

Rami Katz by Marion Polusky-Nakash



I met Rami (Norman) Katz on Kibbutz Nachshon when I joined a group of mainly South African Olim. Rami had an unusually naive way of smiling, which immediately drew everyone's attention to this kind and lovable young man, who I don't remember ever being angry or uptight.

Rami was fiercely proud to be in Israel, to the extent that he was determined to delete any mention or sign of his SA past. Upon meeting him, I asked him by what name he is known in SA, and he simply replied, "I am Rami". By chance, whilst visiting another kibbutz, I met a relative of his, who asked me if I knew Norman Katz and that's when Rami's secret leaked out and I discovered his birth name. Of course, once I knew, I couldn't resist the temptation of humming an old hit song – "Oohoo Norman" to him. This didn't please him at all - it clearly showed on his facial expression, but he just grinned looking embarrassed.

He was fiercely idealistic; I remember him speaking about his wish to become an Israeli Airforce Pilot and fly like a bird and fight the enemy from the sky! However, as the year passed, he changed, slowly becoming more of a pacifist. Even after enlisting, the impressionable young man had begun to sound more realistic, and a lot less interested in fighting wars. I distinctly remember his telling me during his army service, that it bothered him that he was being taught to kill and every time he saw the cardboard silhouette of a man whom he had to aim for at the target practices, it gave him goose bumps.

Rami loved the open spaces of the kibbutz and worked very hard. I can still see him working in the melon fields, "donning" his blue "kova tembel" dressed in blue kibbutz work clothes. His hands were always chapped, but he never complained about a rare skin disease that he

suffered from. He also had a very special way with the young children who followed him everywhere, as if he was the “Pied Piper of Hamelin”.

My last encounter with Rami was 3 weeks before the Yom Kippur War, when he unexpectedly popped into my workplace. When I told him that my boyfriend was leaving for abroad, he suggested I join him on the kibbutz for Yom Kippur, as he would be on leave too. I gave him a ride to his favorite haunt in Tel-Aviv. To this day, in my mind's eye, I can still see him, turning around, smiling and waving goodbye.

With the departure of my boyfriend, I forgot about my arrangement with Rami, but my memory was jolted by the sirens on Saturday, October 6, 1973 - Yom Kippur. On Sunday I was told that Rami was missing in action. The next day, I received another message that he was alive but a few days later, I heard again that he was missing in action.

Living in Tel-Aviv and feeling sad and helpless, I went to the Gat Cinema, Tel-Aviv every day to look at the photos on display of captured soldiers, hoping against hope that I would see my friend's picture too, but to no avail. Upon hearing the news that the bodies of two deceased Israeli soldiers were being returned by the Egyptians, my gut feeling told me that one would be Rami's.

Sadly, the next day there was a caption in the newspaper mentioning his name – Rami had come home, not soaring like a bird in the sky but in a wooden box!

Later, I was told that his older brother Gideon, whom Rami adored and tried to emulate, had gone down to Sinai to look for him. They found some personal effects of Rami in the first tank which the crew had to abandon after a hit, however, their second tank had unfortunately gotten a direct hit, killing Rami and another soldier on Oct. 6. Two others in the tank luckily survived.

Rami, rests in peace on Mount Herzl, in Jerusalem, not far from the grave of Yoni Netanyahu which is always my guide to finding Rami's grave. The Ethiopians who take care of the

graveyard are simply amazing and very willing to take me to Yoni's grave, but when I continue to walk towards Rami's grave, they warn me – "that's not Yoni's"! That is the moment I see Rami with his shy smile, hovering above Mt. Herzl like a bird in the sky.

What can I say about a young life taken in vain, someone so gentle and vibrant, who only wanted to live in peace with nature and mankind and not fight wars.

Rami my friend, you stayed young forever, and I grew old, may we meet again in another life or in a better and kinder world!

~~~~~

**Rami Katz**

**Written by Marion Polusky-Nakash**

**Posted on the CHOL 'Share Your Stories Site' in October, 2025.**