

# Glenn Martin

Writer and author

Human values, ethics and leadership



[www.glenmartin.com.au](http://www.glenmartin.com.au)

[www.ethicsandvalues.com.au](http://www.ethicsandvalues.com.au)

## Discovering creative non-fiction

For the last 15 years I have earned my living from writing – something that I had dreamed about since I was nine years old. When I left school at 17, I couldn't see a way to do this. Journalism was the accepted option, and I knew I didn't want to be a journalist. So I studied engineering (hated it), then became a teacher (not a career goal), and later a worker in the community sector (which satisfied some needs), then a manager...et cetera.

In my forties I went back to university and finally managed to complete a degree (an honours degree in business, along with a university medal, so it was creditable). I thought I was going to get a job in human resources (HR). But then a job appeared for a person to write about HR and I thought, isn't writing what I've always wanted to do for a living?

So I became a writer on HR (and employment law, training and management) for a publishing company. With a salary and some autonomy. It's been a good experience. I've learned writing as a craft.

But there was still the matter of voice. When you are writing on work topics for subscription products, you say what needs to be said. You are essentially the anonymous expert. Eventually the fact that there was no personal voice in this began to grate. And there were things I wanted to express – my perspectives on workplace ethics and human values, which I had been formulating in my head for over a decade.

So, over a period of 18 months, I wrote a book, *Human Values and Ethics in the Workplace*. I self-published it in 2007 (and launched it at the NSW Writers Centre November Festival). Now I wasn't just a writer, I was an author. I had written a solid piece (95,000 words) which expressed my ideas. For a while, this was satisfying, leaving aside the lack of commercial success. Although, for an academic book written by a non-academic, this was probably predictable. I had no captive audience.

What happened next? I was thinking, I need to write another book on ethics. Something that is more accessible, like an Edward de Bono book – just clear, raw, usable concepts, in less than 100 pages. Something that will attract a wider audience. I even started – I mapped out an outline and wrote three chapters. But it stalled for over six months.

Then I read about a NSW Writers Centre Master Class with Professor Robin Hemley (from University of Iowa). He was going to talk about "creative non-fiction". The publicity said this "has developed into an exciting new genre over the past ten years". He had written a book

called *Turning Life into Fiction*. I had never planned to be a novelist, but I signed up for the class.

But before I got to the class, things suddenly accelerated. I was still intent on my “simple ethics book” and committed myself to finishing it in three months. It was 31<sup>st</sup> October. I told my youngest son (always tell someone else about a commitment).

He started telling me about National Novel Writing Month (Nano Wrimo). You sign up to a website and you commit to writing a novel of at least 50,000 words in one month – November. Apart from the fact that I thought this was a ridiculous proposition, I said I wasn’t interested; I was writing non-fiction.

But he replied, “Why don’t you write it **as** fiction?” Somehow this hit the mark. I had no idea what it could mean, but I went and signed up immediately. And I started writing at 6.00am the next day. I wrote nearly every day for the next four weeks, and a story poured out, a story about a leader who endeavoured to lead ethically in difficult circumstances, where he ended up being under attack.

I finished the novel, then two weeks later I went to Robin Hemley’s master class. So the class didn’t help me to write the story, but what it did do was provide me with an enormously powerful validation of what I had done. There were other people who had approached writing about difficult (real) circumstances in the same way.

I had often thought about writing about the circumstances in the novel, and other people had suggested to me that I do so. But I had shied away from it – if it was written as history, I would have had to focus on dates, names and locations – accuracy. And there are still people out there who would want to sue me for telling the truth. And what would be the point of writing about seedy events in an obscure place over 20 years ago?

But writing it as “fiction” meant that I could keep my attention focused on the “truth” of the events, in a way that made it meaningful to anyone reading it. It was a story about ethics in leadership. And as I tell the story, it is a story about how it is always worthwhile to be ethical.

So the little book of ethics remains to be written, but this story had to be told first.

**The Ten Thousand Things: A story of the lived experience of the I Ching** is self-published, and the making of its success will be another story. More information is on my website:

[www.glenmartin.com.au](http://www.glenmartin.com.au)

There is a book launch at Gleebooks on Sunday 8 August at 3.30pm. You’re invited. Register on their website: [www.gleebooks.com.au](http://www.gleebooks.com.au)