

# Flames in the open



Glenn Martin

Published by G.P. Martin  
5 Gumnut Place  
Cherrybrook NSW 2126  
[www.glenmartin.com.au](http://www.glenmartin.com.au)

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## Photos

The photo on the front cover is from the Woodford Folk Festival (Queensland) fire ceremony, 1 January 2005. The fire ceremony takes place on the evening of New Year's Day. It is an open-air show in a natural amphitheatre at the head of the valley. It is on a grand scale, with large mythic creatures sculptured in wooden frames and rice paper, a 500-person choir of Woodford Festival-goers and a storytelling that ends with the lighting of the fire.

The fire ceremony has a different story each year. The common thread is the meanings contained in fire – burning the old or things that need to be destroyed, starting anew and making things pure, being on display, and allowing oneself to be seen and subject to the elements.

The photo on the back cover is my Horseshoe Creek (Kyogle) house, "Bywater", circa 1984.

Photos taken by Glenn Martin.



### **The asterisks**

Some titles have an asterisk. This means I have a story relating to the poem in the section at the back: "Stories about: the poems".

## **ON THE DECK\***

On the deck at the stern of a ship  
that is sailing  
away to the clouds  
there are people  
proclaiming, profaning, disdaining  
and rising and falling  
and crying and dying  
'til curtains descend  
and the bones reassemble  
to drink cups of tea  
'til the evening show.

Some bodies are groaning  
some friends are disowning  
and drinking cold tea with a calm that  
could only be learned by rehearsing  
and up in the back row  
a young girl is crying  
but nobody minds  
for it's part of the show  
where the tears are all practised  
but puzzle the young man  
who offers his shoulder  
and wonders still more  
when they soon disappear

but he holds her still tighter and covers his fear  
for it's all in the show

as he's played it before  
on the deck  
at the stern  
of a ship  
that is sailing  
and nobody knows  
why the young girl is crying  
although it is after the curtains have fallen  
although it is late  
and the wind has arisen  
and billows the curtains  
and fills up the sails  
'til nobody's certain  
if she should be crying  
or whether it's all in the play  
and they look at the young man.....

## **JUST ENOUGH\***

Honest the day is rising,  
is quietly asking,  
if there is any question  
let it poke with gentle rays into acquiescent dark.

If a rhythm is called for,  
a sparkle is all that is needed  
to measure the pulse  
and your eyes may pound  
as they please.

At a touch we all discover  
the secret hopes we had withheld –  
discovery bathed in such great happiness –  
afterwards we would call it ecstasy.

Sometimes, the earth is just soft enough  
for pockets of fragility to persist  
for just long enough  
for us to wonder  
that love is possible at all.

And then, every day  
the clean face of honesty  
shining for only a moment  
shoots rays across the other side of space.  
A day of saturation  
would break you open,

split down the centre and see  
if you would spill out love.

Beginning in the dark  
we taste what the light would do,  
hope, and occasionally  
stand defenceless,  
tempting the fire-bright.



Margaret introduced me to the I Ching, and its figure of the wise man gave me an ideal I could relate to. The wise man, the sage, the hero, the superior man, the stranger....I think my first exposure to the wise man was the fool in King Lear. The figure of the fool and his function intrigued me.

**Just Enough** was written during the “hippy days”. It’s unfortunate that I have to use that word. There was a period of time when Margaret and I looked for a hippy community, and we did end up spending six months on a shared-ownership property (a multiple-occupancy). But it was nothing like my concept of a commune. It was a collection of individuals, couples and families spread out over 600 acres, all living separate lives and with limited capacity or desire for cooperation.

My quest was also more about individual growth and understanding than the development of an alternative economy or society. Hadn’t we all heard John Lennon say, “You say you want a revolution? Well, you know, you better free your mind instead”?

**Just Enough** is about the (re-)discovery of joy. When I read this now, I think back to the early poems (eg **Young Man**) and think, yes, I have discovered the possibility of joy.

Most of the remaining poems are reflections on that awakening, filtered through the glass of the I Ching. All of them were written at Horseshoe Creek, in the time after Margaret and the children were gone (there were Tim and

## The poet

I am pleased to say I write for a living. True, it is non-fiction – articles, books, commentary and essays on employment law, ethics, training and the human aspects of management. I worked as an employee (writer/editor) of a publishing company for ten years and now work from home.

I have been a high school teacher, manager of community service organisations, adult educator. Lots of roles, lots of steps, lots of labels, angling towards the clarity of self.

I grew up in Sydney and left when I was 24. I thought I would never come back but did so ten years ago and it's fine. I have a life here now.

Writing poetry has been an element of my life since I was nine. It helped me to find out what I felt, to articulate it and come to terms with it. I love the W.B. Yeats' line: "It is so many years before one knows what one feels".

Poetry also helped me to delve into words – their meaning and their sound. I'd like to think it shows in my writing on business issues. People do occasionally tell me I write well.

I have written thousands of pages on human resources management and training and development for CCH Australia. I edited their *Australian Master Human Resources Guide* and wrote several chapters for it. More non-fiction.

When I was in Kyogle (where I spent 20 years) I wrote two books on local history – *Places in the Bush* (a history of the

Kyogle Shire) in 1988 and *The Kyogle Public School Centenary Book* (1995).

I've also written a book on ethics – *Human Values and Ethics in the Workplace*, which appeared in 2007.

And in 2010 I crossed the floor from my non-fiction business writing and wrote a novel about leadership, *The Ten Thousand Things*.

There is more poetry in the box, and an assortment of stories. And yes, they do keep happening on occasion.

