

It has been 850 days and 850 nights. That's a long time. You can nearly complete a college degree in that time; or walk $\frac{2}{3}$ the way around the Earth; or give birth three times; or travel to Mars and back – twice. Eight hundred and fifty times that I have woken up to an empty bed. Eight hundred and fifty times that I have lain down in that empty bed and wondered whether, when I woke in the morning, I would finally awaken from the nightmare that I am having, which *surely* isn't real. 850 days since Shelly died.

You would think that I would “get used to it” by now. And you would be right to a certain extent. The pain, though still deep and abiding, is not nearly as persistent; the number of hours per day that I think of her is far less than earlier; the tears barely fall any longer; the sense that there is no purpose to my life has dissipated; the constant, gnawing feeling of emptiness has given way to a less acute sense of sorrow, greatly tempered by palpable shafts of gratitude for 55 years of joy and happiness.

But no, I will never get comfortable with the fact that my soulmate is gone forever. The thought that I would ever be alone without Shelly never entered my head. Thank God it didn't as I think it would have been terrifying and crippling. And yet, it has happened. Well, over the course of twenty thousand hours, one cannot help but get acclimated to a new reality. It is just human nature at work. So perhaps I am “used to” my new reality in the sense that I realize it is not going to be any different tomorrow than it was yesterday. And so I don't experience the anxiety, the dread, the bewilderment, the immense sadness, the rage and anger that characterized my thoughts, feelings and actions at the outset – and in the ensuing two years – of the tragedy. But intellectually, dispassionately, objectively, I am still awed by the magnitude of the loss, the inexorability of the separation, the finality of the breach and by the futility of my desperate attempts to “do something about it.”

Nevertheless, I have been able to go on with my life – even inject some meaning into it. I made a fabulous trip with my eldest son and his family to Israel to reconnect with Shelly's family there. I made another wonderful trip with my youngest son and his son to Boston, where I revisited the places Shelly and I frequented and lived in the first three years of our marriage more than 50 years ago. I am still enjoying the lake home that Shelly and I purchased a decade ago. I even wrote and published a new math book. And I enjoy the company of family and several life-long friends – and even a few new ones.

I am a member of two grief groups, whose participants all lost spouses after long marriages. Both groups formed in the months after Shelly's death. It is remarkable to see the similar progress of most of the people in these groups. From despair to optimism and hope. Whereas

at the beginning all were morose, grief-stricken, heart-broken, devastated, some even borderline catatonic, now 850 days later, almost all are often happy and smiling, enjoying life, even “keeping company” in a few cases. Self-examination reveals I am no different. The hole in my heart is as big as it was 850 days ago. But my brain has forced me to accept the finality of what has happened and to recognize my inability to change it. It has educated me about the destructiveness that would follow my being consumed by the loss. It has commanded me to try to put some purpose, meaning and joy into whatever future I have left. And so I shall.

As I wrote that last paragraph, it occurred to me that this might be my final entry in these pages. Maybe; maybe not. We’ll see. If it turns out to be, then on my behalf and on Shelly’s behalf, thank you for listening.