

**"Gentle John, My Love, My Loss." H C Martin.  
Published by Hill of Content Publishing Co (1995).  
160 pages. RRP: \$19.95.**

This is a poignant and powerful account of the author's experience with her husband's illness and death from cancer. Writing one year after John Martin's death, Helene Chung describes in detail the pain, sense of unreality and emotional see-sawing in coming to grips with the illness and probable death. She is extremely candid in telling of the appalling grief and paralysing sense of loss which followed her husband's death and the beginnings of the process of climbing back to a full life.

Although the book is highly emotionally charged, her journalistic skill allows her to tell the story in a detailed way without overwhelming the reader. The story of illness and death is entwined with the story of their love for each other during a 17 year relationship. We are made aware of the limitations of medical practice, the unpredictable nature of cancer and the reluctance of the mind to grapple with the physical reality.

Small vignettes stand out and allow the reader to share in some way in the experience; reaching automatically for his favourite marmalade on the supermarket shelf, expecting him to deal with the cat-mangled corpse of a bird in the courtyard of their house, or losing control in public at the sudden realisation that he will never reappear again.

Helene Chung herself admits that the manuscript was written for herself alone, a private document to explore and deal with her intense grief. As such it has achieved the goal of helping her face her future. Publication only followed at the urging of others as she started to reveal her loss and tell her story. In this well written book the reader is privileged to share the experience but also to learn and reflect. It will be valuable for families and the bereaved, in helping them feel a little less alone. It is also a gentle reminder to the professional to remain aware of the complex nature of people who are also experiencing illness, death and bereavement.

*M Skene  
Anti-Cancer Foundation of South Australia  
Adelaide, SA*