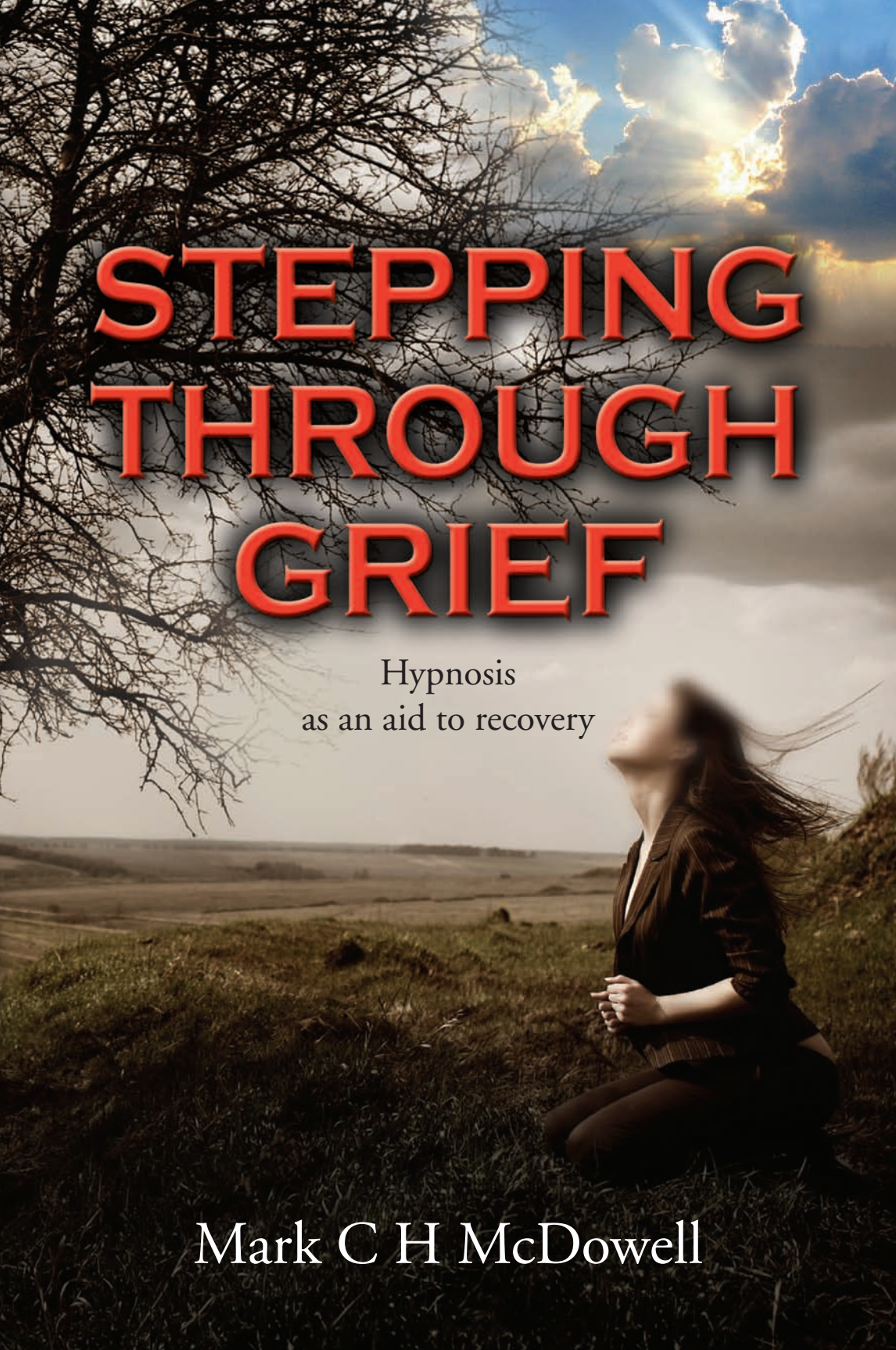


Stepping through Grief is an inside account of how to approach both the emotional and everyday problems that can often be associated with the loss of a loved one. Real case histories show how we can remain 'stuck' by retaining anger, sadness, guilt, shock, or by simply switching off and becoming apathetic with our own life. More importantly, the book shows us how we can overcome these and other problems, and move on towards contentment.

Stepping through Grief

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A woman with long dark hair is kneeling in a grassy field, looking up towards a bright sunset. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a golden glow and long shadows. The sky is filled with scattered clouds. In the foreground, there is a large, leafless tree with intricate branches. The overall mood is contemplative and hopeful.

STEPPING THROUGH GRIEF

Hypnosis
as an aid to recovery

Mark C H McDowell

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FOREWORD

I remember when I was very young, about nine or ten I think, Saturday morning after breakfast was when the weekend *really* began. That's when my Father used to give out my pocket money, and seconds later I would be racing down to the newsagents, and straight into little boy's heaven. I could spend the next goodness knows how long, poring over comics and picking sweets, making quite sure that I didn't go a penny over, or more importantly, a penny under.

During these times there would often be an elderly lady who would come into the shop, at which point the owner, a friendly middle-aged man as I remember, used to disappear out the back, leaving the two middle-aged women assistants on their own. I never really paid any of them much attention; I think that I was far too concerned about making sure that I got my money's worth.

One day however, while trying to decide on chocolate or chewing gum no doubt, I heard the elderly lady say; 'He was here one minute and then gone the next.' I think it must have been the unfamiliar expression that took me away from my reverie and caused me to lend an ear to her conversation with the assistants. I say conversation, but in truth, it was only the customer that was doing any talking. It turned out that the woman was speaking quite candidly, about the sudden loss of her brother, but as if that wasn't enough, she then went on, in great length, to describe the death of her Father, and then her Mother, until she was apparently, 'the only one left'.

At the conclusion of that last piece of cheerful news, I thought that I had heard enough and so I put my sweets up onto the counter to be served and unlike other occasions, neither of the assistants seemed to be able to get across to me fast enough to take my money! On reflection, it wasn't the content of the elderly lady's story that held me briefly mesmerized, it was the expression on the faces of the other two women, they looked just as miserable as the story teller, and I don't

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think that was because there was a natural empathy taking place, after all, they couldn't wait to get away! I think that it was more likely that, unlike me in the prime of my emotional naivety, the stories reminded them either of the losses they had already encountered, or the prospect of losses to come.

INTRODUCTION

Death is a subject rarely raised, especially so when applied in forethought. Books on the subject abound, but however good they may be, I feel that it is impossible to provide a *blueprint* on how to go through a grieving experience, as this is a process we can only complete successfully, by carrying it out in our own, individual way. Each death we encounter is unique and should be dealt with as such.

For example, it is likely that we will mourn differently for the loss of a father than a son, a wife from a lover. That does not mean that we hurt more, or love less, just that we feel the loss and will experience the hurt differently.

I once worked with a client that looked after her ailing Father for more than eight years. She loved him dearly and when he became frail, she thought nothing of devoting her time to his every comfort. She said that she actually enjoyed the everyday tasks of looking after him, as it seemed to give her a sense of purpose. Then, one day while she was in the kitchen making him something to eat, he had a heart attack and died as he sat in his armchair. The day after her Father passed away, Claire went to work and carried on as normal, she said that she ‘Did not feel the awful feeling of loss that I was expecting, so I couldn’t really see a reason why not.’ Claire took just a half day off for the funeral. From the moment that her Father died, all of the attention that she had previously given to her Father went on her cat. She would carefully prepare hand-cooked meals, never settling for tinned food. Letting it out throughout specific times during the day and allowing it back in at night to let it sleep on the end of her bed. Several years later Claire’s cat died un-dramatically of natural causes and she couldn’t understand why, after handling the death of her Father so well, she fell apart and felt compelled to take to her bed for several days.

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At some point during the grieving process, and really, the sooner the better, we need to recognise the *void* that a particular loss has created in our life. It is only then that we can *safely* elect how to fill that void, or, if we so choose, to continue our life with the *void* in place. For instance, we can decide to take on a new lover, perhaps spouse, or of course, we can remain lover-free. We can give birth to another child, or we can make the decision to remain childless.

If we remain *unconsciously* aware of our loss as in the case of Claire, it may well be that we cast our intention, our emotions, towards safer, known ground. Then, even inanimate objects can become the focus of our attention and desire, or, of course, we can lose interest entirely and desire nothing. Often there is also a sense of duty, obligation or respect towards the love that we have lost that can decide our actions. It is for that reason that we are far more likely to replace a pet for another, than entertain the prospect of replacing a loved one with someone else.

It is common nowadays to hear of ‘Giving one hundred percent’, especially when applied to sporting events, and generally, it is accepted that we have one hundred percent (physically) to give. We also have the same one hundred percent capacity emotionally and, it is up to us how much of that emotional potential we are prepared to use and how we decide to divide it up. Imagine that we are married with, let us say, two children. We can give thirty-three and one third of our emotions to our partner and share the remaining sixty-two and three thirds amongst our offspring. We do not always share out that emotional capacity equally of course, I have worked with many clients that are happy to give one hundred percent towards their children and have nothing in reserve for their partner! There is no law governing how to divide.

When we lose a loved one that percentage game becomes null and void in an instant. There is that word again...void. The balance of our life is affected by the loss of someone that we love. They will seem irreplaceable... and maybe they are, but we at some point, need to find

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someone or at the very least, something, to fill that void or we will remain out of balance indefinitely.

People wanting to know how long the grieving process lasts often approach me. I remember a client, a woman in her late seventies, who originally came to me because she had lost confidence when out walking. A proud and independent woman, she was embarrassed about the amount of time it was now taking her to cross the road. Sometime in our treatment, she cancelled a session at short notice, previously unheard of for her. When she returned the following week, she explained that the reason she had cancelled was that her husband had died, and although she had been expecting it for some time, she felt worried because she had read an article that said the grieving process took three years. She was angry because as she said 'I probably don't have that much time left for myself and I don't want to hang about, I want to get on with the rest of my life!'

Grieving is not a race against time, although time, by its own merit can help to heal. We do not have to fill our lives while in the grieving process by expecting or accepting either permanence or transience; we just need to acknowledge how we *feel*. There is a period to experience grief, a time frame...but it is *our* time frame. It is not reliant upon the opinion of any analyst, doctor or supposed expert. Grief is a natural emotion and so, as with all emotions...should be accepted as a temporary state.

Stepping through Grief is an inside account of how to approach both the emotional and everyday problems that can often be associated with the loss of a loved one. Real case histories show how we can remain 'stuck' by retaining anger, sadness, guilt, shock, or by simply switching off and becoming apathetic with our own life. More importantly, the book shows us how we can overcome these and other problems, and move on towards contentment.

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