

# The 'perfect marriage' that

Outsiders said Robert and Nancy Kissel had the best marriage in the universe. The husband was a high-flying senior investment banker at Merrill Lynch whose personal estate is worth US\$18 million. The wife, an attractive, artistic, and devoted mother of three, had everything that an expat woman could dream of. They lived in a luxurious Parkview apartment and sped about town in a Mercedes and a Porsche. They appeared in public with big smiles, dining with important people such as former US president George Bush.

But the illusion of the beautiful life was shattered on November 2, 2003. On that fateful day, Nancy Kissel killed her husband by hammering his head repeatedly with a heavy lead ornament. The blows were of such force that parts of his skull were pushed into the cerebral cortex and white matter inside the brain. The two figurines sitting atop the 3.7kg ornament flew off during the attack, splattering blood all over the bedroom.

When the 41-year-old stepped into the High Court in late May, her appearance was almost unrecognisable from that two years ago in the days before the killing. The shine in her eyes was gone, blonde hair turned dark brown, colourful outfits had become plain black, her trademark sunglasses replaced by studios, oval, wire-rimmed glasses. She had lost so much weight that she walked like a shadow floating in court.

Her husband, found by police in a rolled-up rug in her Parkview storeroom five days after the killing, was buried in a cemetery in the US state of New Jersey. Their children, in the temporary custody of the estranged wife of her brother-in-law in Greenwich, Connecticut, had not seen or spoken to her since the murder.

Yesterday, after a sensational three-month trial involving more than 500 exhibits and over 100 witnesses, Kissel was found guilty of

what prosecutor Peter Chapman called the "cold-blooded" murder of her husband.

When she testified in early August, Kissel gripped the city as she admitted for the first time that she had killed her husband. "Do you accept that you killed Robert Kissel," asked Mr Chapman to open his cross-examination. "Yes," Kissel replied. When the prosecutor accused her of trying to conjure a picture of the victim as an abusive husband, she broke down. "I still love him. Things happened. I stayed with him. I loved him, and I am not sitting here to paint a bad picture about him, because he's my husband," she said.

But the story of a love turned sour did not end there. It was to be followed with allegations of spousal abuse, cocaine addiction, sodomy, extramarital affairs and greed.

Life had seemed to go on as usual for Nancy Kissel on Sunday, November 2, 2003. About 9am, she drove her Mercedes to the Sunday morning service at the United Jewish Congregation on Robinson Road, Mid-Levels. When she was nearing the Parkview taxi rank, she saw Andrew Tanzer and his seven-year-old daughter, Leah, carrying a schoolbag with the logo of the congregation's Sunday school. Kissel offered the pair a ride.



Shocking, chilling, riveting – it was a murder trial the like of which Hong Kong has rarely seen. Polly Hui reconstructs Robert Kissel's final hours and traces the seeds of the rage that drove his wife to murder him

At the congregation, Kissel met her husband, who had taken their three children to the service in his Porsche. She introduced him to their newly met neighbours. Leah, a sociable girl, recognised Kissel's second child, June, was also from Parkview. She urged her father to arrange a play date for her and June in the afternoon.

Shortly before 11am, Kissel left the congregation and drove her eldest child, Elaine, to her friend's birthday junk party. She dropped her daughter at Aberdeen Marina Club and drove back home. Meanwhile, her husband was having lunch at the congregation with June and the youngest child, Reis.

But under the surface of normalcy was a sea of turbulence. By that time, Robert Kissel had lost hope of saving the marriage after realising that his wife remained in frequent contact with Michael Del Priore, with whom she had begun a sexual relationship during her stay

with her children in Vermont to escape Sars that summer. He had told close colleague David Noh that he would discuss getting a divorce with his wife that afternoon. Nancy must have discovered his intention because a "stupid" lawyer of his had earlier sent a list of divorce lawyers to the family e-mail account, not his Merrill Lynch one, he told him.

By that time, Kissel had already acquired three hypnotic drugs – Rohypnol, Lorivan and Stilnox – and an anti-depressant – amitriptyline – in a seven-day "shopping spree" for drugs in late October. She had told a doctor and a psychiatrist that she had serious sleeping problems, was assaulted by her husband, and had parents with a history of depression, alcoholism, and violence. The same drugs, plus an additional hypnotic, Axotal, were found in Robert Kissel's stomach and liver contents during an autopsy.

About 2.30pm, the banker retreated home with the two children. Tanzer took Leah to see June in the Kissel's flat in Tower 17 at 2.45. The neighbour said it was a bit odd that Kissel never came out to greet him as the two men were talking in the living room. When he was about to leave, Leah and June came out of the kitchen with two identical glasses of pink milkshake that the prosecution argued Kissel had laced with a cocktail of sedatives for their fathers.

Mr Tanzer said he had "never drunk anything like that" and asked Kissel what it was when she popped her head out of the kitchen. "It's a secret recipe," she told him. He returned home at 4pm, shocking his wife by passing out on the couch and, bizarrely, treating himself to three tubs of ice cream at dinner. The next morning, he had almost no recollection of the evening.

Meanwhile, Kissel's husband took his son to the playroom down-

stairs about 5pm, where he talked for 10 minutes on the phone with David Noh. Noh said the deceased sounded tired, slurry and mellow. Robert was "on a different tangent", talking about export markets when he was asking him about real estate prices, he recalled.

Twenty minutes later, Kissel sent their maid Maximina Macaraeg to tell Robert to return to the flat. The helper met him in the car park as he was on his way home and took his son with him.

That was the last time Robert Kissel was seen alive. The next time his son saw him would be when three days later his body was carried out of the flat by four Parkview workmen in an old, stinking rug.

Back in January 2003, a month after Kissel had walked out on her husband after a fight on a skiing vacation in Whistler, Vancouver, according to her testimony, he installed Eblaster spyware on his wife's laptop and a home computer

to monitor her activity. In June, he hired two private investigators to find out if his wife was cheating on him in Vermont.

He would never have imagined that the steps he had taken to confirm his suspicions would one day become crucial evidence for the police and prosecutors to retrace the steps leading to his demise. It was from the spyware reports that the court learned of the diary entries recording Kissel's frustration with her deteriorating marriage and her website searches for the drugs used to dull her husband's senses on the fateful day.

The banker would certainly have had no idea that the sick joke of his confidante, Bryna O'Shea, who said: "If Nancy is going to kill you, put me in your will," would be an omen.

With the effort of a large number of experts in DNA typing, blood-stain pattern analysts, pathologists, police officers, photographers and



Nancy Kissel leaves court after testifying; Parkview, where she and her husband lived; prosecutor Peter Chapman, Judge Lunn and defence lawyer Alexander King. Photos: Oliver Tsang, Robert Ng, Martin Chan, Edward Wong

## Weather

**TODAY IN HONG KONG**  
MAINLY CLOUDY 27/31

**WIND** 13 KNOTS  
**HUMIDITY** 75-95%  
**UV INDEX** 8  
**POLLUTION** HIGH

Mainly cloudy and hazy with isolated showers. Temperatures will range between 27 and 31 degrees. Moderate westerly winds, occasionally fresh.

**OUTLOOK:** Showers over the weekend.  
**MACAU:** Hot and hazy. Cloudy apart from sunny periods. Isolated showers at the end of the day. Temperatures will range between 27 and 32 degrees. Light to gentle westerly winds.

**GENERAL SITUATION (11PM YESTERDAY)**  
The weather was generally fine over the western part of Guangdong. Locally, it was sunny and hot. Temperatures rose to 33 degrees or above in the afternoon. After crossing Taiwan, Typhoon Talim made landfall over Fujian and weakened into a severe tropical storm in the afternoon. At 11pm, Talim was centred about 170 kilometres west of Fuzhou. It is forecast to move west-northwest at about 22 kilometres per hour across Fujian.

POLLUTION	
GENERAL AIR POLLUTION	
Central/Western	68 HIGH
Shamshupo	68 HIGH
Tsuen Wan	73 HIGH
ROADSIDE	
Causeway Bay	93 HIGH
Central	86 HIGH
Mongkok	86 HIGH

**COASTAL AREA FORECASTS**

**Warning:**  
Strong winds in Shanwei and south of Hong Kong.

**Weather situation:**  
As above.

**Area forecast for the next 24 hours:**  
**Hong Kong adjacent waters:** Northwest 4 to 5, becoming west to southwest 4 to 5. Some haze, isolated squally showers and thunderstorms later. Rough seas.

**Shanwei:** West to northwest 7, becoming southwest 6 later. Isolated squally showers and thunderstorms. Very rough seas.

**South of Hong Kong:** West to southwest 4 to 5, occasionally 6. Isolated squally showers and thunderstorms later. Rough seas.

**Shangchuan Dao:** West to southwest 4 to 5. Isolated squally showers and thunderstorms. Moderate to rough seas.

**Outlook for the following 24 hours:** South to south-westerly winds of 4 to 5, becoming east to northeasterly winds of 5 in east later. Isolated squally showers and thunderstorms.

**LATEST SOUTH CHINA COASTAL REPORTS**

Area	Wind	Visibility
WAGLAN ISLAND	W 4	6km
SHANTOU	W-SW 4	7km SHOWERS
DONGSHA	W-SW 4	10km
MACAU	NW 4	8km
XISHA	W 2	25km

**TIDES**

LOW	SUN & MOON
1.4m	01:21
2.3m	08:04
0.6m	15:29
1.6m	22:11

**TOMORROW**  
SHOWERS 26/30

**SUNDAY**  
SHOWERS 27/31

**MONDAY**  
SHOWERS 28/32

**TUESDAY**  
SHOWERS 28/32

**OTHER CHINESE CITIES**

City	Condition	Min	Max
Changsha	rain	23	26
Guiyang	cloudy	20	29
Hefei	rain	22	26
Jinan	overcast	19	26
Kaohsiung	thunder	26	30
Lanzhou	fine	18	27
Nanchang	thunder	22	27
Nanjing	rain	22	29
Nanning	cloudy	28	36
Taiyuan	cloudy	16	27
Urumqi	showers	15	21
Wenzhou	thunder	25	28
Zhengzhou	overcast	21	27



**YESTERDAY'S READINGS**

KING'S PARK	27.5	32.5
WONG CHUK HANG	26.9	32.7
TA KWU LING	25.5	34.0
LAU FAU SHAN	28.2	31.8
TAI PO	27.4	32.3
SHA TIN	28.0	33.7
TUEN MUN	29.0	33.5
TSEUNG KWAN O	26.7	33.3
SAI KUNG	28.8	33.0
CHEUNG CHAU	26.4	31.8

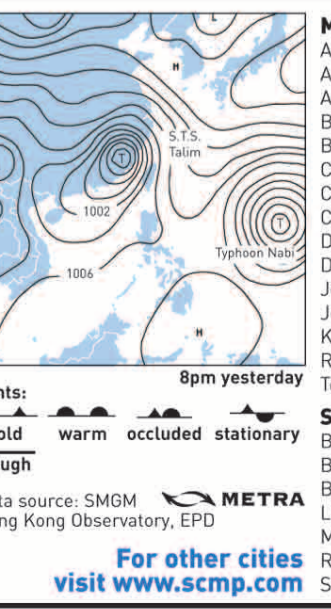
**HONG KONG 27/31**

Max air temp 32.1  
Min air temp 28.2  
Grass min temp 25.0  
Relative Humidity 55-87%  
Hours of sunshine 9.8  
Rainfall Nil

Total rainfall since January 1st is 2,844.2mm against an average of 1,725.9mm.

Data source: SMGM METRA Hong Kong Observatory, EPD

For other cities visit [www.scmp.com](http://www.scmp.com)



**MIDDLE EAST AND AFRICA**

City	Condition	Min	Max
Abu Dhabi	haze	29	34
Addis Ababa	cloudy	12	20
Amman	haze	21	32
Bahrain	clear	29	37
Beirut	fine	25	31
Cairo	haze	24	36
Cape Town	rain	9	15
Casablanca	cloudy	22	27
Doha	clear	30	39
Dubai	clear	30	36
Jeddah	thunder	29	39
Johannesburg	haze	7	26
Kuwait City	haze	28	44
Riyadh	fine	31	44
Tel Aviv	haze	24	32

**SOUTH AMERICA**

City	Condition	Min	Max
Bogota	haze	8	16
Brasilia	haze	16	31
Buenos Aires	overcast	1	11
Lima	cloudy	15	20
Mexico City	cloudy	13	21
Rio de Janeiro	haze	22	31
Santiago	haze	1	14

## The popular guy met his match

Dennis Eng traces Robert Kissel's life and loves from high school to Hong Kong

Robert Kissel dropped a chilling hint to his closest childhood friend about five months before he died that his outwardly perfect marriage was in trouble.

After tracking down Daniel Williams through the internet, Kissel sent him several happy family pictures. Wife Nancy was in none of them, although Mr Williams had been at their wedding.

"Rob sent pictures of himself on the beach, one of his three kids, as well as one of his daughter on the beach," Mr Williams said. "I suspect he may have known that his marriage was in trouble then as Nancy was in none of the pictures."

Friends like Mr Williams and Kissel's first girlfriend, Carol Japngie, have painted a picture of an attractive man who liked girls, displayed leadership qualities and had a tendency to be controlling. He had tried drugs but hated them, to the extent he would react angrily if he saw anyone using them.

They also told of a "fun" couple who met on a Club Med singles cruise to the Caribbean in 1987 and then started to raise a family in New York while enjoying an active social life with friends, giving no hint of the tragedy that was to follow. Nancy was remembered before their marriage as like many of her friends – a "sexually social, flirtatious" young woman who wore her naturally brown hair in a blonde bob.

As the nightmarish sequence of events unfolded in court, Ms Japngie recalled her own relationship with Robert Kissel, saying: "I remember saying to my mum afterwards that if I had married him, he wouldn't be dead now."

Years before, Robert Kissel had made it very clear to her that they would never have married, however. Even after their romance blossomed into a sexual one on the ski slopes of Vermont, he told her: "We can't be serious because you aren't Jewish," which she understood.

They met as sophomores at Pasack Hills High School in New Jersey. Her family had just moved from California and it was not long before she caught the attention of one of the most popular boys in school.

"Robbie was a popular boy and all the girls in our class were attract-

ed to him. I was new and didn't know anyone in the school and Rob and I became best friends," Ms Japngie said. So much so that, six months later at Christmas, she was invited to join him on one of his family's ski trips to Vermont. Robert asked her to be his girlfriend.

"I had a great vacation with his family skiing in Vermont. From the first time we met, his sister Jane and I became close like sisters," she said.

They had sex on the ski trip, although it was not planned. She said she got the idea after finding a condom among suitcases belonging to Robert's father. "I initiated it and it was spontaneous. I think the whole day was leading up to that," Ms Japngie said. "There was more a sense of trust that overwhelmed the apprehension. I guess there was also the thrill of getting caught."

During their two-year relationship, she revealed that Robert didn't mind smoking marijuana, although it would make him pass out.

Cocaine was another story. "We both tried coke once. He said, 'this is the devil'. He could not swallow and my throat choked up," Ms Japngie said. She doesn't recall exactly when or where it happened, but they were both just about 17 and had crashed a party of 19- and 20-year-olds.

They played darts and pool before someone in the room cut 15 to 20 lines of cocaine on a mirror and passed it from person to person. By the time it reached them, there were only two or three lines left.

"Some guy handed the coke to us. I remember he was a big black guy and quite intimidating. Rob said no, and I was poking him, urging him to just go and leave," she said.

Fearful of being assaulted or exposed as gatecrashers, he snorted a line of cocaine. She did the same. "About 10 or 15 minutes later, we were freaking out. Our throats closed up. We looked at each other and we turned white. Our hearts were racing," Ms Japngie said.

When someone broke out lines of cocaine as they drove to the beach after their high school prom in 1981, Robert threw a fit, Ms Japngie recalled. "He stopped the car, got out and wanted to go home by bus or train. He was so pissed off. I spent two or three hours fighting with him, trying to coax him into hanging out.