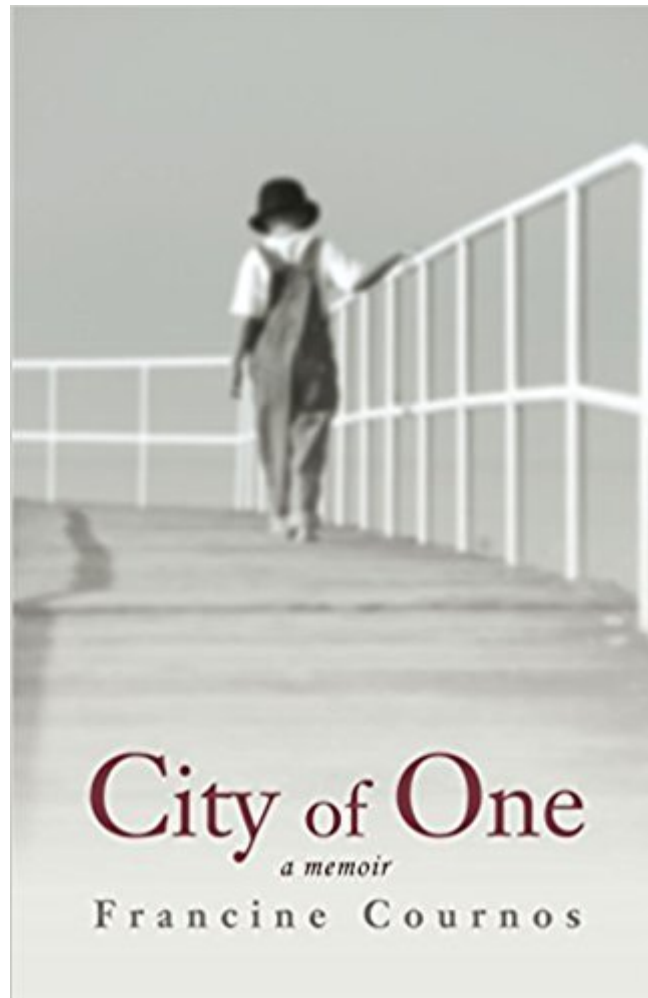




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# City Of One: A Memoir



## Synopsis

City of One is a poignant and beautifully written memoir of childhood loss and its enduring meaning. Francine Cournos was three years old when her father died, and by the time she was eleven, her mother was dead of breast cancer. "I had been hurled over a cliff," she writes. "The irreversibility of what had happened crashed down on me; a nauseating wave of fear and a flood of tears followed. I didn't know who I was without my mother. What would fill the vast space left by the disappearance of this all-consuming relationship? How would I spend my time? What would I become?" In answering these questions, Dr. Cournos offers a sharply perceptive portrait of an injured child's inner life, and the moving-even exhilarating-story of the ways in which, after much struggle and with considerable help from others, that injured child living in a foster home grew to become a happy and successful adult. At once illuminating and heart stopping, City of One is an inspiring account of triumph over childhood adversity."Eloquent and moving." -New York Times Book Review "Inspiring, insightful, and thoroughly engaging, offering hope and awareness to all who have experienced pivotal losses." -Kirkus Reviews "City of One is extraordinarily moving. It is handled with a remarkable honesty and sensitivity. This is redemptive work because it leaves us with a sense of admiration for the courage of the human spirit." -Jonathan Kozol, Author of Amazing Grace "From tragic to inspirational, City of One is an impressive lesson in one woman's ability to endure."

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

When Cournos was three, her father died suddenly, leaving her pregnant mother with three children

to support. In this riveting, sharply etched study of a child in distress, the author, who is now in her late forties and a professor of clinical psychiatry, recalls how a childhood marked by family tragedy led to years of depression and the feeling that adults could not be trusted. After her mother was diagnosed with breast cancer, Cournos struggled to make herself into an adult by taking care of her younger sister and doing the housework, in hope that being good would save her mother's life. Upon her mother's death when Cournos was 11, the author and her sister went into foster care because her uncles and aunts refused to take them in. Cournos's prose captures her sense of abandonment and her ensuing emotional withdrawal. Despite many failed relationships with men, sexual passion allowed her to begin to feel again. A desire to understand her mother's death led Cournos to study medicine, during which time she began psychoanalysis, which provided her with the self-awareness she needed. Having overcome several setbacks, including a major depression, before becoming a happily married mother, Cournos is perceptive and convincing about the mark these experiences left on her. Agent, Richard Balkin. Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Francine's early childhood was full of fun adventures and happy memories. For even though Francine's father had passed away when Francine was three, her mother made sure her children knew joy. And then, tragically, Francine's mother lost her fight with cancer. Francine and her younger sister lived a short time with their grandmother until she became too feeble to care for them. It was then that, despite numerous aunts and uncles, the children were declared orphans and placed in foster homes. By burying the raw emotions deep within her, Francine stubbornly survived and even excelled, eventually becoming a doctor of psychiatry. The emotions she had buried surfaced later--*City of One* is the chronicle of her journey of healing. Although Cournos could publicly have ostracized the extended family that rejected her, the tone is that of acceptance and rejoicing in the knowledge that her daughter will never know that treacherous pain of rejection. From tragic to inspirational, *City of One* is an impressive lesson in one woman's ability to endure. Toni Hyde --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

The fact that I know Fran Cornos colored my reading of this memoir. My first thought as I started was, "She certainly does write well" - which meant a lot because I usually don't like non-fiction. From that auspicious start, I was quickly engrossed in the story of a young girl whose parents died within a few years of each other, leaving her, her sister, and her brother orphaned. The book explores the damage she suffered first as "the one" her mother depended on (the substitute mom

for her younger sister) and then as the abandoned child who felt both powerless (further abandoned by her mother's family and sent to a foster home) and powerful (blaming herself for the death of her mother). Fran's journey from orphan to respected psychiatrist and part of her own secure family was neither easy nor quick. This is not a tale of a grand reconciliation or of a sudden realization of the key to saving herself. It is not a how-to overcome story. It is, instead, the recounting of long years of exploration and difficult work to reconcile her past with her present and with her hope for the future. It is a story of strength and struggle. It is also a story of maintaining normalcy while fighting severe depression. And it is, finally, the story of success and survival. The book is a must-read for people interested in the human spirit and in the way children cope in extreme and difficult circumstances.

This is an unusual memoir because Dr. Cournos, a psychiatrist practicing in New York City, wrote about her vulnerable feelings and depression as a result of being born to a family that did not provide her with the tools she needed to grow up successfully. Both parents died when she was young and she had to grow up too fast and without the role models she needed. She was in the New York City foster care system. We don't expect this story from a successful woman. I am in debt to Dr. Cournos. Her story exceptionally well written and honest, reveals the complex emotional life, including the fears one has when we are not properly supported in our childhood.

very interesting

I am using this book in a social work class that I teach at Michigan State University. City of One is beautifully written, with well-chosen words demonstrating a thoughtful approach to sharing her story and insights. Dr. Cournos' personal reflections are both thought-provoking and somewhat jarring. As a foster care survivor myself, I am taken back to my own journey of pain, loss and triumph. The careful reader will find the book both dramatic and riveting as well as filled with life-lessons for personal use or for foster care reform. There are more than a few foster care memoirs on the market that are worth reading, but I recommend City of One if you chose only to read one book in this genre. Dr. John Seita

This was difficult to read in that I felt so concerned for the "heroine". In truth there was no hero or heroine, just a conglomerate of characters in pain. It was truthful and sad.

It didn't occur to me that I would be so touched by Francine Cournos's book. I have an interest in

child welfare issues, which is why I read it. She deals with a much bigger issue than foster care -- she writes about the voluminous effect that the loss of parents can have on a child throughout his or her life. Brava, Dr. Cournos. Thank you for sharing your life with us. This is a must-read for anyone who works with children in any arena.

From Ned's wife. A moving account of early loss and childhood resilience.

I loved the read but the electronic version had a great deal of typos which was distracting to me when I read. Other than that it was a wonderful insightful book!

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