

Local psychologist finds soul mate

BY TOM TAUCHERT
Features Editor

Dr. Moti Peleg knew the story of finding the love of his life, Ronit, was an especially unique one long before it was published in *The Record* last year. Now that he has appeared on "The Oprah Winfrey Show" to share it, the whole world knows it.

Born to Holocaust survivors in Poland in 1947, Peleg immigrated to Israel three years later. At the age of 17, while in Air Force Preparatory School, he was struck by the image of the recently crowned Miss Israel in a magazine. Ronit would go on to become the second runner-up to Miss Universe in 1964.

"Her blue-green eyes were very compelling and exceptionally beautiful," he recalled. "I couldn't forget it and that image of Ronit's face remained in the back of my mind for nearly 40 years. She didn't know about me, but from time to time, throughout the years, I read about her whereabouts in Israeli tabloids."

During this time, Peleg moved to America where he accomplished his goal of becoming a clinical psychologist, married and had two children, now aged 26 and 23. Meanwhile, Ronit would marry an American physician, settle in Los Angeles and raise three children of her own — all of whom are now married with children.

When Peleg and his wife divorced about 10 years ago, he began to think more and more about Ronit, who had captured his heart when he first saw her pictured as an 18-year-old in a magazine. Sadly, around this time, Ronit became a widow and moved back to Israel.

"I decided to inquire about my dream girl, Ronit, and connect with her," he said. "Through the years I felt she might be my soul mate and discovered after meeting her that she was always yearning to find the soul mate, of which she was dreaming about. When I contacted her for the first time, I told her: 'Ronit, this is Dr. Moti Peleg, an Israeli American psychologist from Ridgewood, New Jersey. You have been in my heart for 40 years. I believe we are soul mates and we will probably become a husband and wife.'"

Also a believer in destiny and spirituality, Ronit stayed on the phone with him and kept in touch via e-mail. Two months later, shortly before a visit to her family in Los Angeles, Ronit received a special gift from her admirer.

"I sent her my CD, a recording of a song which I wrote and composed that related to her titled, 'You are the girl, woman and the soul; I have searched for all my life,'" Peleg explained. "The song brought tears of relief and joy to Ronit's face. She began to realize that I was indeed the soul mate she was waiting for all her life."

Now married for a year and a half, Peleg, who, in addition to his work with his clinical staff on Pine Street, conducts intimacy counseling workshops with his wife, told

his story to *The Record*, where it caught the eye of an "Oprah" producer for an upcoming show on love.

"At first, I didn't know if it was a hoax or not," Peleg said. "But Oprah does like strange stories like these."

After being interviewed in the Peleg's New York apartment for 10 hours and several more times over the phone, they were somewhat surprised to see the video chopped down to a three-minute segment on the show but are still very pleased with the overall experience.

"We were invited to Chicago and the night before the show, a limo came to pick us up," he said. On the show, the Pelegs were featured with a panel of four other couples to discuss their love stories.

Peleg admits worrying if his accent would be hard to understand but relaxed once the cameras began to roll.

"I was nervous but calm when they started filming," he said. "I was tense. [Ronit] was tense but Oprah put us at ease after only a few minutes. She's terrific. One dynamite lady and she asked all the right questions."

After the taping of the episode wrapped, Peleg received a little taste of stardom on the flight home.

"When we came back to the airport, people recognized us. The stewardess said she just saw us on the show," he said with a laugh. "I felt like a semi-celebrity, like I was a singer or performer or something."

That newfound celebrity continued once they returned to the East Coast, as the couple, who are now working on a book about their experiences, was recognized time and time again.

"I didn't expect the response to be so widespread," he said. "People everywhere, in the market and on the street, in New York and New Jersey, even weeks after the show would identify me and my wife, approach us and tell us how inspired they were to watch our love story on 'Oprah.' Many said, 'You gave us a renewed hope that perhaps someday this might happen to us as well, we should not give up.' This comment came from both people who were singles without a partner and people who were married, or in a relationship. The message I have gotten from these responses is that spirited soulful love can be found if we only can be mindful of it, attuned to it and believe in investing ourselves in it."

Excited about his appearance, Peleg's staff sent out an announcement to current and former patients, as well as other area psychologists, alerting them when the episode would air and many tuned into it.

"All our patients were touched by watching the program," he said. "They saw the human personal side of my life and felt very good about it. As a person and as a psychologist, I believe in being humble, being real and down to earth. I believe it's OK for patients to know that their psychologist is human, has feelings, has hopes and



CHRIS PETERS/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Dr. Moti Peleg relaxes in his Ridgewood office with his dog, Mia.

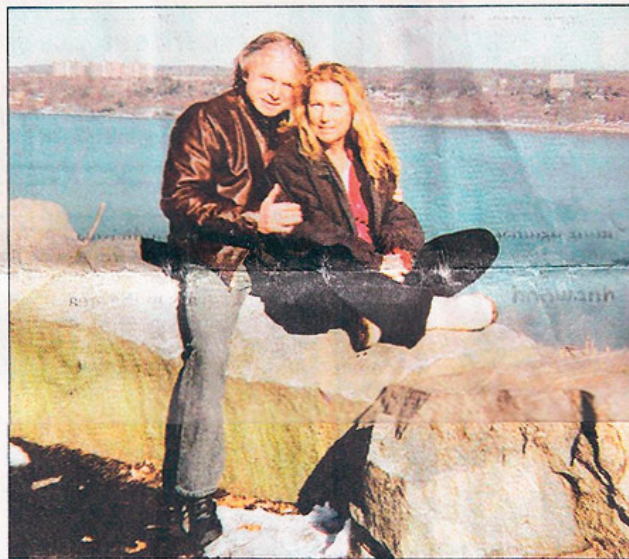


PHOTO COURTESY OF MOTI PELEG

Moti Peleg and the love of his life, Ronit, appeared on the "Oprah Show" recently.

dreams, sadness, happiness and love. Patients don't need to know the entire life story of their psychologists, however, they can know some details like the ones portrayed on the 'Oprah' show, which are inspiring and positive." Peleg said he feels humbled watching the DVD of his appearance on "Oprah" and that the experience was a dream come true.

"I felt good about delivering an inspiring message to 40 million

people that true love can be found and it is not just a fantasy in one's mind," he said. "One needs to go after his or her dreams, even if sometimes they seem farfetched. The main message I give is, 'Don't settle for what you have arrived to, it's OK to stretch beyond and reach to your destiny and to your spirit.'"

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