

From: Gil Zeilberger.

Matti was more than just a cousin to me—he was one of the very first people who shaped my earliest memories. Being over six years older, he already had a big presence in my life when I was still very small.

One of my earliest memories—when I was just three or three and a half years old—was visiting the Weiss family in Rehavia. We went outside the apartment, and Matti, not yet ten years old but already the mischievous older cousin, warned me in all seriousness that we had to be very careful of the very dangerous “Hades”, an elderly lady in the building who, according to him, is chasing after children. His sister Ada, with more gentleness, reassured me that Hades only bothered noisy children who ran around too much... I’ll never forget that mix of fear and excitement—and the relief I felt when the Weiss family later moved to Bayit Vagan, which to me seemed a much safer place, with no “Hades” lurking nearby.

Another vivid memory is from when I was about eight years old and Matti was in his mid-teens, at the wedding of Shully and Alex on the rooftop of the Rabbinate in Haifa. At that celebration, Matti became the first person to introduce me to “real” beer. While I was drinking malt beer, the non-alcoholic kind, Matti insisted that I should try the white alcoholic beer, which he claimed was far tastier. I tried a small sip... But that was so very Matti—always eager to share new experiences.

We visited the Weiss family almost every summer, and those visits became woven into the fabric of my childhood. Later, when I was an undergraduate student at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, I would spend one evening almost every week with Matti and the whole Weiss family. By my third year, when Michal entered my life, she often joined those evenings as well. Matti was already pursuing his master’s degree and later his Ph.D., and it was always wonderful to be with him—in the way he lived with passion, with commitment, and with warmth.

After we moved to America, we kept our strong connection alive. On every visit to Israel, we always made sure to spend time with Matti and the family. Our children, Ruthi, Noam, and Danny, grew up sharing that same connection and love for Matti and his family.

The last four and a half years were unimaginably hard for him, after the terrible fall in the mountains. Matti lived with constant and immense pain. And yet, even while struggling with so much, he remained himself. He made every effort to be present with us, to keep his pain from overshadowing our conversations. His resilience and dignity in those years were extraordinary.

Our last phone conversation was on August 2nd, when Matti called to remember my late mother's birthday. I usually don't have very long talks on the phone, but this one was different. That call lasted a little over an hour, and it wasn't just long—it was a conversation I didn't want to end.

These memories—playful and profound, lighthearted and deep—are the treasures he left me. And I know that each of us here carries our own unique stories of Matti: stories that capture his humor, his kindness, his passion, his brilliance, and his gift for making us feel connected.

I miss him deeply, and I wish he were still here with us. Yet his presence continues to live on in many ways—in his family, in our shared stories, and in the legacy he left to us all. His life left a mark on ours that will never fade. And while the pain of losing him is great, there is also peace in knowing that his own suffering has finally ended.