The Gabriel Al-Salem Foundation will finance the Award and further help develop professionalism of small and medium enterprises by introducing new technologies and quality consulting services.

The author gives special thanks to Margarete Dorsch, Gabriel's mother, as well as the staff of BAS Programme of the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development for their help in preparing this article.

