

K-STATE WILDCATS

Gone too soon

Remembering the loss of two loyal K-Staters



What you're about to read is one of the most challenging stories I've written in my four-plus years in the journalism industry.

During the past month, I've rewritten this piece on numerous occasions in an effort to put the lives of two tremendous people into proper context. Frankly, I'm not sure that's possible, because I don't know if there are any words that exist in this world I can put to paper that do justice to the lives of Shwan Alkhatib and his older brother, Weesam.

I never formally met either of them, but I sure wish I could have. Unfortunately, I, along with many, many others, will not have that opportunity. Shwan, who graduated from Manhattan High and received a degree in electrical engineering from Kansas State University, died unexpectedly on March 2 at the age of 25. Weesam, who graduated from K-State with a degree in chemical engineering, died on April 14 after battling a rare form of cancer. He was 34.

"You wonder how these two amazing people got taken away from us in less than a two-month span," Cheen Alkhatib, one of Shwan and Weesam's two surviving sisters, said.

That is incredibly difficult to grasp and something we all wish we knew the answer to. But I do know one thing: Shwan and Weesam will not be forgotten.

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The basement of Kassim and Sorkel Alkhatib's Manhattan home was where sheer brilliance took place. This was Shwan's domain—a place where he had a television hooked up with HDMI cables, along with an external hard drive and a complicated software that he taught himself how to use. The basement was where he made some of the very best videos that exist regarding K-State athletics.

And they were a thing of genius. Shwan, under the Internet names of fatty4ksu, fatty fat fat, fatty, and several others, recorded every newscast possible that mentioned K-State sports, something that made his videos unique. From ESPN's Kirk Herbstreit talking about the Wildcats to a local news station discussing them, Shwan had them recorded and packaged into his highlights.

"He knew what the start time was for every local news sports segment so he'd try to cut in and get more than one clip," said Ben Trenary, one of Shwan's best friends. "Those things start right at the same time, but he knew 'oh this station is going to lead with KU, this other one is going to lead with K-State. But the most rewarding thing for him was finding the little moments when something special happened that the camera is not really looking for. He would find it."

Shwan was an innovator on K-State athletics message boards. He was well known by thousands of Big 12 fans, which was put on display by hundreds of posts mourning his death on the message boards of Big 12 teams. He was ahead of the game and had a good-natured sense of humor that could sometimes irritate fans of opposing schools.

"He was such a smart guy so he knew what buttons to push. He would pick up on those things," Cheen said. Perhaps one Texas fan said it best: "I always hated that guy, which is why I always liked that guy."

He could really get under the skin of Kansas fans. In fact, the moderator of KU's scout.com message board (phog.net) banned the whole IP range from K-State's campus from being able to register on the site because Shwan had logged on from so many different computers from Manhattan under numerous user names.

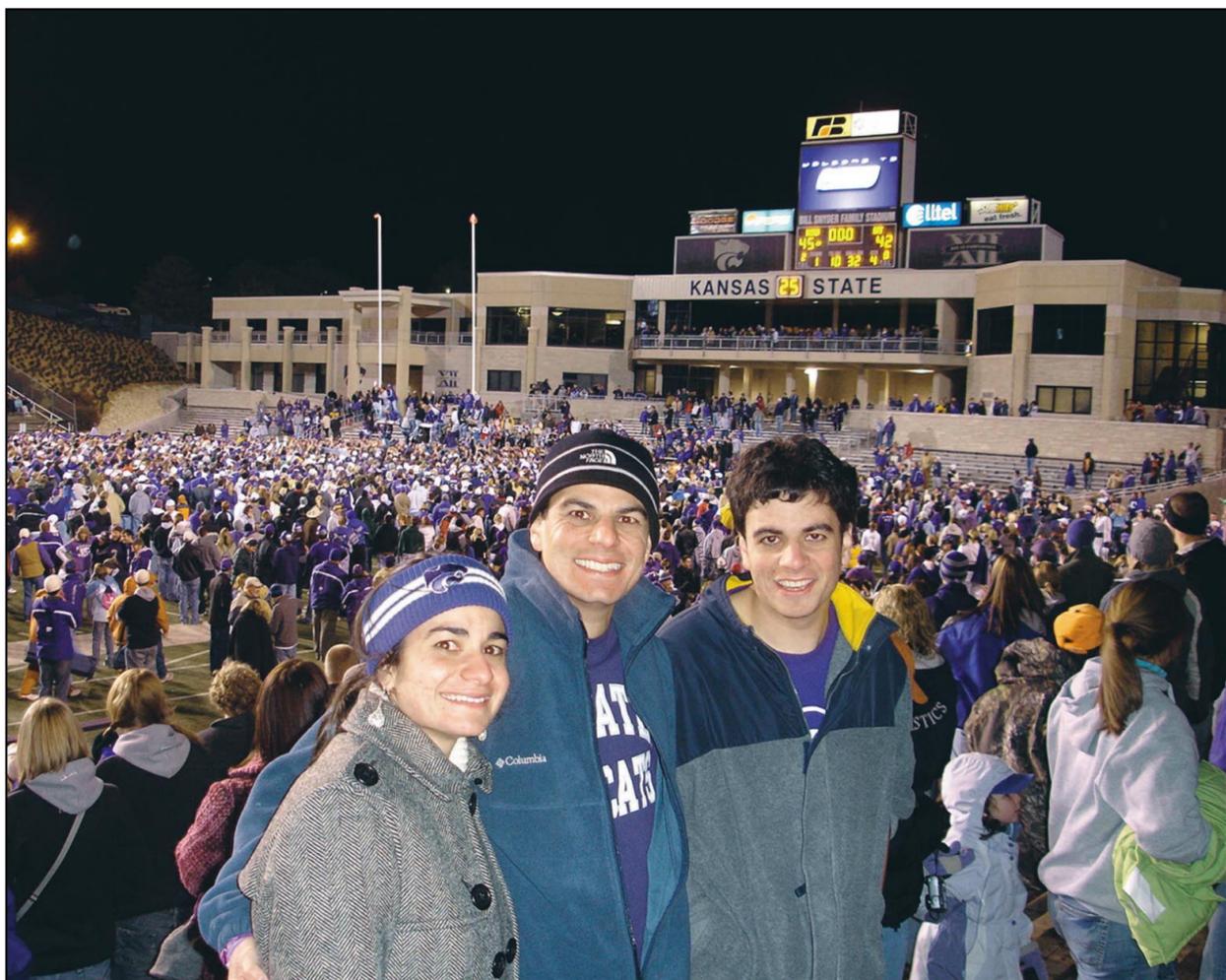
As funny and entertaining as he was, Shwan also had an ability to simplify things with deep thoughts that gave people perspective. "You know why I want to win? So good people can be happy. Just for a day. Because good people deserve good things. Even if for just a day," Shwan once posted on goemaw.com.

Shwan moved to Manhattan with his family in 1996, and from then on adopted K-State as his team. He poured his heart into the Wildcats, exemplifying what being a fan was all about.

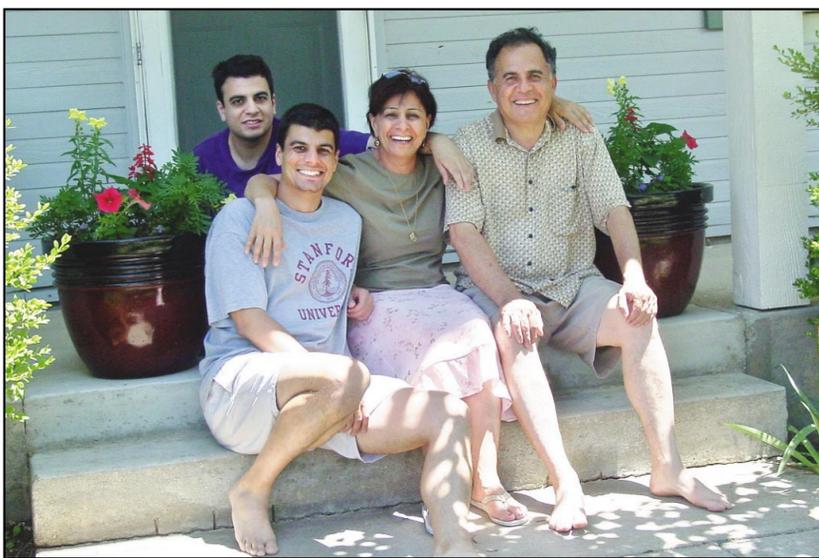
"He loved K-State," Trenary said. "The people at K-State were dedicated to the undergraduates. It was the land-grant institution that was dedicated to educating all people, dedicated to making sure Kansas State was a welcoming place. He was so passionate about making sure the underdog was going to get ahead in the end. I think he succeeded in that."

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Shwan was courageous in so many ways. For example, the Alkhatibs trav-



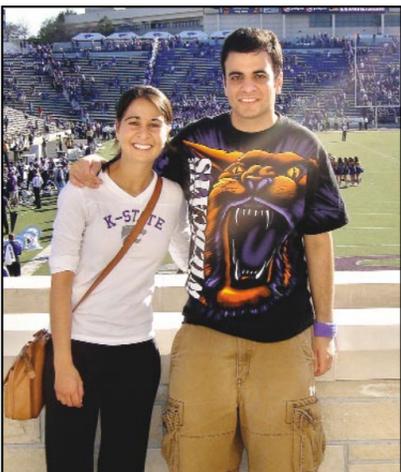
Aveen Alkhatib (left), sister of Weesam (middle) and Shwan Alkhatib, pose for a photo after Kansas State upset Texas 45-42 at Bill Snyder Family Stadium in 2006. Shwan died unexpectedly on March 2 while taking care of Weesam, who was battling cancer. Weesam died on April 14. Courtesy photo



Shwan (back) and Weesam (front left) pose for a photo with their parents Kassim and Sorkel. Donations can be made at www.goemaw.com to the Shwan "Fatty" Memorial Fund. Courtesy photo



Weesam stands with his father, Kassim. Weesam, who graduated from KU Med, received an award for the most outstanding resident while at KU. Courtesy photo



Shwan (right) stands with his sister, Cheen, at a K-State home football game. Shwan, who graduated from K-State, had an unparalleled passion for the Wildcats. Courtesy photo

eled to K-State's 2004 Fiesta Bowl game against Ohio State, and while eating dinner in a restaurant leading up to the game, Shwan spotted a separate room where several parents of the Buckeyes' football players were eating. He presumed to march in and sing the fight song of Ohio State's biggest rival—Michigan—and he nailed it word for word.

"He goes in there singing it and clapping and they looked shocked," his sister Aveen Alkhatib, who played tennis at K-State, said with a laugh. "We're like we've

got to go and get out of here now."

But Shwan's bravest feat was in the last six months of his life. Weesam, who graduated from medical school at the University of Kansas and became the clinical instructor of vascular surgery at Stanford University in 2010, was battling cancer. So Shwan, who at the time was getting his master's degree from K-State in electrical engineering, dropped everything and moved to California to be with his brother.

Weesam was eventually transferred to a doctor in New York City, thanks to Shwan. "Shwan was the one that found the doctor in New York," Cheen said. "He's the one that did it all. He made all the phone calls."

Shwan, the youngest in the family, sat by his brother's hospital bed each and every night, making sure he was OK. During the day, when Weesam was awake, he would talk to him. "He hardly ever slept," Aveen said.

While taking care of Weesam, Shwan became motivated to become a doctor who emphasized the importance of primary care. "He became really obsessed with primary care physicians and doctors being there for caretakers both emotionally and medically," Trenary said. "He wanted to be there for families to make sure that they understand what the human options were and what resources were available and existed. He wanted to follow up and make sure the patients were in good hands, making sure they were well cared for."

With no educational background in the medical field, Shwan taught himself the ropes, reading numerous books. He took the MCAT with no training from any teacher and scored a 33, considered to be well above average.

"Once he had it burning inside of him to become a doctor—he already was so smart and capable—that was what he was going to do," Trenary said. "He was going to become the best at that. He would have been someone rethinking how doctors provide care and how care is managed."

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One of the many things about Shwan that I took away from visiting with Cheen, Aveen, Trenary and several other friends were how many lives he touched. He was so passionate about everything he put his mind to and loved his family more than anything. And he absolutely loved K-State.

"The biggest thing is we carry on his zest and passion for all the things he was passionate about, including K-State," Trenary said. "He taught us that you've got to be passionate about what you love and making other's lives better. He was so incredible, so talented and such a good person that it makes you want to carry that forward. That way he's remembered, but also everybody else, even if they don't necessarily associate it with his name, they'll learn that lesson and pass it on."

Shwan and Weesam will be missed dearly. They're gone far too soon. Billy Joel once wrote a song that says "only the good die young." That can be debated in plenty of circumstances. But in this instance, the good most certainly died young.