



RUCA'S FARM

A Rehabilitative Organic Farm

I was born in Tel Aviv to a family devoted to education and public service: My mother is a schoolteacher, my father served for many years as a senior security officer for the city of Tel Aviv, and my younger brother is a combat soldier in an elite unit. Growing up, I was a competitive basketball player and an active member of the Scouts, experiences that shaped my sense of discipline, teamwork, and responsibility.

Before my military service, I chose to attend a pre-military leadership academy in the southern desert town of Mitzpe Ramon. The program was unique: about ninety percent of the participants were young men who had spent much of their lives in prison or entangled in crime, alongside conventional youth like me. Living and training together was challenging, but deeply formative. The academy prepared me for military service, strengthened my values, and shaped my understanding of people, resilience, and leadership. What it could not prepare me for was what lay ahead.

I enlisted in the Israeli Navy, but my heart was set on becoming a combat commander in the Armored Corps. After significant effort, I succeeded in transferring to the armored forces. Through an accelerated training track, I became a tank platoon commander. After completing the officer course, I was assigned as the armored officer responsible for the sector of Kibbutz Be'eri and Kibbutz Re'im along the Gaza border — an area that would later become associated with the tragic Nova music festival.

My unit took responsibility for the area approximately two and a half months before October 7th.

On the first day of fighting, October 7th, half of the soldiers under my command were killed, and others were abducted to Gaza in the early morning hours. Later that same day, the second tank crew under my command advanced toward the Nova festival area. All members of that crew, except the driver, were killed in combat. One of the abducted soldiers was returned a year later to be buried in Israel.

I myself fought throughout most of that day from our tank position. Eventually, an anti-tank missile, launched from a Hamas drone that had been tracking us, struck our tank and disabled it completely. Unable to move, we continued fighting from that position for hours and eliminated some 120 militants who had broken through the border fence in the first hours of the attack. Eventually, we abandoned the disabled tank, hid in a ravine, were extracted, and continued fighting elsewhere.

Over the course of that day, we escaped under fire, rescued families, fought near Kibbutz Sa'ad Junction, and helped prevent the takeover of that kibbutz by driving militants away from its entrance. We later reached the Nova festival site, witnessed the aftermath, and continued fighting into the

evening in Kibbutz Re'im alongside elite IDF units, where we eliminated the last 4 militants who remained in the kibbutz.

After October 7th, I suffered a total psychological collapse. All my systems shut down. The sights, the smells, the radio communications, and the constant presence of death left me unable to function. I was very quickly diagnosed with severe combat-related PTSD and permanently discharged from military service. My life came to a halt at the very spot where so many of my soldiers and comrades in arms had been killed. Overnight, I went from loving the military to being unable to even look at a uniform, and those feelings only intensified with time.

For months, I remained at home, disconnected, inactive, and mentally deteriorating. Eventually, my mother told me about Ruca's Farm — an organic, rehabilitative farm for combat trauma survivors. At first, I refused. All I wanted was to be alone, in my bed, away from the world. After months of persuasion, I agreed to visit.

What followed was a strange and gradual love affair. Over the next year and a half, I would come to the farm once a week and then disappear for weeks at a time. I was neither fully a volunteer nor a participant in formal group therapy. I worked alone in the fields, avoided groups, breathed fresh air, and returned home after long days of physical agricultural labor. It was not therapy in the conventional sense — but it was enough to keep me going.

Slowly, something began to change. The spark that had been extinguished on October 7th started to return. I began coming more regularly, more seriously, and with growing consistency. I found myself wanting to return the next day, and the day after that. Over time, my presence at the farm became stable, meaningful, and engaged.

After about a year and a half, I joined the farm as a member of the professional team. In time, I was promoted and became one of the agricultural managers. Ruca's Farm has played a central role in my rehabilitation, my personal growth, and in bringing back the light in my eyes — and the desire to remain alive, even when there were countless reasons not to.

My name is Yotam, and I am living proof that Ruca's Farm is not just a farm, but a rehabilitative agricultural space that truly saves the lives of combat trauma survivors.