

# VIEW FROM A FATHER

AVINOAM SHIRAN

Our son Daniel was born when I and my wife Varda Avinoam were students at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He was an exceptional baby: he did everything early and well. When we moved to Haifa Daniel began making friends; a group of children from kindergarten and elementary school in the Ramot Itzhak neighborhood would accompany him throughout his life.

Daniel was a gifted child, with a brilliant mind, and was often bored with the standard curriculum of elementary school. The headmistress and his teacher creatively initiated a challenging extracurricular program: a Russian maths teacher took him out of class for several lessons a week. Daniel was given problems which encouraged him to think in different ways. The results were amazing. Formally classified a talented child, he attended a special teaching programme in fourth grade.

I took up a job in Washington in 1996 and the family, including 10 year-old Daniel and his six-year-old brother Guy moved to Rockville, Maryland, for two years. Shortly after our arrival, our daughter Noga was born.

Daniel attended 5th grade at the Farmland Elementary School. He was brilliant with unique scientific abilities. He learned English easily and after one year in the ESL program was admitted in a regular class in the Tilden Junior High School.

Upon returning to Israel, Daniel enrolled in the prestigious Ha'Reali High School in Haifa, division of biotechnology. He excelled in his studies and had a sharp sense of humor.

Daniel remained loyal to his old buddies who loved him dearly. Five or six close friends, almost brothers, went through their formative experiences

together: parties, clubs, snooker games, expeditions. They admired him. He was willing to do anything for each and everyone of his friends. He was the first to get a driving license and they loved to be driven by him since they trusted him. Later, during the army service, his comrades felt the same way; they wanted to be with him on combat duties because they trusted his judgment and felt safe with him.

His friends particularly admired Daniel's determination to become a combat soldier. He had a congenital problem with an ankle and was given a



low medical profile, which prevented him from enlisting in a combat unit. He was very offended. I tried to persuade him that with his brains he would be more useful in an intelligence unit but Daniel decided to appeal. He was brave and very stubborn; he believed he could contribute more as a combat soldier. After three rejections by the medical committee, he managed to raise his profile and enlisted in the Golani combat unit. I was worried, but I could not stop him or pressure him. I did not think that in our country it is moral to tell a child not to go into combat service, so that others would go instead.

Daniel became a part of the military and absolutely identified with Golani. He turned us all into members of Golani.

We wore Golani T-shirts and had Golani stickers on our car. Daniel's ankle caused problems once advanced training started; it would swell and he would limp for two weeks, but he would not complain. He went on a 27 mile training march carrying heavy equipment and stretchers. The doctor warned him of the dangers to the foot, but he dismissed him with "it will be OK".

Daniel's unit arrived at the Lebanese border two weeks before he died. I was out of my mind with worry, I found it difficult to work in the hospital; I told myself that so many soldiers are involved and we have relatively few losses, why should it be Daniel? I tried to assure myself that they were in an anti-tank missile unit and would be positioned on a hill in the back and not in the front line...

I was at the hospital when I heard that Golani soldiers were hurt in a battle. A young intern came to me and said: "Come quickly, they are looking for you in the CCU." He shoved me into the doctors' room, where I saw the army officers. I understood immediately. I hoped that Daniel was just wounded, but the officer immediately said: "Your son was killed in Lebanon". I asked them if they were sure. "Do you know who I am? Maybe you did not come to me? Maybe you made a mistake?..."

Daniel died in the early hours of Friday morning, 4 August 2006.

A few days later I heard the whole story. The platoon went into Merkaba, a small village a mile and a half into Lebanon, following information about a house with weapons. Daniel led the force in battle since he was a machine gunner. When the mission was completed, on their way back, a burst was fired from an ambush at a range of 20 ft, and Daniel was hit by a bullet in the head...The soldiers shouted that Daniel was wounded. The doctor, Captain Igor Rothstein, sprang up and ran to Daniel but was killed trying to save him.

Daniel's funeral was held at the Military Cemetery in Haifa on a warm Friday afternoon, the day he was killed at dawn, 4 August, 2006.

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