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A Message From Jakie: A Spiritual Journey of Love Death and Hope

Michael Weinberger
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“I hate being alone, especially at night; all I do is watch TV and drink. The few times I didn’t, I didn’t sleep at all. I have too much angst. My mind won’t stop; I can’t shut it off.” The speaker is the author in the days immediately following his wife’s death from cancer at age forty-six in May 2000—barely a year after she was first diagnosed.

The book is more than a tribute to the woman named Jakie; it includes “conversations” that Weinberger had with his wife after her bodily death. He describes these episodes, his train of thought at the time, and flashbacks to their meeting, their marriage, three sons, and twenty years together.

Weinberger has been a television sitcom writer for the last three decades, for such shows as *Growing Pains*, *Facts of Life*, and *Who’s the Boss?*. Jakie was his co-writer. He first met her at a TV studio when “they told me to see some character named Jake about my parking space. I expected a dissipated, worn-out, old showbiz coot, not a twenty-four-year old, beautiful blond California cheerleader with huge, loving, fun blue eyes.”

Her real name was Janet Kathleen, but the author recalls that her brothers nicknamed her J.K., which was eventually shortened to Jake. His “Scheherazade of Sherman Oaks” discovers the cancer at the same time their oldest child is graduating from high school. “We didn’t live in the realm of cancer specifics,” he writes. “Our focus was on living, not dying, and we pulled it off.”

The author alternates chapters describing their unfolding married life with ones in which Weinberger painfully deals with the loss of Jakie; this narrative device works very well. As the two stories progress, the reader feels that they will ultimately converge in a positive way.

Weinberger includes numerous family photos—readers get to actually see Jakie in happier times. Jakie appears to be fine for the first six months, then gradually worsens, but still seems serene and at peace with the disease destroying her. A last-ditch attempt at a cure takes the couple to Switzerland, where the author, as a distraction, drolly discusses souvenirs for their boys: “I guess it’s a round of Swiss army knives and a bag of Ricola cough drops.”

He’s an entertaining writer on an anything-but-light subject. Readers will feel his pain in the sometimes graphic text, and will sense that they are almost eavesdropping on this most personal of times. Near the end, Weinberger and their sons pray, “Dear God, if you’re not going to get her better, take her quick.”

In a love story that transcends time and earthly dimensions, this husband and father learns a lesson: he’s a better person for having known Jakie.
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