

Down South

Story shows tears not in vain

You were very brave to tackle the issue. I grieve too. Nothing tastes or even smells any more."

This was one of many letters journalist Helene Chung Martin received after her appearance on Radio National in April last year.

She was interviewed by colleague Peter Couchman who, at the same time, also spoke to Queensland-based counsellor Doris Zagdanski on her book, *Stuck for Words*, What to say to someone who is Grieving.

Chung Martin's husband, John Martin, a lecturer in history, had recently died of bowel cancer.

Her book, *Gentle John, My Love, My Loss*, is her tribute to her husband and a gesture towards life -

**Gentle John,
My Love, My Loss**
By HELENE CHUNG
MARTIN

Hill of Content
\$19.95 paperback



It is easy to read and, although not sparing in any of Chung Martin's grief, is not maudlin.

Most people will finish it feeling as though they have shared a loving couple's odyssey and have come to know them as friends.

Most of the story is told by Chung Martin but there are the occasional diary entries and accounts by Martin, some dating back to his childhood.

These help round off his personality, provide humour and point out the humanity of the man.

In her grief Chung Martin might otherwise have tended to elevate Martin to sainthood, especially in her description of his last days.

But to be fair she does point out his weaknesses and her own, with accounts of his temper tantrums, her impetuous nature and even a brave reference to her infidelity.

This is a book from which every reader will gain something.

None of us is immune to loss and even if we haven't experienced it there are our



Mr Martin

friends who must rely on us during their bereavement.

Chung Martin says she was so overwhelmed by her sense of loss she surprised herself by agreeing to Couchman's interview.

It gave her the opportunity to let her own grief 'hang out', something, like many other people in her position, she was shy to do.

A fourth generation Australian Chinese, Chung Martin is a veteran of television and radio. In 1983 she became the first woman posted abroad by the ABC when she was assigned to Peking as a correspondent.

She describes the experience of being on the Couchman program as moving from the objective interviewer to the subjective interviewee.



Mrs Chung Martin

In one sense she was on familiar territory but in another it was acutely unfamiliar.

"I was... revealing my own interior world, my intimate feelings towards John, and the personal disaster of his death.

"I could hardly believe what was happening."

During this time Chung Martin poured out her grief on paper, but initially had decided against publishing her writings, thinking it best to get on with her life.

But she thought again. She eventually contacted her publisher with embarrassment and apologies.

All who read her book will be glad she did.

Pat Fraser