

Grieving a Soulmate: The Story Behind "Till Death Do Us Part"

Robert Orfali

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Robert and Jeri Orfali were inseparable for thirty years. Together they wrote three bestselling software books, traveled extensively, and were peacefully living in Hawaii when Jeri was diagnosed with ovarian cancer in 1999. For the next ten years, Robert was her full time caretaker through major surgery and continuous chemotherapy. During these years, Jeri discovered surfing, quickly became a contender in her age group, and was able to continue surfing until the final months, when the cancer moved into her legs.

After Jeri's death, Robert and an extensive support system planned and executed an elaborate surfer's funeral and created a memorial website to Jeri. Unfortunately, he also began to experience devastating "grief bursts" that both frightened and incapacitated him. "It's a sharp stab of emotional pain and anxiety that lasts about two minutes and is relieved by deep sobbing," he wrote. "The bursts come in waves; each wave brings a dose of pain."

Grieving a Soulmate is much more than a book about Robert and Jeri's life, Jeri's untimely death, and its aftermath. Through extensive research on the grieving process, coupled with personal reflections and strategies, Robert sought to understand and heal his extraordinary suffering. In the book, he provides an excellent overview of the available research and books on grieving, compares and contrasts their healing strategies to his own grieving process, and comes to the conclusion that the advice lacks tangible, fast acting methods for overcoming pain. In the end, he discovered that grieving the death of a soulmate is much more complicated and debilitating than normal grief, and that he was on his own to find a cure.

Robert succeeded in overcoming his "grief bursts" using a multifaceted approach that isolated his several types of grief, from survivor's guilt to self pity to the complications of being an existentialist. These chapters on the "cure" are well written and filled with a wealth of usable strategies.

Grieving a Soulmate is a bit heavy on the intimate details of Robert's sometimes redundant account of his grieving in email correspondence with friends. Much of the book is devoted to stressing the perfection of his relationship with Jeri and working its uniqueness into a special expertise for healing profound grief. Some readers might find this jump from personal experience to discovering a universal cure for grieving a soulmate to be unscientific. That said, *Grieving a Soulmate* is an excellent addition to the existing literature on grieving and could offer an invaluable service to those anticipating the loss of a soulmate or someone in the throes of grieving one.

PATTY SUTHERLAND (July 28, 2011)

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