

CHAPTER 1

The Golan Heights

Green Meadows and Running Rivers

We gathered in Times Square, New York, at four in the afternoon. The plaza, glistening with the same tempting quality that lured me in as a child, flickered its promises on billboards for people passing by to see. We lifted our gaze to the sign that read “BIRD,” a light blue tinge glowing across one of the buildings. Thoughts raced through my mind: How did I, a small-town kid from the north of Israel, whose dreams didn’t extend beyond the local river, manage to become a senior executive of an international company that was now revolutionizing the world?

Like the illuminated letters flickering on the sign, my memory flooded with a flux of flashing images, pivotal moments that had led me to this point in life: my early days as a student, strenuously juggling work and school, the inspiring time spent in Canada with promising youth from around the world, the two, insightful years I’d spent at Harvard (practically pinching myself

each day to ensure it wasn't a dream), life in distant Atlanta arranging journeys to Israel for influencers, and finally, standing in the middle of Tel Aviv's bustling avenues and realizing that shared electric scooters were tailor-made for this city.

Among those flashing memories were moments of hardships and failure – moments of weary desperation trying to sell cosmetics in a Canadian mall, and sighs of disappointment shuffling through numerous letters of rejection. Those moments were no less central to my progress and serve as a humbling reminder of the fragility of success.

Nothing about my childhood could have predicted the triumphs that lay ahead. I wasn't born with a silver spoon in my mouth, nor was I surrounded by people with far-reaching dreams. I didn't stand out, nor did I excel. I was an average student with average grades, nothing more. My childhood dream – which I had absolutely no chance of fulfilling – was to be Michael Jordan. Another dream of mine (significantly more realistic) was spending Saturdays with friends relaxing by the local river, the most exciting thing imaginable at the time.

To put things more accurately: my starting point in life was behind the curve. I was born in April of 1982, 34 weeks into my mother's pregnancy. As a premature baby weighing 4.6 pounds, my life was at risk, and my parents had to endure long and taxing weeks of uncertainty. Finally, when I reached the three-month mark at

a healthy weight of 6.6 pounds, they let out a celebratory sigh of relief.

Two months after my birth, the First Lebanon War erupted. Apart from the challenges of handling a newborn, my mom spent agonizing nights worrying about my dad, who was in the crossfire as a reservist for the Israeli Defense Forces in Lebanon. Rockets flew incessantly above our house, and one of them actually landed on our doorstep.

Our house was located in a small kibbutz (a communal living arrangement popular in Israel) in the north of Israel, a remote area where both my parents, brimming with ideology and values, came as volunteers. My mom, Sima, flew in from Canada, and my dad, Mark, from the United States. A pair of young hippies, they left behind their convenient lives to fulfill their Zionist dream in a novel, socialist kibbutz. The first four years of my life were spent in that utopian setting, running barefoot from the communal children's home to the grassy fields. The few, hazy memories I have of that time include my Canadian grandparents, Esther and Lionel, flying in from Montreal with a bag full of clothes, identical articles for every kid in my grade. A gift solely for their grandson, was, of course, out of the question.

Life on the kibbutz was pleasantly simple. My dad spent his days rushing from the dairy farm to the factory, and my mom taught English at the local school. For better or worse, living with foreign parents meant that I developed my own language – “Heblish” – an endearing, childish blend of English and Hebrew.

Growing up, I was a smart, curious kid who want-