

Hi All,

I've decided to pull the plug on the Till-Death-Do-Us-Part.com Web site. I've put up a new home page that says "We're sorry, but Till-Death-Do-Us-Part.com is no longer operational." The actual site is now at a different address and is password protected.

This may be permanent or it may be temporary. I won't know until I process all of the issues surrounding this project. It has been a profound exercise in facing a question most of us would prefer to ignore until it's too late. That is, how does the knowledge of your impending death effect how you choose to live your life? I'm assuming this is at least partially why most of you agreed to work on this project with me. Having lived through this experience has been enriching, and somewhat enlivening for me personally. And I'm taking away some very interesting lessons.

For one thing, it was an exercise, however darkly ironic, that allowed us all to shine a light into a world we can't actually inhabit, even in the imagination, until we cross a certain experiential threshold in time and space. We can't really know how we would feel if we knew we were terminally ill. Only how we have felt when people close to us have had to cope with that reality, or how we think we might feel.

At the same time, it was fascinating to dredge up and look at feelings of dread that arise when facing our own demise. There's the terror of the unknown, but there's also the terror of the known, which we perhaps keep buried for fear that the actual life we are living might fall short of the expectations we've had for it.

So, if nothing else, working on this project freed us all to briefly imagine what it might feel like to be there. Like getting a sneak preview of the inevitable.

But, therein lies the challenge. We created all of these terminally ill characters, based on experiences we've had and based on how we thought other people might feel under this most challenging of circumstances. In actuality, they were based on how we hope we (or others) might feel. We put these characters out into the world for all to see, trying to attract "the real thing" -- people who actually do want to do what we hope they want to do -- that is, exercise their passion, even if it's for the last time. We were enormously successful on at least one level: We drew a substantial amount of public attention to the site.

The success we had luring the media and the blogosphere into our world was based on the shocking and sensational nature of the subject. We hooked the biggest of the mass media including AP, NPR, CBC, the British tabloids, TalkRadio Europe, some regional press and at least a thousand bloggers. They all, like us, were fascinated with the idea. But the journalists, as representatives of the big corporate media establishment, had a job to do. They had to sell the story to the lowest common denominator of their readers. So they began digging for the prurient, turgid, morose, outrageous, socially unacceptable angles of the story. It was all there on the site waiting for them. But, none of them felt they could adequately report on the story without speaking with some of you, the terminally ill clients. They wanted you to reveal the dark secrets of what it's really like to be short on time but looking for love; dying but still horny; weakened but still feisty enough to seek out one last fling. Regardless of sensitivity or privacy issues, they demanded that you tear open your soul for the world to see. Either that, or they would not cover the story. I suggested that they approach terminally ill people in their regions and write about how those people feel about this type of service, but they all, as far as I can tell, opted out. Essentially, either you deliver the dirt on a silver platter, allowing them to take merciless advantage of you and destroy any and all sense of personal privacy, or you're of no possible use to them.

In the two months the site has been active (it was born on Valentine's Day and expired on Good Friday), it has attracted one verified terminally ill client and possibly as many as four others (none of whom we have accepted as members due to skittishness about luring people into our fake reality without their knowledge, since we had so little to offer them in the way of potential dating partners). All the others (actually dozens of others) were either journalists disguised as clients, looky-loos who were there on a dare or to prove something to their friends (the punk'd crowd), gold diggers, prostitutes, or a myriad of other kinds of scammers.

I could leave the site active and let it fill up slowly (replacing all of us over time), hoping that using our best intuition, we could keep out the riffraff and only allow in people we think are really terminally ill. But, there's another issue. It seems, in terms of your individual participation, that this project has run its course. Some of you are still actively communicating with me about the project, but many seem to have pulled your own plugs. Perhaps it's the subject matter, or perhaps you are disappointed in the way I chose to deal with the media coverage, which really precluded the project from getting real international attention. Or, perhaps it's the normal demands of living that preclude you from dwelling on thoughts about dying. In any event, I'm assuming that you derived whatever benefit you were seeking when you agreed to help create the project. And I remain forever indebted to you for all of your contributions.

This project will eventually be moved to my Web site at joeyskaggs.com, where it will become a part of my archive. (I'll let you know when that happens so you can continue to access the site if you want to.) It was neither a hoax, nor a real business. It was something in between. I used all the techniques I use to perpetrate hoaxes to snare the media into reporting on something that was not true but that could have become a reality if it were to take off on its own. I brought the horses to water, but, I ultimately chose not to let them drink. I assume there are people out there, who are truly terminally ill, who might really have liked to use the dating site to connect with other like minded people, and who might even have enjoyed speaking with the media. But we didn't have those people and I was not willing to fake it.

Ultimately, I did it to protect myself and you all from getting embroiled with a less than forgiving media. There is suddenly so much palpable public anger about fraud and deception, based on the widespread human toll from our various economic and social crises, that this project presented risks I ultimately decided were not worth taking at this time.

I would love to hear from you. I'm interested to know what you think and feel about the project. All comments are welcome.

Best,

Joey