

My name is Jonathan Shefftz. The ski mountaineering races – “skimo” [point to t-shirt] – that Chris participated in, those are mine, NE Rando Race Series. Which included one more race than planned for this past season, in March, at the Dartmouth Skiway, for Chris.

My website includes a memorial page for Chris, with remembrances from his fellow skimo racers. I did not solicit any such remembrances, but when I sent out the tragic news, my inbox was flooded with replies, including the following excerpts:

“He was the purest, most open, kindest young guy [...].”

“[...] I always enjoyed Chris’s friendly company and trying to chase him down (always unsuccessfully). [...].”

“[...] he was a great guy who always had a positive attitude [...].”

“[...] He had such great energy.”

“Chris brought such joy to this community. He was perennially cheerful, even when doing laps in the pouring rain or howling wind at Whaleback or the Dartmouth Skiway. I’ll think of him often, and smile.”

“[...] Super nice and full of energy. [...].”

“[...] It’s that competitive fire he has, and he did it with such a gentle, humble smile. [...].”

I meet lots of highly talented people by organizing these races, including the seven authors of those excerpts. Athletically, sure, you ascend a mountain under your own power, and then ski down – you’d expect that. But the sport attracts participants who are highly talented in other aspects of life.

So Chris’s degrees from Dartmouth, with an accomplished professional career, that also fit in well with the skimo race scene. And being a married guy, becoming a father, that too.

But Chris was also such a helpful person, and in such a low-key way. A couple years ago, I was getting bogged down by a small database task I had to perform after each race for reporting results. Yet another hour-long task to add to each day’s work after a race, whose preparations had already dominated the prior week.

A random little thing to remember someone by, and compared to what he did for a career, far from challenging. But he immediately agreed to volunteer when I asked him if he was interested, he would always attend to it promptly after each race, and he would alert me if I had overlooked granting him the correct access rights. And he did it to give something back, not for any public recognition – well, okay, I’m talking about it now, although you know what I mean.

But don’t worry, I’m not going to talk any further about database management. I do though want to mention Chris’s adventuring, as it’s called.

As you might imagine, skimo racers do not spend the off-season just sitting around. A typical skimo race field includes competitors from running, biking, triathlon, mountaineering, nordic skiing, alpine skiing, etc.

Chris, as many of you know, was an avid trail running racer. I still remember his tales from Tor des Geants.

Chris persevered through over 200 miles in the Italian Alps over multiple days. And Chris, being Chris, of course had his running pace, resting intervals, and sleep stops all meticulously planned.

But as arduous as all that was, it was an organized and supported event, with dozens of aid stations and thousands of race staff. Chris pushed the limits of human endurance. But he wasn't pushing the boundaries of what is reasonably safe. That fit in with my consistent impressions of him as a responsible and thoughtful guy in all aspects of his life.

In the last few years, I've seen what happens from, let's call it, alternative approaches. I'll spare you the details of the skiing and mountaineering fatalities I've known, now up to five.

But that tally does not include Chris. And that's what makes Chris's death hurt me even more. Makes me not merely sad, but also downright mad. Because unlike those five people, Chris was NOT doing anything even remotely unsound.

When I first heard the news, I thought perhaps he'd had a momentary slip of concentration. Or even a literal slip.

No. Not even close.

Chris was crossing the road. In a MARKED crosswalk, in broad daylight.

The driver did not stop because [shrug]. I'll spare you the rest of the police report. [wave the three pieces of paper]

I admired Chris so much for being a safe, responsible, on-top-of-it, act-together, highly educated, professionally accomplished, married father ... in large part because those were characteristics I have strived for in my own life.

Yet then this? Why?

That's a question that goes back a long way. All the way back to the biblical book of Job.

God allows Satan to torment Job as a test. But no matter the depths of his suffering, Job refuses to curse God. And when his would-be comforters try to convince him that he must have done something wrong to deserve all this, he refuses to concede any such misdeeds.

But finally, Job does ask:

Why?

God responds with a whirlwind. The weather version of a whirlwind, but also a whirlwind of boasting about God's own powers and His creation.

So what kinda answer is that, to the question of, Why?

I've thought about it a lot, trying to think it through. A habit that works for me as a professional economist. Always trying to think through things with the goal of finding an answer. Even trying to think through things like this [briefly wave crash report again].

After all that thinking, all I can think, is that the Book of Job's answer is for me to be grateful to have known Chris during his final four ski seasons, to have met such a talented, accomplished, and admirable person in all aspects of his existence, in the context of an outdoor athletic pursuit that we both loved together. And to be reassured that so many others, including ALL of us here today, also knew Chris, in so many varied contexts, whether in the mountains, in classrooms, in offices, in families, and knew him as such a talented, accomplished, and admirable person.

Thank you, to all of you, for listening to this, and to Chris [look up], for the privilege of knowing you.