



JOHN GRAY:



The Blame Box

My wife and I were on our honeymoon in Canada when I got a call telling us that my father had died. We had just seen him a few weeks before and he was in really good health. He and I had a wonderful relationship. He had just been found dead in the trunk of his car.

My father was a retired Texas oilman. He was a very generous person, always helping the poor. When we last saw him, he was really proud to share what he was doing with his life. He took us on a drive over to the poor side of town and showed us all the places where he had coached young kids and started basketball and football teams. He was proud of making those things happen.

I had said to him, "Well, Dad, now I'm grown up and I need to give you some advice. We hear the stories of all the people you help, particularly the hitchhikers you're always picking up. But it's not safe these days to pick up hitchhikers."

He said to me, "John, some men, when they retire, go on safari. Me, I pick up hitchhikers." That was his adventure; that was his joy. And that was how he died.

My mother had a premonition the night before he left on his last journey, and asked him not to go. But he reassured her and went anyway. When he didn't arrive at his destination, she called the police.

John Gray, Ph.D., is the author of fifteen best selling books, including *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus* (HarperCollins, 1992), the number one best selling book of the last decade. In the past ten years, over thirty million Mars and Venus books have been sold in over forty languages throughout the world. He has appeared on *Oprah, The Today Show, CBS Morning Show, Good Morning America, Larry King*, and many other shows. He has been profiled in *Newsweek, Time, Forbes, USA Today, TV Guide*, and *People*. John Gray is a certified family therapist, and is the premier Better Life relationship coach on AOL. More at www.MarsVenus.com.



His death was a tragedy for many reasons. The hitchhiker had robbed him and forced him to climb into the trunk of his car. Then the hitchhiker called the police and said, "There's an abandoned car here, check it out."

But the police didn't respond. Somebody else called to report an abandoned grey Mercedes, and another person again later. Three times the police got calls reporting an abandoned car. When my mother called, the police finally sent a patrol car to investigate. They found the car—with my father dead in the trunk. He wasn't beaten up, or hurt in any way. He had died from the heat of the Texas sun.

I was deeply shocked and upset at my father's death. How could one person do that to another? My soul was crying out for information, so that I could ultimately let go and forgive. It wasn't just an emotional process, although that's a big part of it. It was not just my

-§-
Men and women live
in different boxes.
We're always trying
to change and fix
each other.

intention to be a good and loving person. It was not just the knowledge that lack of forgiveness is killing us. I had to understand how somebody could do what had been done to my father in order to let go.

-§-
My family and I visited the car. It was still parked where my father had died. We stood outside the car. Suddenly, I felt as though I simply had to get into the trunk, to experience what my father had experienced. I had to descend into the coffin and feel its reality.

I climbed into the trunk, squeezed my body in, and the others closed the lid. Inside, I saw a screwdriver. My father had found it, and used it to hit the roof, while calling for help. I noticed that he had bent the lock, trying to open it, but he couldn't make that lock open. I noticed a place where he had broken the back of the taillight in the trunk.

I pulled the shattered lens a little bit further back toward me. I put my hand out through the opening. As I was pulling my arm back, my brother—on the outside, said, "John, see if you can reach around and push the trunk release button." So I reached around and pushed the button. The lid opened.

If only my father had thought of getting in when he was trying to get out.

I wanted something significant and meaningful to come out of my experience. As I healed emotionally, I kept thinking about the metaphor of trying to get out, when really the answer is very simple: try to get in.

We all live in boxes. People are in their own boxes. They're outside of somebody else's box. I have made it my goal to stand outside of people's boxes and help them find the buttons, and let themselves out. Men and women live in different boxes. We're always trying to change and fix each other, yet that tangle doesn't have to persist. We can strive to simply understand what it's like in the other box. So I started revising my approach to relationships. When a woman would come in for counseling, I'd allow that maybe my ideas about possible solutions might not necessarily be good for her. Maybe I needed to just listen to her, to understand her, and to help her reach her own solution. That was often a solution opposite to the one that would have worked for a man. I began seeing things from another point of view.

-§-
Love is the ointment
of inner healing.
-§-

Many of us are boxed in by our feelings of powerlessness to affect the world around us. When we feel powerless, we feel afraid and anticipate loss. Some people will just fall into despair; others buy into fear. Fear frees us from feeling powerless. Some people get caught in grief, a feeling that something has been taken away. People who dwell in their sense of loss, their personal inadequacy, or their insufficiency in life, suffer depression. But once we consciously feel our pain and identify the thoughts that are linked to it, a self-correction mechanism that is an automatic part of the mind-body-heart connection comes into play. It can often be activated in the presence of a therapist or someone who loves us, because love is the ointment of inner healing.

In this process, forgiveness is vital. People mistakenly think that to forgive is to release someone else from blame, and that means that the only blame remaining lies with the forgiver. We can't bear that, so we stay in the blaming box. Yet true forgiveness occurs when there is a justification of blame: somebody did something to me, and I need to forgive him or her. This is the recognition that there is real pain, there is real abuse, there is real injustice, there is a real problem—and letting go of making the other person responsible for how we feel. To get out of the blame box and emerge into forgiveness, we need the confidence that we have the power to create everything we need in our lives. Then we are able to let others off the hook, to forgive the debt. At that point we can go back and try to improve the situation.

So the way out of the box is the way in. Instead of struggling against the walls, reach out your hand, feel how you got in, then invite love to open your box and free you. All you have to lose is the limits that constrict you life. All you have to gain is everything outside your box.