

A story of love, death and grief

Helene Chung Martin, *Gentle John My Love My Loss*, Hill of Content Publishing, \$19.95.

CANCER was just a word to former Hobartian Helene Chung Martin — at least until her long-time partner John Martin was diagnosed with it.

"I had no idea what cancer was," Helene, a Radio Australia journalist, said from Melbourne.

"It was just a word."

Cancer became a major part of her life in May 1991 when John Martin, also formerly of Hobart, was diagnosed with bowel cancer.

Two years and five months later, it killed him. He was 59.

Gentle John My Love My Loss tells the story of love, death and grief.

Sprinkled through it are many references to Tasmania and the couple's early days together in Hobart and their enjoyed returns to the state for visits.

They were together for 17 years and married for less than a year before John died.



HEALTHY
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BY MARY ROSE

Helene, a fourth-generation Australian Chinese, wrote *Gentle John* for herself, as a private memoir, to cope with her grief.

Response to her participation on a radio program on grieving convinced her that her memoir should be published.

In her afterword to *Gentle John*, she wrote a year after his death:

"Well, I have continued.

"I have survived the worst year of my life.

"No matter what befalls me now, nothing could be worse

than my first year without John.

"For most of the past 12 months, the best I have felt is flat.

"All that gave meaning, a sparkle to my life, has gone.

"I seem to have been plunged into an abyss, somehow surviving in the darkness.

"Yet, when I reflect on the past year, I realise that I have been gradually drawn upwards, involuntarily and imperceptibly, towards the light into which I may emerge."

She tells her readers why she has allowed her private memoir to be shared.

"This, then, is my tribute to John, my gesture towards life, an attempt through exposure to heal my wound," she says.

"And if this becomes a vehicle to transport a few others some way in their own painful journey through grief, my tears will have not been in vain."

Helene still finds it hard to believe she is opening her private life up so much to others with her book.

She does not want to actually see anyone reading *Gentle John My Love My Loss* because it tells them about her emotions but she is encouraged by its popularity.

It is a very emotional description of Helene's thoughts, hopes, fears and memories in the last three weeks of her husband's life.

"Even though I had no will to live, there was some basic instinct to live," she told *The Mercury*.

Helene provides enough detail to help her readers picture well every scenario.

Helene does not write her book as an authority. It is based solely on what happened and how she felt about it.

Gentle John seems a bit full-on at times but, then again, it tells Helene's story on how she manages to cope.

In no way does she portray her book as the answer for anyone trying coming to terms with death and grief ... it is her answer.