

Growing up on a kibbutz is a unique way of life. Almost from the beginning you are more associated with your class than with anything else. Our Kita was Kitat Chermon - like the highest mountain we all could see everyday as we strolled through the narrow paths of our little village. It was a daily reminder that we were the best. Our classmates were more than our brothers and sisters, more than our friends. We loved each other and counted on each other and stood for one another. The years may have gone by but Kitat Chermon would stay forever.

We all expected to laugh at this "bond" we have when we reached old age and had yet another spontaneous kita get-together. Guiltily counting our children and grandchildren, once again sharing childhood memories and being comforted in the fact that all of us were together.

I am trying to make sense of this. After all, it's not supposed to happen to us, not like this. The only comfort I find is that knowing Ofer, his need to please and comfort, I think the plan was that since his physical entity limited him, now he is free to wonder everywhere and be with all of us all the time. We need you Ofer to comfort us. I know that you are here among us now, watching us with that half grin and finally hearing all the praise and adulation you always deserved.

You believed in destiny, in accepting whatever life has to offer and making the most of it.

I guess there is solace in knowing you are at peace but we are hurting. We miss you.

The most important event in Ofer's life was meeting Allison. I remember the day you told me about her. We were at the pool. You were wearing your brown shorts, torn at the bottom and a white tank top to show off your wonderful pecs. You said that you met someone and that she was the most wonderful woman you've ever met. I asked you who she was and then you told me all about Allison. Her beauty and wisdom and acceptance. Your eyes gleamed and for once that silly grin didn't fill in the rest. I knew that finally you found your destiny and you were finally satisfied that you had the most.

When you brought little Erez to meet us last year no-one could have been prouder. Almost the whole time you were here, Erez was in your arms and the look on Allison's face was of quiet indulgence. Now you had definitely done your best.

Everyone here has already talked about what a special guy you were but Ofer to me it was more than your faults and your qualities. You were a friend to me at the most difficult times in my life. You had a way of making me smile when words just didn't cut it. You knew when to be there and when to take my side, yet always knowing how to reason with me so that the blows would be softer. You always had these infantile jokes that left me no choice but to laugh.

It's difficult to say all that needs to be said, standing before a beloved friend's last resting place. Each one of us had a very close, loving relationship with Ofer. Each one of us has memories and I am sure has spent the last few days, like I have, remembering little things we shared, crying because there were so many things still to do, still to say, and yet a part of me knows that you will be sharing it with us and you might even be a bit upset that there is so much crying. I know most of my tears are because I want one more time to hug you, one more time to see that half grin, one more time to admire the wonderful physique and yet I feel you so close to us. So if it's any conciliation to anyone standing here - he is. I also am sure that Ofer can see our tears, can hear our grief and can feel our love.

Allison, Erez, Shulamit, Johnnie, Rafi, Avigail and Yaeli, please believe this as I do. I am, Kitat Chermon is, all of us are, the things he loved the most, and though we are hurting today and are still trying to understand, Ofer is at peace and with us always.