



*A Long Walk  
with Sally*

DAVID CLARK, JR

Excerpt

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*Red Sunset Publishing*

**A Long Walk With Sally:  
A Grieving Father's Golf Journey Back to Life**

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**Heaven Was Needing A Hero**

Words and Music by Jo Dee Messina

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Sally and Grace – A Friendship of a Lifetime

## Dedication



This book is dedicated to the beautiful memory of my sweet daughter, Sally McKenzie Clark; my beloved niece, Anna Grace Jordan; and to my friend, Randy Dorton, a friend's friend. They were taken from us too soon, but in the time they were here they made a positive difference in this world. Their tremendous legacies of putting others above themselves continue to live on.

While you are now in the loving hands of our Creator and his Son, Jesus Christ, we miss and love you and look forward to the day we see you again.

Above all, this book is for Jo, Reynolds, Graham, Jennifer, and my sunshine, McKenzie. Without you, my life would be meaningless. I love you.

# Foreword



Ron Green, Jr.  
Senior Writer, *Global Golf Post*

When I met David Clark for the first time, he was sitting on the veranda at Quail Hollow Club where he'd sat so many days after his daughter, Sally, and her cousin, Grace Jordan, had been killed in an auto accident. It had been several years since the accident but his pain was still fresh and painted on his face.

David thought he might have a story to tell but he wasn't sure. If he was to ever find a sense of peace and salvation in the aftermath of the accident, he believed he'd find it on the golf courses in the British Isles. As he explained the journey he'd begun, hoping to play nearly 300 courses across five countries, David understood his unique approach to dealing with his grief.

Walking golf courses an ocean away wouldn't make sense to many people, but if you've been touched by the game the way some of us have, it can have a profoundly therapeutic quality. That's what David was seeking and, in a large measure, that's what he found over the course of playing 290 courses scattered across England, Scotland, Ireland, Northern Ireland, and Wales.

His story is actually two stories. It's about a broken man trying to come to terms with losing his 19-year-old daughter. It's also about a man in love with the windswept charm of links golf, where the sea, the sand, and the sky frame courses that seemed laid there when the world was born, waiting only to be discovered.

David Clark's golf journey is remarkable. His personal journey is more remarkable. He has gone to the darkest place a parent can go and he's walked some of the most beautiful places in the world. He's come out on the other side with the sense of peace he sought and a story that's both heartbreaking and inspiring.

With his wife, Jo, and others, David created Sally's Y to honor the legacy of his daughter, building a place where others can shine.

Sally would be touched by what her father has done.



Machpelah



## A Special Note Regarding Golf Course Classification and the Courses I Chose to Play



In the back of this book, you will find a list of the courses I have played in the British Isles, along with my classification for each course. I also reference these courses within my narrative. I think it is important to establish that I do not in any way consider myself an authoritative source on classifying golf courses across the British Isles. While traveling there for 30 years now, I do have an enlightened understanding of the differences, but my knowledge has been gained by what others with far more expertise shared in books, especially books by authors Donald Steel, George Peper and Malcolm Campbell, and Tom Doak. I took all of this information and attempted to categorize the different courses in the British Isles by what I found when I played them. These are not meant to be literal standards for broad application. They are only my version, and I acknowledge some fluidity in my classifications.

Courses there are typically classified by the type of vegetation, turf, and soil, and location of the course. Most courses fall under the categories of parkland, heathland, moorland, meadowland, clifftop, seaside, and links. U.S. courses typically equate to

parkland-type courses. They are for the most part well-conditioned courses located among trees with fine turf and most often found away from the coast.

Heathland courses are typically inland as well. They are characterized by open, low-growing vegetation, such as heather and gorse, with well-draining, infertile, acidic soil. The region where Gleneagles is situated, near the middle of Scotland, is a great example.

Moorland is the higher elevation of heathland. Courses built over this type of land play similar to links courses. However, I think the current condition of the courses at Gleneagles has trended more toward parkland style golf than what I first played in 1986. This is not a criticism but an observation. Meadowland is open land most often void of trees, with rich, fertile soil typical of farmland.

With respect to the final three categories, defining these gets tricky and requires a dose of subjectivity. Beauty is in the eyes of the beholder, so to speak. I must again emphasize that I do not consider myself an expert on these descriptions. It is simply what I have come to believe over many years of traveling there. In my opinion there are clear, indisputable examples of each, but some fall into a gray area of a combination of elements of each category.

They are all immediately by one of the many bodies of salt-water surrounding the British Isles, and this is a crucial feature to the golf you play over them. For the most part, clifftop courses are situated along the cliffs around the British Isles. There is significant elevation change from the coast to where the course is routed. They rarely have the same soil you find at sea level. However, given their exposure to the sea and the weather you find there, they play in many ways similar to a links course. Seaside courses are courses also located along the coast but lack some clear feature typical of a clifftop or links courses. I know some will take exception to this,

and I don't mean this as a criticism, but I feel courses recently built, such as Kingsbarn and Castle Stuart—which are two of my favorites—are seaside courses. Neither is a true links or clifftop course. While the land they were built over was located by the North Sea and the Moray Firth, respectively, it was farmland that was mass graded with a significant amount of non-native soil brought in to create a links-type course. However, they play exactly like a links course and deserve all the accolades they've received.

With respect to a true links, let me explain what I believe is the origin of the word “links” and how it came to be associated with golf. Whether my version is right or wrong, there is no doubt the word is chronically misused.

The word “links,” prior to golf's origin, was used primarily to describe the area of land near sea level situated between the shoreline and the beginning of rich farmland. The land was considered unsuitable for farming due to its sandy soil, typically populated with massive dunes, harsh seaside weather, and frequent flooding from coastal storms. It thus served to *link* the coast to the farmland, earning the description of links land.

I know there is still debate about the absolute origin of golf; few though will argue that the game we know today had its beginnings in St. Andrews, Scotland, during the 15th century. The land where what we consider “golf” began fits the description of links land perfectly. I believe that as the game took hold, the early golfers came to associate the game with the land on which they were playing. It's easy to imagine a Scot centuries ago saying, “So and so is out playing some frivolous game on the links land.” That's how the term “links” came to be associated with golf, or at least that's my personal understanding and long-held belief.

While there are courses that are indeed links around the British Isles and a few other areas of the world, I believe there is even

a higher classification of true links. These, in my opinion, were laid out by God, and it has been our job to discover them. There is little about them that was manufactured. Our charge was to find His routing, create a teeing area to start a hole, and then a place to situate a green to finish the hole—without disturbing much of His work. I will do my best to note the ones I believe best fit the true links description. Again, this is just my view based on what I have learned from others and the 30 years of traveling there. I love the game of golf as it is played in the British Isles, over a special area of God's Creation.

# The British Isles



prologue

## Please God ...



I considered hitting an iron off the tee to assure I kept my ball in play, but my caddie handed me my driver before I had a chance to ask for it. *Please God*, I asked silently, *don't let me lose this ball now*. I was in a fragile emotional place, and losing the ball, which symbolized so much now after being with me consistently through multiple courses, would be devastating. There was little doubt that Sally was here, and losing this ball on the last hole would crush me. It would be like losing her a second time.

Just as I feared, I pulled my tee shot. I watched in horror as my ball headed directly toward some of the deepest, thickest rough on the hole, or even worse, across the road to the left of the fairway. Everything I was beginning to understand about this trip and *Sally's ball* might all be going away right here with this one fateful swing. As I watched, it fell just short of the road and dove into the thick rough. I wanted to run immediately after it as my eyes locked on where I thought it had landed, but Jo, Jennifer, and Greg hadn't hit their tee shots yet. As had happened many times previously during this trip, when I became aware of the significance this ball had to me, I went into a total panic.

Once everyone had hit, I almost sprinted toward where I thought I would find it. I felt frantic. The ball wasn't where I expected it might be, and a sense of despair began to hit me like a wave blindsiding me. *What if I've lost Sally's ball on my last hole?*

Then I saw a ball barely visible in the tangle of grass. It was mine. I'd be able to recognize that ball no matter where it landed! Yes, it was mine—no longer with the markings I'd originally written on it when we first set out, but still completely recognizable to me. I'll never forget the range of emotions that rushed through me. It didn't matter that it was unplayable. I had found it. That's all I cared about.

I picked it up and clutched it in my hand as I processed what it meant to me. Again, as on the tee for the first time since the accident, as I held and looked at that ball, I could sense tears welling up in my eyes. I knew I couldn't allow myself to cry at that moment and I willed myself to calm down before dropping it where I could hit a short iron into the fairway. From there I hit a series of short shots to make sure I kept the ball where I could see it. On the green, I casually putted out, but again, barely winning a wrestling match with my emotions. I pulled the ball out of the hole for the final time and tucked it into my pocket. I knew I would never play another hole with it.

We put our clubs in the car and headed to the club's bar for a celebratory pint before driving back to Dromoland Castle where we were staying. Jo hardly looked at me. She spoke to me only if she had to. I hadn't told her the whole story about the ball I'd been playing, and the tension between us was impossible for Jennifer and Greg to ignore.

Back at Dromoland Castle, Jo said she was tired and would not be down for dinner. In the room, I told her I needed to explain what had happened. She said she was going to bed but was willing

to listen. I described how my ball had become Sally's ball and how I'd been given the gift to play that one ball on every course during our trip. Although it seemed as if I was being inconsiderate of her and our friends, I had been determined not to lose Sally's ball at our final course on this trip. "You might not understand," I added, "but I felt Sally was there."

I reminded Jo of how Palmer Trice had explained that we would grieve together and we would grieve apart. Marking the ball the way I had allowed me to feel a connection to Sally and was one way I could deal with my grief. I expressed to Jo how much I loved her and how sorry I was for leaving her on her own at Lahinch, but I hoped she could forgive me and understand what I was telling her. She said it helped to hear my explanation and she asked me to leave her alone so she could process what I'd revealed. When I returned to our room awhile later, I found Jo asleep. I didn't know when or how I'd tell her, but I was certain that this part of the world was where I'd have to come to find whatever peace I could after losing our sweet Sally.

# Introduction



In today's world, parents don't expect to lose a child during their lifetime. With the exception of a tragedy or through the ultimate sacrifice to defend our freedom, we have fortunately been insulated from what was a common heartbreak just a few generations ago. When it does happen today, however, no matter the reason, a parent's heartbreak is the worst imaginable. The only thing worse than losing a child is losing more than one.

As any parent who has lost a child would agree, I would have willingly given my own life for Sally's rather than live with the heartbreak I have felt since that fateful night in April 2004. But God didn't want me yet. He needed Sally and Grace, and later, Randy. They had each made a tremendous difference in His Creation and earned their reward to live in eternity in His Home. He apparently still has things left for me to do here before I can hope to hear Him say, "A job well done, my child."

Prior to the accident, for 20 years I traveled to the British Isles to play golf and spend time there. On several occasions, I also took my entire family, including Sally, for a family vacation.

Beyond sightseeing, where we stayed had an abundance of lochs and streams in which the children could fish and play. We also attended Open Championships while there. It was a place I never tired of visiting. I always felt a peace there, and I dearly loved the links golf I played. Each time I returned to play golf, I tried to add at least one new course to my itinerary and used a book—*Classic Links of England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland*—I'd purchased in St. Andrews in 1995, written by well-known British golf course architect, Donald Steel, as a guide. Mr. Steel is also an accomplished golfer and he, like I, especially loved links golf.

As I struggled with losing Sally, I desperately looked for a place I could grieve on my own and be left to find whatever peace God would grant me. Based on certain events that occurred, God revealed to me that there was no better place than the British Isles to look for it. This was the basis of my decision to go there and play so many courses. It was never about doing something unique or checking off a list no one else had checked off. I did it for my own salvation. It became my sanctuary, my safe harbor, where I could grieve alone, an ocean away from the people who knew me. Golf in the British Isles was part of my therapy, and I needed a lot of it.

For reasons I was able to understand much later, I determined I would give myself 10 years to play as many courses as I could, or until I found the peace I hoped God would grant me. Whether that meant I played only a certain number or all of the ones I included on my lists, I didn't know. At the time, the 10-year period was just an arbitrary timeframe that indirectly connected to turning 60 a decade later.

Understanding what this represented to me personally, I planned to create an informal record or journal of my days there that would also include photographs I took. I hoped, like other golf books, including Mr. Steel's, that I loved, that this personal

journal would provide its own form of medicine when I wasn't there—when I struggled at home over the loss of Sally.

As friends and acquaintances heard what I was doing, they asked me to share my recollections and reflections with them about my golf and Sally. They encouraged me to write a book. It was a daunting notion, because I hadn't even been able to write a good term paper when I was in school.

Given this reality, I knew if I were to write a book, I would need help to put my story together to make it worthy of sharing with others. While playing a remote course in Ireland, God sent me a loud message about where to look for that help. I had a thought to contact Ron Green, Jr., a sportswriter with the *Charlotte Observer* specializing in golf.

After speaking with Ron and hearing his willingness to help, I began to contemplate what I would include in a book. As I traveled back and forth each year, many times more than once in the same year, I contemplated the book idea. If I did it, what would I say? How much would I share about Sally? In terms of my golf, I thought I could include a rating of the various courses I had played, a list of my favorites courses by country, as well as other lists, like my favorite places where I stayed or information about the golf course architects. I knew I could also throw in stories about events that occurred while there that were unique or worthy of sharing. But what else did I want to say? What else did I need to share?

Writing a book is a big commitment, and making the commitment to start didn't happen immediately. As each year passed and I played more courses, I kept pushing it further away. Still, I hoped that with Ron's help, I could eventually write something worthy of Sally's memory and of potential interest to those who asked me to do it. When anyone questioned me about my plans to start, I always said I needed to finish playing the courses I had on my list first.

On May 24, 2014, I played the last course on my list. Almost as soon as we walked off the green of that last hole, Jo told me it was time to start the book. I told her I wanted time to regroup at home and I would start in the fall, hoping that would satisfy her. The truth is that I remained intimidated by the prospect of writing it. I also worried that my story was not worthy of being told.

As 2014 wound down, the book idea was never far away, but I still hadn't done anything definitive about it. I hoped Jo was going to give me a pass. Wishful thinking. I should have known better after being with her for nearly 45 years.

Celebrating my 61st birthday on January 12, 2015, Jo gave me a big box with a ribbon on it. Inside were a card and a book. The book was titled, *How to Bring Your Book to Life This Year*, by Lisa Shultz and Andrea Costantine.

The card read, "No more excuses. I will get you a ghostwriter if Ron won't be able to help. Get to work!"

I looked up at her after reading the card and said, "Okay, no more excuses." I told Jo I'd contact Ron to see if he was still interested in helping and, if not, I would formulate Plan B. I knew Ron had left the *Charlotte Observer* to cover golf for *Global Golf Post*, a weekly digital magazine, and it required extensive travel. I anticipated we'd go with Plan B.

I emailed Ron. He replied, saying he'd be happy to do it, and we met for lunch to lay out a plan. We talked about several approaches and agreed it would be best for me to start writing and see where it led me.

Ron asked if I knew how I would get the book published and marketed. I didn't, but I had little doubt that everything would eventually be worked out. So much had happened in my life that I'd come to understand how things sometimes have a way of working themselves out.

On vacation in mid-February, I sat down at my computer in our room and wondered where to start. Without much thought, I knew exactly where to begin. My walk began as I sat on the curb at 4:30 a.m. on April 4, 2004, looking at the car Sally and Grace were riding in and realizing they were gone. I began writing and didn't stop until I finished on July 17, 2015, while The Open Championship was being played through the wind and rain at St. Andrews, the exact place where my love affair with links golf in the British Isles had begun in 1984.

This book is different than I ever imagined it would be. The lists that I thought this book would include never entered my mind as I wrote. They may be things to share later, but I knew this book had to be much more. It's more personal than I'd envisioned, but it had to be in order to fully share the walk I've been on. I've also come to understand that I could not have begun before I did, because I was not ready. As the thoughts and words began to flow, God revealed feelings, memories, and insights I had never seen or realized until those moments. Ultimately, I came to understand that I was not in control. He was, and had always been, the One in control.

My hope is that you find *A Long Walk with Sally* a worthy read, because I have shared far more than I ever expected. It has been a long walk indeed, but it took me until the very end to fully recognize the peace God intended for me in the aftermath of losing my sweet Sally.

TO HIM I GIVE THE GLORY!

# Staying Safe



As Sally often did, she came home from Peace College in Raleigh to spend the weekend at home. She arrived on Friday night, March 26, to have dinner with her mother and me and to spend time with friends from school and church. After their years at Charlotte Country Day School, they had all gone off to various colleges but, like Sally, many returned home on free weekends to maintain the friendships that stretched across years.

Sally loved being home, back in Iron Station, North Carolina, where she had grown up with Jo and me and her brothers, Graham and Reynolds, bringing her own sparkle to the world.

For Sally, life was a rainbow. She had a spirit that was contagious. She had a smile that made other people smile and a light that came from within. This is not *just* how I saw her. This is the way the world saw Sally. It was commonplace to have people who met or knew her tell us how much they loved being in her company. You could not be around her without feeling the warmth she radiated.

Sally's best friend from birth was her first cousin, Grace. They were the same age and had grown up together, practically sisters

whose lives were wrapped together like a hair braid. Grace was a student at North Carolina State and, like Sally, often came home on weekends to spend time with her family. Many times, they rode home together.

Often on Friday nights when she got home, Jo, Sally, and I headed out to dinner, where we could catch up on all that had happened with each of us before Sally headed out to be with her friends later that night. She would share how school was going and new friends she'd made that week, and we'd tell her about anything new that might have occurred in our lives. Sally had her own life, she'd been that way for years, but her family always remained at the center. On March 26, we wound up at Mickey and Mooch in Huntersville, where we had a wonderful evening. It was the kind of evening we loved to spend together.

On Saturday morning, the three of us, along with Graham, had breakfast together at Stacy's in Denver. Afterwards, I headed to Charlotte to play at Quail Hollow while Jo and Sally went shopping for clothes. That night Sally headed out to meet up with friends in Cornelius while Jo and I stayed home with Graham. She told us she would spend the night with one of her friends and would see us in the morning after church.

After spending time with her friends, she decided not to stay overnight and came home. She arrived back at our house at 3:00 a.m. on Sunday and woke us to tell us she had arrived—reassuring words to parents with children of any age. However, knowing she was out on the road by herself at that hour of the night concerned us.

The next day, before Sally headed back to Raleigh, I told her that, while we trusted her driving in the middle of the night, it was the other drivers that worried us. I told her what my mother had told me—nothing good happens after 11:00 p.m. I also called on

the late comedian Richard Pryor to help make my point. He had done a great monologue in the '70s about hanging around street corners with his friends late at night. When Pryor asked his friends what they were waiting for, one of them said, "11:30, because we're going to pitch a bitch at 11:30!" My point to Sally was that her mother and I would rather she not be driving late at night. As long as she felt safe where she was, we preferred she spend the night there.

One week later, our world was torn apart. My sweet Sally never made it home that April night.

I hope you enjoyed this excerpt of

*A Long Walk With Sally.*

Click here to buy the book on

[Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).

After you've read the book, would you kindly post a review on Amazon if you enjoyed it?

Thank you!

David Clark, Jr

