

Amihai Katz (1975-2011)

Amihai Katz, a former Mosse Distinguished Graduate Exchange Student from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem passed away at home on September 19, 2011 surrounded by his family after a sixteen month battle with cancer. The Mosse Program community mourns his passing. Throughout his ordeal, his courage and sense of humor never left him; even in his final months, his only concern was the impact of his illness on others, especially his beloved wife, Shlomit whom he married shortly before his illness was diagnosed in April, 2010.

I first saw Amihai (or “Katz” his preferred name) shortly after he arrived in Madison in August, 2009. He was an incredible apparition; close to three hundred pounds, solidly built on a short frame, with a bushy beard, and long finger nails that he used to play his ever present guitar. He greeted me like a long lost friend, and expressed his excitement and enthusiasm about participating in the Mosse Graduate Exchange. During his time in Madison, he never lost this enthusiasm, and it was evident that he viewed this year as a very special opportunity, and honor—an affirmation of his accomplishments that is not often available to students who are returning to school after many years. His love for history, in particular Irish history was irresistible. Along with other subjects, he took an independent study course with Prof. Jim Donnelly where he was able to shape his dissertation topic, and a Celtic language course that he found fascinating and challenging. He was a born teacher, whose passion and enthusiasm for Irish history and culture, made even arcane questions about the similarities between Celtic and Hebrew, fascinating and compelling. Often, these conversations took place at “Mosse Haus” a ramshackle house on the near east side of Madison that had long been home to Mosse Exchange students. These conversations were accompanied by the best coffee in Madison. (Unlike so many Mosse students, who have complained about the quality of coffee in Madison, he actually did something about it; he purchased an Italian coffee maker, and a case of “Mauro” Italian coffee on the web, and had them shipped to Madison.

Katz was a recognizable figure in Jerusalem, whose high profile was a combination of his exotic appearance, outgoing personality, his “alternative” life style, and his long time management of the famous “Syndrome” pub. (The alternative cultural and political scene in Jerusalem of which Katz was a prominent part is an amazing story in itself).

Katz was known to music lovers in Jerusalem as a man with an incredible, almost obsessive knowledge of music who was also a master guitar player. He gave many famous Israeli musicians their first “gig” at the “Syndrome” and many of them considered Katz a close friend and attended his funeral, choosing to express their feeling the way Katz would have wanted them to – with songs they wrote to honor him. Some of these songs were performed at Katz’s funeral, along with a song Katz recorded and performed, knowing that it would be performed at his funeral. Katz was a loyal and devoted friend whose tragic loss at a young age cut short a life already filled with accomplishment. He is greatly missed by his colleagues from the Dept. of History at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, and the many friends he made during his Mosse

Graduate Exchange Fellowship year in the Dept. of History at UW-Madison where his illness was first diagnosed.

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