His Midlife Crisis
Is Your Crisis, Too

What You Need To Know,
And How You Can Take Care of Yourself

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Dedication

For all the men who are scared of what’s happening to them, and the women who love them, but don’t know how to help.
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Male Midlife Crisis

Introduction

This book is about male midlife crisis. Yes, it is real and yes, it is the topic of many a joke. But it is a serious subject that needs to be let out into the light of day. Men commit suicide over it, destroy their marriages, their families, their finances, their careers, and their credibility because of it. Who among us hasn’t made fun of the guy who goes out and buys a sports car, then dumps his wife for a twenty-something airhead. To most of us, he looks like a complete fool. But to him, it is his attempt to save himself. You’ll learn why as you read this book.

Obviously, many men don’t “act out” when they go through those midlife years. I’ll explain why that is so you can look at your husband and ascertain whether he is likely to have difficulty in his transition.

Armed with what you will be learning in this book, you may be able to avoid the difficulties that other women have had to endure.

Male midlife crisis is a topic that I began studying in 1995. It was actually a personal quest to determine what the hell was going on with my husband. I’m sure of the date because I just looked at my divorce paper to check. I was divorced after 29 years of marriage in October, 1996. The year before
that was horrible and gut-wrenching, thus the use of the expletive above. I hope I didn’t offend you.

For the first 27 years of my marriage, my husband was someone I could count on, someone I knew, someone I respected. Then he began to change. Before the change, we had always been a team. We had our own careers and interests, but we made decisions together, we were best friends, we did everything as a couple. In our community we were a model of the perfect marriage. One woman, when verifying the gossip she had heard about our impending divorce broke down and cried, sputtering through her tears, “If you two can’t make it, there’s no hope for the rest of us.”

There was a pivotal moment that began the spiraling down of our marriage. It was suggested by a massage therapist that he might learn a lot about himself if he had an affair. He told me what she had suggested and we had a good laugh. But the idea stuck and began to take shape in his mind. After a time, he said he was attracted to a woman he had met and needed to “explore” what it was all about.

I tried to be okay with what he wanted but every cell in my body was screaming a lot of four-letter words, you know. like “no f--- way”. To avoid the gory details, I’ll just say that after about eighteen months of struggle and lots of tears, I finally filed for divorce.

From everything I was studying on the subject, my ex-husband was exhibiting all the classic signs of male midlife crisis. I asked him if that was what was going on. He denied it and was actually quite offended that I would suggest such a thing because all along he had insisted that what he
was doing was an attempt to explore and expand his spiritual side and his ability to love me more completely.

I continued to insist that loving another was NOT the way to learn to love me more deeply. Today, now that I understand more fully what male midlife crisis is all about, I understand why he was offended by the accusation that he might be going through his own midlife crisis.

I’m sure that even today he would deny it, but I’m certain that’s what was going on. I tried to understand it. I searched for books on the topic but could not find any help. I had no way of knowing what to do. There was no way I could save my marriage other than to accept him being with other women. I couldn’t do that then and I could not do so today. I chose divorce because I could no longer trust or respect my husband. I realized that without trust or respect, there is no basis for love.

Once I was single, I continued my study of men. I was teaching a seminar called *Embracing Our Sensual Selves*. In the afternoon of the last day of each seminar I brought in a panel of men to answer any questions the women had ever wanted to ask a man, no matter how personal. The seminars were a grand success.

To determine if the men on the panels were capable of being open, honest, able to express themselves, and as I often joke, to see if they were “up” for the job, I interviewed them individually. It was a very enlightening experience for them as well as for me. They told me things about themselves and men in general that I had never heard or read. I knew my women friends and the women in my seminars didn’t know those things
either, because we were all complaining and frustrated about the same things.

So I took what I had learned and wrote my first book about men titled, *Men Made Easy*. In it I share 12 secrets that every women needs to know about men if they want to have more satisfying and fulfilling relationships.

Since the publication of that book, I launched a web site called AliveWithLove.com where I used to have an advice column that answers relationship questions sent to me by my visitors. (I hated to quite offering that free service but it became way too time consuming.) One of the ongoing topics for women has been the frustration they experience when their husbands or boyfriends are trying to make it through their midlife crisis years. They don’t necessarily know that that is what is happening, but I know the signs when I hear what they describe. Having learned a lot more about the subject since that crazy time in my first marriage, I decided it was time to write a book on the subject so I could help on a larger scale.

I hope to offer you information that was not available to me when I was going through it. When you understand what mid-life crisis is and learn what you can do to help your husband or boyfriend, maybe he won’t have such a difficult time. Most important, I want you to be able to help yourself because it can be the most traumatic thing that your marriage will ever have to endure. You must learn what you can do to insulate yourself from his actions as well as keep your sanity. And maybe you will be able to get him to read it as well. But don’t count on it.

If he hasn’t gone through it yet, maybe you can help him before that
frightful time hits. And maybe you can help your own sons avoid the booby-trap that society has already set for them.

My blessings to you if you are in the middle of his midlife crisis and my encouragement if your man isn’t quite there yet. With what you are about to learn, you just might make it through without both of your lives crumbling around you. At the very least, you won’t think he’s going crazy and you will know to stay out of his way if he does not respond to your newfound wisdom.
Chapter One

Male Mid-life Crisis: Is it real?

Is male mid-life crisis real? It depends on whether you ask a man who is going through it or the woman who helplessly watches him change into someone she doesn’t know. Few men admit that it is real, even when their lives are crumbling around them. The irony is that the very reason men won’t admit they are struggling with mid-life crisis is the same reason it occurs. They are supposed to be what they’ve been taught to be: men. Have it all together, have all the answers, do not, DO NOT, show any kind of vulnerability, least of all, to feel their emotions. Midlife crisis is the antithesis of those social directives.

Your husband, boyfriend, brother, father, and even your sons (whether you like it or not) have been taught to fit into a certain mold which happens to be a very tight fit. So tight that a great deal of what he “could be” has to be discarded or hidden away. All of who he is or might be simply will not fit into that box. In particular, the ability to be vulnerable, to make mistakes, to do silly things for no reason, to express what’s in his heart and soul, to follow a dream that his family, teachers and peers might think is silly, to express his creativity, his full range of emotions, all of which are perceived as being weak or feminine, which is, sadly, to them, the same thing.

To survive in this narrow world, he has learned to shut off his feelings and is a stranger to most of his emotions. As you learn more about this potentially life-threatening subject, you’ll understand how truly significant the inability to feel is to the dilemma that most men must struggle with. The struggle is life-long and the crisis is when the struggle becomes unbearable.
We joke about and make fun of mid-life crisis because men often do things that appear to be stupid or childish when they are going through it. The motorcycle, the sports car, the bimbo, the new hairpiece, the new body. What man wants to admit to being a joke? So they suffer in silence and often their lives get destroyed with divorce, financial ruin, and even suicide, with no one knowing quite what happened.

Yes, male mid-life crisis is very real and much more serious than most of us can know. Once you understand what it is all about, you will see how terribly insensitive all the jokes and teasing are. It is probably the most serious and potentially devastating thing that men have to endure. The problem is that no one understands it, least of all the man who is going through it. And there is no preparation for its coming. All he knows is that he’s become dissatisfied with his life, feeling lost, alone, doesn’t know why, and doesn’t know what to do about it.

Women often write to me and ask if their husband or boyfriend is going through a mid-life crisis. They list all the reasons they think that might be what is going on. Intuitively they know that something really serious and frightening is occurring, but because they haven’t been taught how to deal with it, they feel lost, shut out, and frustrated. They want to help if they can but there is little that they can do.

Because men suffer in silence, (even if they knew what was going on they wouldn’t dare talk about it,) no one really knows much about it. And certainly, there are no clear guidelines for how to make it through to the other end. You will understand why this is such a tragedy as you read
further.

The man who has someone who gives him support and understands is more likely to get through it with less long-term damage. At the other end of his journey is the possibility that he will be a happier, more sensitive, more fulfilled man. And you will have a closer approximation to the man you always knew he could be.

But that’s a big if. Hopefully, after you know what male midlife crisis is, how to negotiate through it, and how to reassemble the pieces he has strewn about him, you will both be more satisfied with your lives.
Chapter Two
The Signs of Mid-life Crisis

There are a variety of signs that a man is going through his mid-life crisis. Of course they very with each man as does the intensity of each behavior. But the following list should help you begin to understand what this very serious time in his life is all about:

- His personality changes.
- He gets angry for no reason.
- He loses interest in his work or changes jobs on a whim.
- He ignores his responsibilities.
- He becomes obsessed with his appearance.
- He reverts to boyhood behavior.
- He makes friends with other irresponsible men.
- He spend more time away from home.
- He drinks more or starts using drugs.
- He begins to gamble...a lot.
- You see lust in his eyes when he looks at other women or worse, you suspect he’s having an affair.
- He starts making plans to sail around the world, even when he’s never sailed a boat in his life.
- He comes home with a sports car.
- He wants to move out...but he’s not sure.
- He ignores his kids, the house, his family, you.
- He’s insensitive to how he’s hurting the people around him and gets defensive if you even hint that there’s something wrong.
Does any of this sound familiar? It does if your man is between 40 and 55 and has been living the typical, “expected” role of a man. Remember the box he has been forced to cram himself into? He’s never acknowledged his “inner” self, his feeling self, the part that looks inside and questions who he is. Therapy? No way. That’s for women and sissies he’s always said. That would show weakness and that isn’t okay. And it definitely does not fit into that box.

When you start accusing him of changing, of being childish, of wrecking the finances, the family, and the marriage, he strikes out at you, his wife. You begin to fight all the time, he accuses you of things you haven’t done, gets angry with little provocation. And what do you do? You get hurt, frustrated, try to understand, plead for him to get help, maybe even change your behavior patterns in an unsuccessful attempt to placate him. You’re walking on eggs all the time and you’re worn out. But nothing works and you watch helplessly as your marriage falls apart.

You try to talk to him about what’s going on but he says nothing is wrong and to leave him alone. You try leaving him alone, but that doesn’t work either. Everything in your life is turned upside down and there doesn’t seem to be any rational way to deal with him.

“He’s always been so even, unemotional,” you tell your friends. “He’s been my rock, always taking care of us. Why has he turned on us?”

But he isn’t turning on you. It isn’t about you, at least not directly. It’s about that too-little box that he stuffed himself into when he was a boy. He was barraged with messages that taught him how to be a man: “Big boys don’t
cry.” “Pick yourself up, dust yourself, off, get back out there, be a man.” “Fight your own fights, don’t be a sissy.” “Don’t let them see that you’re scared.”

When they grow up they need to “settle down,” be responsible, don’t feel, don’t cry. They’re supposed to take care of everyone else, be brave, don’t show fear or weakness, be the strong one. Men can’t even be silly without everyone assuming they’ve been drinking. They have to work, marry, take care of a family, be a model citizen. And never, ever admit that they’re hurting, scared, and confused.

The signs may be obvious to you, but to him, they’re invisible because he can’t and won’t look at what is going on. It’s too scary because it is too far out of his consciousness to acknowledge, yet alone accept. They don’t understand and fear they are going crazy. That’s why so many men turn to alcohol, drugs and sex. And sadly, it’s why suicide is most prevalent during these precarious years.

They mask and numb the fear and the ever-present desire to scream, “What’s happening to me.” They suffer alone and they don’t know what to do. If they knew to expect it, like women know to expect menopause, they might be better able to handle it.

Not that long ago, no one talked about menopause. Women were committed to insane asylums, calling the problem a mental breakdown. Doctors told women they were imagining their symptoms. Women didn’t talk about it so when it hit, and they were as unprepared as the men of today who are suffering through the “unknown.”
Today women have shelves of books, lectures, talk show topics, girlfriend comparisons that discuss openly all the possibilities of physical, emotional and behavioral changes that are part of the “change of life.” Menopause is understood and no longer feared. And women do not need to suffer in silence, alone, fearing they are losing their minds.

Someday, hopefully soon, there will be as much information available and openly talked about on the subject of male midlife crisis. But until then, you must wade through it as best you can, armed with this beginning of an understanding, and maybe, maybe you can help ease the way for yourself and for him.

Certainly you can light the path for your sons so they will be better prepared and maybe even less at risk than if they didn’t have you there, guiding them. And if you can prepare your daughters, maybe they will be able to walk through it with their husbands. Change takes time, but it all starts at the beginning. This is the beginning and you are part of it.
Chapter Three
What causes male midlife crisis?

Because boys have been programmed to grow up to be strong, unemotional men, they begin a path toward mid-life crisis when they are babies. Studies in hospitals showed that newborn baby boys were held less, allowed to cry longer, handled rougher, and spoken to less gently than baby girls. As infants the programming begins and never, ever lets up.

Little boys are taught not to cry, “Be mama’s little man,” “Don’t be a sissy,” “It’s only a scratch,” “You’ve got to be tough.” They learn from their peers that the worst thing they can be called is “Sissy.” In a documentary on young boys, one twelve-year-old boy said he sometimes wanted to cry when he got hurt, but wouldn’t dare because the other boys would tease him. I watched my seven-year-old grandson go through the contortions of not letting himself cry when he was disappointed and embarrassed that he was too short to get on the “cool” rides at the carnival.

In sports boys are taught to focus on winning, being tough, taking their falls like a man. Men are taught to focus on achieving goals and being the solid rock in their community and family. And to always ignore the pain. Even their own health issues are ignored until there is no choice and is forced to go to a doctor or the hospital. In every area of his life, he hides or ignores what’s going on inside.

But where can a man go to talk about being unsure or scared? Where can he go when he needs to get away from the pressures of being a man? Who can he talk to when he is failing at his job, has lost financial ground, or
made a huge blunder at work? You may say you want him to go to you. But he knows you need to see him as your rock, the one who shields and saves everyone else. If he lets down completely, maybe breaks down and sobs like a baby, would you know what to do? Would you still be able to look up to him? Would your relationship be the same if you knew how scared he is sometimes? How unsure of himself? If you’re honest with yourself, you will have to admit it might make a difference.

Because the life men are expected to act out is so narrow, there often comes a time between 40 and 55 when each man looks back and asks himself, “Is this all there is? Is this what I’ve been busting my back for all these years?” He feels that his life is empty, that something is missing, but he doesn’t know what it is. He has no idea that what is missing are all the aspects of his humanness that were turned off when he entered the world and a blue blanket was placed around his tiny body.

This may be the first time he has ever taken a serious look at his life. It’s the time a man finally “pauses” long enough from being “the man” to see that maybe there could have been, should have been, more. The title of this book was going to be Men - Oh! - Pause. But an even more appropriately title might have been: Men - Oh #&*@!!! - Pause because that is what he often feels when he really opens his eyes and looks clearly at the life he was directed to live. When he takes that moment to pause and question, he often finds himself in a free-fall with not bottom in sight and “Oh #&*@!!!” is all he can feel.

The questioning is usually unconscious, just a feeling in his gut. He is completely unaware that what he is experiencing is doubt. Doubt in his
abilities as a man, doubt in his abilities to take care of his responsibilities and obligations, doubt about the choices he made. Sadly, many of his “choices” were made by others; his father, mother, teachers, coaches, society. Sometimes he chooses a particular job simply because he needs to make money to support a wife and growing family. Now, after living a life that was not selected from his deepest heart’s desires, he feels the emptiness, and all he knows is that he’s not happy. There is a sense of loss. So he mourns, but for what he is unclear.

The more unconscious he is about what is happening to him, the more likely he is to act out in ways that are perceived as foolish. Dump the wife for a younger women, get the sports car, a Harley, a new wardrobe, new hair-do, even a new job. Or maybe he goes in another direction and starts to drink more, take drugs, hang out in places he would never have been seen in before the crisis began. Maybe he just does more of the same and works harder and longer hours. Anything to keep from feeling the pain that is erupting through every pore.

Or sadly, he becomes a statistic and takes his own life because he can’t deal with the inner questioning, the doubts, and the disappointment that is staring back a him in the mirror. More men than women kill themselves and the older they get, the higher the numbers go.

Even if a man could identify what was going on, he would not know how to talk about it. And most men feel they have no one they can talk to. If they do attempt to talk about it, they don’t want to appear weak or confused so they hold back some of the truth. They try to make it less than it is or they simply don’t know how to put it into words. But even if he did, most of his
friends would not be comfortable with what he was trying to say. They are uncomfortable in the presence of a man who is being emotional, showing vulnerability, needing understanding and just the right words.

How often, after a man has committed suicide, do you hear the wife or best friend say, “I had no idea,” or “I knew something was going on but I didn’t realize it was that bad.” Tragically, the more a man hurts, the more scared or confused he is, the less likely he is to talk to anyone, not even his wife. Even if he actually talks to someone, they don’t know how to deal with a man who seems to be breaking apart. They can’t acknowledge that he isn’t the strong, solid rock everyone wants and needs him to be. His wife can’t deal with it and his best friend is too uncomfortable. So he continues in isolation and silence. He is alone and worries that he might be going crazy.

If he had been warned that someday this time would come, this questioning, these doubts, maybe he wouldn’t have such a difficult time. But there is no set of criterion, no science to help him understand and accept that this is a normal transition. Menopause has a clear understanding of what is happening in a woman’s body with the changes in hormones and the slowing down of the reproductive system. There’s none of that for men. So even when a man is brave enough to seek a doctor’s advice, the doctors are just as their patients. They don’t know what it is, they don’t know what causes it, and they don’t know what to do about it.

Male midlife crisis is a mystery that looms out beyond view, in a fog. It’s the great unknown, dark and damp, filled with deep holes. Because men, even scientific men, avoid the entire issue, it will be some time before it has the understanding that menopause now enjoys.
Chapter Four
Is he going crazy?

A man is taught from birth to repress his feelings and emotions. He’s gotten so good at it that he literally doesn’t think he has them. You’ve heard your husband or dad deny, sometimes quite angrily, that he might have shown a soft, tender, or vulnerable emotion. But at mid-life, when most of his goals are either achieved or, with a growing sense of disappointment, he knows they never will be, those buried feelings start bubbling up, like a geyser, ready to blow. Reaching the middle years causes most everyone to take at least a little peek back at how they’ve done. It’s that little peek, that moment to pause and wonder, that starts the journey into mid-life crisis.

Even if a man has been tremendously successful, which, in most societies, usually means monetarily, he still has the same issues to battle as other men. Men are goal oriented by nature so no matter how many goals get achieved, there are always unfulfilled goals still to be met.

On top of the unmet goals is a sense of failure, a fear that time is running out, and a questioning that maybe even the goals that were achieved weren’t worth giving up his life for. Because he has cut off his feelings, his emotions, his ability to get close to the people he cares about, he ponders these questions alone, in isolation and darkness. There begins to grow within him an angst caused from an awakening to the gaping hole caused from an emptiness that he never noticed until now.

The successful man, maybe even more than the man with the simpler life, is at greater risk of a true crisis. Because he achieved so much, he feels like he
ought to be happier than most. Because he was more focused on his goals than the average man, he has been even more disconnected from his feelings. Because he worked harder and identified himself more with his achievements, he is less likely to have strong bonds with family and friends. And it’s the bonds with loved ones that can make the difference between a true crisis or an uncomfortable, or if he’s lucky, an easy transition.

But for every man, successful or not, that pivotal time comes when he looks back at his life and his accomplishments, no matter how great or small. And what he sees, what he feels, is the void, the hole, the emptiness, the loneliness and isolation, that stems from the denial of his true feelings and emotions. When a man takes that life altering look back at his life, he knows something really large is missing, he just doesn’t know what.

Once the feelings begin to rise to the surface, he can no longer hold them back. There are too many of them and they’re too compelling. But because he has absolutely no experience in dealing with emotions, they squish out in a myriad of ways. The real dilemma is that he doesn’t know what they are.

He’s scared because this is all new to him. And because he’s become a bubbling volcano of feelings, feelings he’s never, ever allowed himself to feel, he is in a constant state of overwhelm.

You know how alarmed most men become when we women cry or act out emotionally. They are beside themselves with not knowing what to do. Can you imagine how much more disturbing it must be for them when their emotional state turns into a storm filled with lightening, thunder, gale force
winds, and a deluge of rain capable of drowning him?

He really doesn’t know what these feelings are, or even that they are feelings. All he knows is that this is something entirely new to him. And whatever these feelings are, he knows he’s not supposed to be having them. He knows he’s not supposed to be scared--he’s denied those feelings, too--so he worries that he’s losing his mind. He’s not crazy, but he feels like maybe he is, and he’s scared to death.

The only way he has known how to deal with feelings is to repress them but at this stage of his life, because they are so strong and overflowing so rapidly, that isn’t working any longer. Because he doesn’t recognize the emotions he’s feeling, he certainly can’t explain them. Not to himself and certainly not to you. He can explain the inner workings of a combustion engine, but he has no words to explain what is going on inside himself.

He suffers in silence, he strikes out at those closest to him (mainly you), he acts out in every way possible to make himself feel alive, he pretends he’s happy with his new girlfriend or his sparkling new Harley Davidson, and works feverishly to avoid the pain and fear caused by the bubbling inferno that is churning inside of him.

On the surface it appears that maybe he is going crazy but if you can accept that he is in a great state of emotional upheaval, a true crisis of the soul, maybe you can be enough of a support that he can hang on long enough to make it through.
Chapter Five
What's love got to do with it?

One feeling he has been allowed, and even encouraged to have, is love. Because he is daring to question his life, the validity of his goals, and the way he has organized and lived his life, he finds that isn’t working either.

Men have the same need to feel and express their emotions as women. The problem is that most emotions are considered weak and feminine. That sissy thing again. But there is one “soft and tender” emotion that he has been given the go-ahead to feel, and that’s love. But the more masculine he considers himself to be, or he has been raised to be, the less softly, the less romantically, he will express his love. The less he is able to express love, the more he will suffer when he arrives at his time to “pause” and look at his life.

He has been taught to equate love with sex. Sex is mocho, sex is manly, sex is being “the man.” Tenderness, romance, all that “mushy stuff” is uncomfortable for most men. When you want to just cuddle and touch, he doesn’t understand because he thinks all touching must lead to sex and all sex must lead to orgasm. “Yes! I’m the man.” “Mission accomplished!” “Job well done.” He can do what he’s “supposed” to do, and at the same time he never has to acknowledge his tender side.

But all human beings have a need to touch and be touched. You’ve read about the “tests” they did on monkeys. When they were not touched and held, they did not develop, they did not grow, and eventually, they died. The same tests were done on human babies and the results were the same.
Lack of emotional, social, and motor development, lack of growth, and sadly, after it was too late to reverse the damage, some of the babies died.

So, even though he needs touching as much as you do, he has never been able to be vulnerable enough to admit it. Has he ever come to you and said, “I need a hug.” No, that’s what you do. Since he and his buddies started discussing sex, or should I say, joking about sex, touching, tenderness, and romance were not part of the conversation. It was sex, intercourse, and orgasm. Period. As an adult, it’s been the only way he’s known to express intimate love and the only way he has been allowed to fulfill his need to touch and be touched. It’s the closest thing to intimacy that he’s been able to experience. But at this stage he knows something is missing. It’s not fulfilling his needs any longer. And he doesn’t have a clue as to why.

He’s been taught to accomplish goals. To see a job through. To get from point A to point B in the shortest amount of time, and the most efficient method possible. To complete what he’s started. For him, sex means climax. He has never seen the point of being physical with a woman without a climax. He really doesn’t see the point of “making love” without at least one of them climaxing. But the feelings of deep dissatisfaction are there, he just doesn’t recognize them.

Not realizing that what he wants is more emotional closeness, he assumes that the reason sex doesn’t satisfy him any longer is because he isn’t attracted to you. He thinks he’s not satisfied with you any longer when what’s really going on is he isn’t satisfied with sex any longer. But what man can admit that? That would be going way too far. So he starts to look around at other women. Maybe that will do the trick. But even if he does
have an affair, or two, those are even less fulfilling. At least with you he has a bond of history, and knowing each other inside and out. So no matter what he does, more sex is not what he needs. He’s at a stage in his life that he wants more emotional closeness, more emotional connection, but doesn’t have a clue how to get it or even that that is what’s missing.

Set the goal...achieve it. Set the goal...achieve it. It’s always worked, or at least he felt like it was working. And in his work, it has carried him through. He thought it was doing the same in his personal life and never understood what you meant when you said you wanted more intimacy, more touching, more time together, more talking and sharing.

But you know that isn’t how it works with human interaction. You know how good it feels to share. You know that the deeper you share with someone, the more connected you feel. And you know the importance of touching.

To him, physical intimacy of any kind is only step one of the completion of the project: climax. You’ve always known that cuddling, stroking, and holding each other are pleasurable behaviors in their own right, and that they certainly don’t have to lead to sex and ultimately, climax. You’ve always known that the two of you could be closer, but over the years, when you’ve asked for more intimacy, he thought you meant more sex.

Sex is his way to express love and create intimacy. He doesn’t have an inkling that sex doesn’t equal love and a climax won’t create intimacy. Think about how little boys, high school boys, college boys, and even young men are taught to think about sex. With all that attitude of joking, scoring,
don’t talk about the details, don’t get too mushy, you haven’t really had a chance to get more than he’s been able to give.

If he feels too deeply, he’s uncomfortable. It makes him feel vulnerable and, ironically, allowing himself to become comfortable with feeling vulnerable is exactly what he needs. But, like all other strong emotions, even love, all he knows is to repress them and deny them as best as he can.

Most of his life, his wife or girlfriends have been begging for more intimacy. He’s been confused because he’s always thought that’s what he’s been doing. To him, more intimacy just means more climaxes. This method has never worked very well for you and at mid-life, it’s not working for him any longer either.

But he doesn’t know what to do because he doesn’t understand that his feelings of dissatisfaction aren’t about you, they’re about his inability to feel. So, too often, he assumes that he doesn’t love his wife any longer and starts to pursue his need for love elsewhere. But more partners, more sex, and more climaxes will not give him what he seeks.
Chapter Six
Why can’t he ignore his emotions any longer?

He has had feelings and emotions all along but he’s always successfully represses them. Why isn’t that method of dealing with feelings working any longer? What’s different about this is the added layer of doubt that has been creeping in. As he gets closer to mid-life, his level of accomplishment, his successes and failures are clearer, more obvious. He can’t help but notice. And when he notices he takes that life-altering pause to look back on his life. Usually, because there has been no real intimacy with the people he cares about, everything he’s done falls short in his estimation of how well he’s done.

He doesn’t realize that what is really meaningful is not the achievements, the goals, or the failures, but the closeness with the people he cares about. In particular, true intimacy with you. He wants to blame it on his lack of accomplishments, which, for him, have a direct correlation to his stature as a man. But even if he had achieved every goal, he would still be experiencing the same emptiness. That is why that moment when he pauses, and dares to look at his life, is such a pivotal point for him.

He has two directions he can go, either consider himself a failure or understand that he’s entering a new phase of his life. But, unfortunately for most men and their wives, because change is uncomfortable, he chooses what is familiar. He judges his life in a linear fashion, A connects to B, which connects to C. That’s how he’s always done it and it has worked. But the crisis that he’s in says it hasn’t worked, at least not with what really matters. Dealing with people and feelings and emotions isn’t a matter of checking off the steps to a goal.
When he was building his life toward the accomplishment of goals, it worked fairly well. But now that he has seen where he stands, he begins to feel the emptiness. For him, emptiness is just something to be filled up. Another goal. Harder work, a new car, a motorcycle, women, drugs or alcohol. Anything to fill the hole. But that kind of emptiness, emptiness that comes from not feeling and the distance that he has always kept from the people he cares about, is caused from isolation.
Chapter Seven
Why has he isolated himself?

He doesn’t know he was isolating himself. All he knew was that he was doing what he was supposed to do: Work and take care of his responsibilities. He was never taught that intimacy and love were equally important to a full and rich life. Because he’s never acknowledged or allowed himself to feel the full depth of his ability to love, he has kept himself in that tight fitting box. And because it’s such a tight fit, there has been no room for anyone else and certainly not for all those emotions. So he sits in his box looking out at you, and you can’t get near.

Mid-life crisis is traumatic because the only way he is going to get through it is to actually step out of that box. When he does that, he will be able to reconnect the parts and pieces he discarded when he began to force himself to fit into the mold that society demanded of him.

To become a whole person who feels and expresses feelings and emotions, he must know what parts to reconnect. But he has been isolated from his feelings for so long that he can’t identify them. So he grasps at whatever he can and usually it is something outside of himself. In his effort to fill the emptiness with cars, women, drugs, working harder, he moves further from the people he cares about. Unknowingly, he is also moving further from the real problem that he must resolve if he is to come out the other end a happy man.
Chapter Eight
Does he have to change?

To move into this next phase of his life he must become a different person than he has been. What’s worked in the past—denying his feelings and emotions—is exactly what is causing him such turmoil. To become fully human, so he can fill the emptiness and rid himself of the isolation, he must actually climb out of the box he’s been living in. That’s scary because that means he must go to a place that is not only unfamiliar, he’s actually been warned not to go there. He is frightened to go into this abyss of human feelings because he truly thinks he might fall in and never return.

In a way, if he does it well, he actually won’t return. At least not as the person he has come to know, the person who is familiar to him. But that person is the one who is in trouble. If he will trust enough to feel the full range of his emotions he will be able to finally feel whole, real and authentic. The emptiness will be filled when he can express his emotions—to himself as well as to you and the people he cares about.
Chapter Nine
Who’s in control?

One of the many levels of his crisis is that he doesn’t want to lose control. That’s why he has suppressed his feelings. It’s also why he is fighting so hard not to feel the emotions that are trying so desperately to come out. The irony is that he’s going through this crisis because he hasn’t ever been in control. Society, family, church, teachers, coaches, and peers, have been in control. They have caused him to keep his true range of feelings intact. If he can allow himself to feel all the things that are rising to the surface, he will finally be the one in control.

As he has held back his feelings from himself and the important people in his life, he has held back the possibility of living a fuller, happier, richer life. He has never learned to just let things happen, to accept, to loosen up.

He needs to let go of old beliefs, behaviors, and all the unwritten rules that society has laid on him. That puts him in a terribly uncomfortable position because he’s comfortable with the control. He thinks he’s in charge and he’s unwilling to let go. But if he doesn’t step out of that box, he will never be in control and he will never be able to connect to his real self or the people he wants to love.
Chapter 10
How serious it is?

We make fun of the male mid-life crisis because the things men do to resolve it are perceived as silly, stupid, hurtful, and even dangerous. With greater levels of isolation, divorce, and sometimes a life in shambles, suicide is the only way some men can deal with what is happening to them. The mental and emotional pain is so great for these men that the only way they can see a way out is to kill themselves.

Women attempt suicide more often than men, but they don’t always want to kill themselves. They are often reaching out to the people around them. They drop hints, leave messages, and emote outwardly. They use pills, poison, or slit their wrists which are reversible.

When a man is in such severe emotional crisis that suicide become a viable option, it is often too late to help him. And his method will be something very permanent. Guns, hanging, crashing their car, jumping off of tall buildings. These are not reversible.

It is telling that as men age the rate of suicide rises. Men have no outlets for expressing what they are feeling so everything that has led him to the brink of suicide is exacerbated. When a man has no outlet for the expression of his pain, suicide comes as a welcome relief.
Chapter Eleven
Do all men go through it?

Because men are enculturated to believe they must fit into the box, and because this enculturation begins the day he is born, all men must go through this crisis. But the man who has never learned to look inward, or to understand himself somewhat, or to express what he is feeling, will usually suffer the greater level of crisis.

He’s always been isolated but because his focus was on the achievements still in front of him, he never noticed. When a man’s full energy is spent on the achievement of goals, of succeeding, he is too busy, too preoccupied with the future. As he gets to that time in his life that he can’t help but look at what he has accomplished, he begins to feel the angst of the big question that lurks at the forefront of the male mid-life crisis: Is this all there is?

Every man must come to terms with this question. Some do it better than others. Better in that they cause themselves less harm and better because they actually learn to become fuller human beings who have put the missing parts back in place. Once they learn how to feel and express what they’re feeling, they enjoy a richer more fulfilling life.
Chapter Twelve
Why are men so unprepared?

Men do not discuss what’s going on inside of them, especially not with other men, so they assume they are the only ones going through it. The isolation is self-induced. It would be good if men would talk about it with each other but because they aren’t in touch with what’s going on until they’ve gone through it—if even then—they won’t admit to themselves or anyone else what they are feeling.

Another problem that is actually part of the problem is that they won’t admit to being weak, unsure, or vulnerable. It’s part of the unwritten pact between men. At a certain level, they never let go of that little boy in the playground who would be devastated to be called a sissy. The adage, “Never show your cards,” is part of the, “never do anything that could cause you to be called sissy...ever.”
Chapter 13
Is anyone to blame?

You are the source of his intimacy, you are the source of love, you are the one he looks to create the warmth and safety within the relationship. But you are not to blame for what he is going through. Yes, he blames you because you are the one he expects to give him what his soul is seeking. But you can’t give it to him because you don’t have it. Society took it away from him and he is so unfamiliar with it that he doesn’t know what he needs from you.

Ironically, it is what you’ve wanted all along. When he was first in love with you, his feelings were so strong that he couldn’t help but express some of what he was feeling. That same man is the one you’ve hoped would rejoin you in your relationship. The good news is that if he makes it through without causing too much damage, you’ll have that man you fell in love with so long ago.

Even though he is the one who through his feeling self out of the box, he can’t even blame himself. Society and especially his peers, were just too strong a force. He didn’t know he was dissecting himself, and if he had, he wouldn’t have known where to store those feelings for a future day.

It’s no one’s fault but he is the one who must go on the inner quest in search of his true self. He’s been living as only a portion of who he can be, he is the one who feels lost, he is the one who has isolated himself. He is the one who has to put the pieces back together.
Some Native Americans have a ritual where the boy goes out into the wild to find his manhood. It is the primal right of passage. He must go through fear, hunger, anxiety, and deep soul-searching in order to return to the tribe as one of the hunters, as a man, no longer the boy.

In a sense, the modern man is going on a similar quest. But this is the reverse of what that Native American boy was doing. He must go and find the feeling boy who he lost touch with so long ago. He must go through fear, hunger, anxiety and the same deep-soul searching to connect to all his parts and pieces. If he has done his job well, he will return from the wilderness a new man.

If he is blaming you, it is only because he is afraid to go out into the wilderness alone. He wants you to make it all better, like you always have. You have been his safe haven. His only real source of love. You have been his guide in the relationship, the one who has used your compassion, your softness, your tenderness to resolve any problems you have had together. But this is beyond you. This is a job for him alone. No one can look inside for him, he must do that himself.

It is important that you not blame yourself. It has nothing to do with you. You have not failed him. If anything, you have seen that there was more to him and tried your best to assist him in allowing it to show itself. But he was too afraid to be that vulnerable. Being alone was easier, safer, and more familiar. Now that he has no choice but to feel what is bubbling to the surface, he strikes out at whomever is closest, and that happens to be you. At this time it is best that you leave him alone, don’t try to explain to him what is happening, and don’t try to get him to explain it to you. He can’t
and he resents being put in a position of weakness.

Women are quick to feel guilty for everything that isn’t going right, even when they had nothing to do with it. You have been trained to take care of others, to anticipate their needs, to keep them emotionally safe. Because you have been responsible for making the relationship run smoothly, you blame yourself when it doesn’t work as it should.

In the past, you might have made changes within yourself and in your behavior so your relationship worked. And it did, to a point. You kept the peace. But now, because he is in such an emotional upheaval, you can’t really do anything that will help him.
Chapter 14
Why can’t you help?

“We’ve got to toughen him up,” the father says to the mother. She wants to protect him from being hurt but if he runs to his mother his friends jeer, “What’s the matter? Mamma’s little boy?” There’s that time in every little boys life when he must leave his mother’s side and join the rough-and-tumble world of males. You try to gather him up into your arms and he says, “M-o-o-o-m!” and looks around to be sure no one saw.

So he can’t cry, he can’t ask for help, he can’t touch, he can’t express fear, sadness, or pain. But what about the “good” feelings? That’s not allowed either. If he’s joyous, or blatantly in love, or feeling silly, even that gets teased out of him. And there’s no way he’s going to show tenderness.

Now is the time that you could really help him, but he’s too conditioned not to ask for help. We all joke about a man’s inability to ask for directions. That he would rather drive around lost (not admitting it, of course) than stop and ask someone where he is. This is the same kind of thing. He can’t ask for help, that would admit he is not capable of “handling the situation.” He can’t go to you because you, of all people, are the one he feels most obligated to show his strength. Remember? He’s your rock. And he does not want to disappoint you. Something he has never told you is how important it is for you to respect him. Everything he is feeling right now makes him need to hide it even more.

If he’s like most men, he won’t go to the doctor until he’s half dead. And you know how he will respond if you say anything about following the
doctor’s orders. Then there’s the whole therapist thing. More than any time in his life, he could really use a good therapist but it’s beyond fathoming. No way will he allow himself to be that vulnerable.

Any comments or advice you offer only cause strife. “What’s going on with you? You just aren’t here. You’re somewhere else,” you lament. And his usual response is, “Get off my back. I’m just preoccupied with a lot of things on my mind.” “But there’s obviously something wrong. You’re distant, grumpy, and you’ve been ignoring us. Can’t you tell me what’s wrong?” But he doesn’t want to deal with you so he snarls, “Just leave me alone,” and walks out. You’re hands are tied and you feel helpless and blame yourself because you feel like there’s something you should or should not be doing.
Chapter Fifteen
What Can You Do?

To be written

Chapter Sixteen
Where Will It End Up?

To be written
Notes

Males

1. Suicide is the eighth leading cause of death for all U.S. men (Anderson and Smith 2003).
2. Males are four times more likely to die from suicide than females (CDC 2004).
3. Suicide rates are highest among Whites and second highest among American Indian and Native Alaskan men (CDC 2004).
4. Of the 24,672 suicide deaths reported among men in 2001, 60% involved the use of a firearm (Anderson and Smith 2003).

Females

Women report attempting suicide during their lifetime about three times as often as men (Krug et al. 2002).