

LOVE AND ARMOUR



Glenn Martin

LOVE AND ARMOUR

Glenn Martin

G.P. Martin Publishing



Published by G.P. Martin Publishing
5 Gumnut Place
Cherrybrook NSW 2126
www.glenmartin.com.au

© Glenn Martin 2007
First published 2007. Reprinted 2017.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

National Library of Australia
Cataloguing-in-Publication Entry

Martin, Glenn.

Love and armour.
ISBN 978 0 6480811 1 1 (pbk)
1. Martin, Glenn. I. Title.
A828.409

Book layout and design by Glenn Martin
Typeset in Palatino Linotype 11 pt

Contents

Preface.....	1
Images.....	4
Contents.....	6
ADVANCING IN EMPTINESS	9
THE BADLANDS.....	10
IMAGES OF PERFECTION	11
BENJAMIN WOODCUTTER AND THE QUEEN	12
WANTING	13
A DARK DAY THEN	14
PAINT ME A PICTURE	15
YELLOW SMOKE ON THE WATER.....	16
A DEAD MAN	18
FAR AWAY.....	19
THERE IS NONE THAT SEES TOO FAR	20
CYNICAL MOMENT	22
THE SOFT BARRAGE.....	23
RIVERRUNDOWN.....	24
COMRADES	26
FOND HEARTS.....	27
JOY AND SORROW	28
FOR A CITY FRIEND	30
BIRTH DAY	32
FOREST/NIGHT/HOUSE LAMPS	33
MING I.....	34
THE READING	35
IN DANGER	36
THE OLD MEN HAVE A SAYING.....	37
THE DRY WELL (Ching).....	38

THE SAGE'S UNDERTAKINGS	39
THE SAGE AS STRANGER	40
KU'N (RECEPTIVE)	41
THE LAST SONG	42
THE LAST SUPPER.....	43
THE NOTEBOOK.....	44
Advancing in emptiness	44
The badlands	45
Images of perfection	45
Benjamin woodcutter and the queen.....	47
Wanting.....	48
A dark day then	49
Paint me a picture.....	52
Yellow smoke on the water	54
A dead man	55
Far away.....	61
There is none that sees too far.....	61
Cynical moment.....	63
The soft barrage	64
Riverrundown.....	65
Comrades.....	66
Fond hearts	71
Joy and sorrow	74
For a city friend.....	76
Birth day.....	81
Forest/night/house lamps	85
Ming I: Darkening of the light	85
The reading.....	89
In danger	89
The old men have a saying.....	94
The dry well (Ching)	95

The sage's undertakings.....	101
The sage as stranger.....	102
K'un (Receptive).....	104
The last song	109
The last supper	109
The end	113
The author	114

Preface

This is my second collection of poems. The first was *Flames in the open*, a selection from between 1970 and 1988. The selection of poems here is another slice from the same period of time. I made this selection in 1989, and published it for just a few friends, inventing Bywater Whimsies as a publishing entity – a figment.

Bywater was “real”. When I moved to my Horseshoe Creek house, 17 kilometres out from Kyogle on the far north coast of New South Wales, in January 1978, I named it Bywater. It was the name of the area near Hobbiton, where Bilbo Baggins lived in J.R.R. Tolkein’s *The Hobbit* and *Lord of the Rings*.

In 1989 I was living alone. My partner had left the year before, in a downward spiral, going back to her parents in Sydney, and she had taken our son with her. He was five years old then.

I didn’t put the poems in chronological order, and I like the sequence as I put it then. The poems cover my perceptions over a long period, the vicissitudes of relationships, feelings, and my striving for meaning. When I was younger (to be clearer, less than 25), I dated poems and kept the original piece of paper. Some of my friends think this is odd, but the poems were about particular moments in time, so I think there is some sense in my keeping the pieces of paper.

I wrote on scraps of waste paper that represented things that were part of my life at the time (e.g. worksheets I used in the classroom as a teacher). I learned recently that Kurt Vonnegut did the same – more boldly, he crafted (or assembled?) entire novels on stray scraps of paper. I don't feel so outlandish with him for company.

This is even more intriguing to me now, as I can place the poems in the context of what was happening at the time. In some cases, the context is still vivid, and in other cases the poem has assumed its own life and its roots have been cut (shall we say?) asunder.

As I said in *Flames in the open*, in my stories I am not trying to interpret or interfere with the poems, I'm just offering a context where I think it is illuminating. Growing up and reading Australian poets, I was annoyed and alienated when they quoted obscure references that I was most unlikely to know. I felt that poems should communicate and connect, not flaunt esotericism.

I haven't rewritten any of these poems. They are as I encapsulated them in 1989. Is this important? To me, yes. This collection is in some ways a retrospective. The earliest ones in particular reflect the crude influence of poets I had only recently discovered; or the volatile environment of the early 1970s.

This is very much why I still enjoy them now, in the same way that you would not want the Rolling Stones to issue a

“mature” version of “Satisfaction” that cleaned up its juvenile rawness.

The opening quote: “The only thing we did that was wrong, was to stay in the wilderness for too long”, is by Michael Newman, a Catholic priest who put together a great book of songs and stories in 1971 that summoned up so much of the turbulence and aspirations of that time (the year before it was Gough Whitlam’s “time”). The book was a collection of Christian and social activist songs. The saying appealed to me and still does.

What does it mean? I take it to be a “prodigal son” concept – everybody comes home sooner or later. Jon Anderson (from Yes) captured that sentiment most perfectly in the song “Somehow I’ll find my way home” on the *Friends of Mr Cairo* album (circa 1980). Ursula Le Guin addressed it more recently in a collection of stories called *Always Coming Home*.

I suppose Newman was championing the homely virtues of the Catholic Church. The irony was that around that time I was coming to the conclusion that the Anglican Church, or indeed, any church, was no home for me. But I’ve always remembered the saying, to keep me from being obstinately alone or aloof from others.

Images

The photo on the front cover is from the Woodford Folk Festival (Queensland), December 2004.

The photo on the back cover is also from the Woodford Folk Festival, December 2005. The photos were taken by me.

I love the three ladies on the front cover. I think of the New Testament – love, hope and charity. I think of the three muses. I think of numerology, and the Tao – how one becomes two, then three, then the ten thousand things. First there is one, then yin and yang, then the three muses. One festival which embraces all, and three muses. Love and armour – love and our defences against hurt.

The three ladies were standing on long steel poles which were anchored in pivot points on the ground. The poles were curved, and the ladies were strapped to them at the ankles as if to a pogo stick, and looking like crocheted toilet roll holders. They were not static; the poles were gyrating in time to music, so my catching them at just that moment was magic. It's my favourite photo.

At Woodford Folk Festival there were many night acts like this as you walked around. You simply came upon them, or they came upon you. On mid-summer nights among crowds of people who had come as if to a respite (six days of it), where hate, anger, delusion and domination were unnecessary and irrelevant.

So why wouldn't I choose that as my front-page image?

And on the back cover? Again, Woodford. If love and armour were to contend, they would make an image like this, where there is somewhat confusion, but the ambience is benign. The need for defence is but an illusion. In the morning, we know we will laugh at how we stumbled in the dark. Even the music would be angled towards wry humour, soft cadences, lilting. Darkness it would pick up and turn to playful taunting performance which will have its time.

The import of the dark is ritual gestures that denote the great balance. Between love and armour there is poise, and afterwards there is the stillness where all things are possible.

A DARK DAY THEN

And you would say we were no higher than the grass,
and you would tell me that like flowers we would pass:
it was a dark day when I knew you,
I have set my sights for the sun,
as straight as the barrel of a gun.

And you would weigh heavily like sad news in the morning,
or you would turn in terror, and stun me without warning:
it was a dark day when I knew you,
the shadows bore your weight,
but I have withdrawn from the chaos of your fate.

And you would be quizzical like unexpected sunlight,
and you would be suddenly passionate, almost bright,
it was a dark day when I knew you,
I took your ecstatic moments then;
I stand alone, you've lost your way again.

A DEAD MAN

A man dying is a very little thing –
a name in a newspaper;
there is no hole in the sky
to be plugged up.
It is like taking a cup of sand
from the beach,
it makes a little hole,
you think, somebody
must have trodden it down like that,
and a little boy flattens it out
to build a castle.
Maybe his wife gets a tiny scar
on her heart,
if he had a wife.
Perhaps there is another place
where he goes now.
If there is, it must be
a long way away.
You can never find a man
where he used to be
when he is dead.

A dark day then

Ah, where is Chrissie now? Chrissie was from my innocent days in the Anglican church fellowship at Greenacre (circa 1965-1971 for the historians). It was the peak time of church fellowships in the suburbs of Sydney. I was the leader of the group, and there were up to 60 people who turned up on Sunday evenings, to sing songs, have Bible studies, conduct philosophical discussions and compare clothes and musical

preferences (Beatles, Rolling Stones, Elvis Presley or the burgeoning group of artists that the advent of the Beatles had unleashed – and then there was the US San Francisco phenomenon).

It was all exciting, but we had all grown up in the Australian suburbs, Bob Menzies' suburbia of the 1960s. We lived comfortably inside a paradigm. Key elements were Victa mowers and the June Dally-Watkins School of Department. We did not know what paradigms were, or that there might be other paradigms. That realisation came bumpily, through people who blundered outside the straightened way. Like Chrissie.

Chrissie had bliss inside her waiting to break out. Along with it, she had a multitude of demons. And she was extremely sensual. At a time when I was dutifully constrained by Christian virtue. I was older, and she looked up to me. But along with that, there was the motor bike, a vehicle of sensuality. We spent many hours together on my motor bike (the Yamaha 180, the Honda 450), she on the back and huddled up close, us weaving through curved roads or sailing along country highways.

Times. There was one time when she turned up at my place late at night, out of her mind, distraught. And in possession of a small quantity of white powder. In about 1969. We were all so innocent. What was this white powder? We hadn't even come across marihuana. She allowed me to flush it down the sink, but she was wrung out, and I spent an hour

riding around looking for a chemist that was open, hoping for what? An antidote? A cure? An answer?

Another time I was at teachers' college, at lectures on a sunny autumn day in a place that had apotheosised irrelevance. I received a message from the office (hand-delivered) that I was needed to see Chrissie. I had no idea why, and I was young. How do you explain walking out of a lecture where there are only a dozen people present? And it was so formal, the college admin person taking a phone message and walking over to the classroom.

I got on my motor bike and went to her place. She was just scattered. Wanting to take the powder, take the pills, possessed by that irritable energy. What was I supposed to do? I just talked, ill-equipped, not understanding and probably not much help.

The next day at college I had to explain my absence. I had to submit a form. I didn't know how to accomplish that. Fortunately the lady in the office knew. She said there was a formula – it was called “urgent personal business”. So that was it.

A dark day is not a description of Chrissie. As I said, there was bliss underneath. It is a description of my frustration, my inability to comprehend or know what to do. Years later, she turned up at a place I used to go to. I was taking another girl out at the time, and Chrissie turned up. And I was giving them both a lift home. In a car this time.

Who was going to go first? It was Chrissie, and she couldn't believe it. But why not? I was going out with the other girl at the time. Beyond this point, things could get ugly. There could be a conversation about doubt. And there could be a conversation about being sensible (around a girl who used drugs).

I stop that with a position statement about not harbouring regrets.

A dead man

My father died when I was 16. He was 53. It was sudden. One afternoon. It was an unusual day – I was working with him to replace the roof on the “temporary dwelling”. There are so many stories here already. In the early 1950s, Sydney was still suffering from shortages of materials, post-World War II. It was difficult to get a house built, and after the war there were so many more families – reunited families with returned soldiers, and migrants from Europe.

Accommodation was at a premium. My parents married in 1947, and they lived in other people’s houses until they bought the block of land at Greenacre in August 1954. My four-year-old mind remembered that date. The block of land

was covered with bush, the road was dirt, and there was a “temporary dwelling” on it, a thirty-foot by twelve-foot fibro, one-room building with a lean-to on the side that had a bath and laundry tubs.

Mum and dad and us three kids lived in that building until I was nine. We moved into the house in May 1959 (that date was painted in black script by the painter in the top corner of the external wall at the back). During those years there was a war with the local council about these temporary dwellings. The council took the view that they were sub-standard and people shouldn't be living in them. Easy enough to say.

My mum has reminded me that she and dad went to a meeting in Bankstown with about 300 others to protest about the council's intolerant and unrealistic policy. The talk of evictions was just cranking up stress levels for people who had no means to do other than what they were doing. No one was living in a dump by choice.

Our little scenario was lived out by countless others during the fifties and early sixties in what was then the western suburbs, the outskirts of Sydney. The dream was to build a nice house, make it a home, and have a lovely garden. Mum and dad did that. We had a huge block of land, and mum and dad created a neat, beautiful garden. It was picturesque.

The temporary dwelling stayed. Its existence was never questioned. First, mum's niece and her new husband lived in it for three years while they were building their house out

at Lugarno. After that, Brian (my brother) and I took possession of it. We were allowed to paint it. We had a table tennis table, and spent hours playing table tennis there during our teen years. It was my study and his. I had a table and a cupboard, and dad bought me a typewriter. Ah, magic.

But it got to the point where the roof leaked, so dad and mum decided to replace the corrugated iron. It was all organised. Measurements taken, materials purchased and delivered, a power drill organised (we owned nothing of that nature). My main thing in those days was study. I was aiming for high marks in the Higher School Certificate so that I could get to university. I would be the first person in the Martin family to do so (there was a lot of underlying mythology here, both an inspiration and a burden).

There was a serious conversation between mum and me. She said I had to put my study aside this weekend. I had to help dad. And I was obedient. I didn't fight about it. I said okay. Dad and I had not spent a lot of time together since I started high school. Before that we used to go to soccer games together on Saturdays. That was when Australia first started to invite overseas clubs to visit. Dad and I saw English, Italian, Greek and Spanish teams play. It was exciting, as well as being my first real experience of other cultures in the crowds.

I think the job of replacing the roof daunted dad. He was a painter, not a builder. I vaguely remember he had some help from neighbours. I was there, doing what I could. Given my focus on matters of the intellect, I was pretty much useless

at practical skills. And I had a perfectionist bent that focused too much on detail – like trying to get a margin of error of one in 10,000 when one in ten would do just fine.

The day was going alright. Old sheets were coming off and new sheets were going on. The screws and nails were working out okay, and the sheets seemed to be staying straight and covering what they needed to. About two o'clock, dad got pains in the chest. He seldom got sick and I never thought about him being sick beyond an occasional cold.

He went and lay on his bed and mum called the doctor. Everything was big in those days – we didn't have a phone, so ringing a doctor meant asking a favour from a neighbour. The doctor came, and dad seemed okay. The doctor said he should rest. Which was alarming, as we still had parts of the roof that were uncovered, and what if it rained? I had assumed some sense of responsibility by now, I wasn't just passing the nails and screws and obeying orders.

The doctor was packing his bag to go when dad had the heart attack. The doctor said to get him down on the floor, and told me to help him to do resuscitation. He did the pushing on the chest and told me to breathe air into his mouth strongly– now, pause, now, pause, now. That's right. Keep it up. Mum was told to call the ambulance. Back to the neighbours.

Dad was dead. He'd gone, just like that. I was breathing air into the lungs of someone who had already gone. Around eight o'clock that night (maybe), mum and I were sitting in

the visitors' room at Bankstown Hospital and the doctors finally came and said what we already knew. They hadn't been able to revive him. We got home somehow.

Most of the details escape me. Who drove us home? We had no car. Where was Brian? I know that Helen, my older sister, was away for the weekend at some kind of camp, and someone had to go and get her and bring her home. I know that Brian cried for a week. And mum cried, but she was also faced with the fear of not being able to keep things going. There was a mortgage. There were such powerful fears afoot. It was as if the grief was overshadowed by these fears.

What assailed me the most? I was the central character in the "going to university" mythology. I was the one who was going to succeed in that way. I was in Year 12, my final year of school. So – would I have to leave school, and get a job in a shop or an office to earn money to keep the household going? Would this spell the end of a lifetime's aspiration (as vague as it was)?

Then combine this with my guilt over my selfishness. I was paralysed. The result? Numbness. I felt numb for ages. Mum swallowed her sadness, talked to the bank and social security, and sorted it out, so she could keep it all going, with me and Brian at school. I was okay most of the time. The thing that brought me unstuck was people's sympathy. At the funeral, there were lots of pupils there from school. There were probably 200 people in that tiny weatherboard church at Greenacre, St David's. I thought I was okay, being strong for mum. No tears. Listening to the words, keeping

my perspective, not falling into that emotional pit from which I might not return. But outside the church, one of my school friends came up to me and touched me on the shoulder and said, "Sorry." I went to pieces then. For a short time.

I got an image for it later. Dad dying was like a wall being removed from the house. You don't think about a wall being removed. But it's gone, and you think, the roof can't possibly stay up.

In those days I was writing a lot of poetry. The travail and explorations of that period of life. (I don't like that sentence, but let it stay. I just don't like being trite about "periods of life". We can experience anything anytime, especially when we wake up and choose to.) But I didn't write anything about dad. It was a case of – let's not talk about the wall that just disappeared. Let's just hope the roof stays up. And perhaps it will if we don't talk about it.

I wrote "A dead man" in November 1970, three and a half years later. I accept that many people might find this totally unsatisfactory as a poem about the death of one's father. I'm sorry. This poem is my tears for my father. I sat down and faced his death. There's a lot that the poem doesn't say. That feeling I had that I had not appreciated him or acknowledged him during his life. What he had given up in providing for all of us. The fact that he died so young.

Well, it's implicit. When I wrote the poem, the overriding thing still was the suddenness of his death, and the fact that life went on without him.

Here's a strange experience. It's not even directly about me. Many years later, Lois, to whom I was married for a decade, visited a clairvoyant. Curiously, the clairvoyant spent part of the time talking about me and Margaret, my first wife. What was said is not relevant here. The curious thing was, the clairvoyant's "informant" was my father. I thought it was rather cheeky of a clairvoyant to discuss matters other than those to do with the person in the room.

So when this was related to me, I realised that it was all okay – my father had loved me, and had forgiven, or overlooked, my youthful conceits.

The author

Born in Sydney in 1950. Grew up in Greenacre. Was schooled and churched in the usual ways. Went to University of New South Wales and didn't complete engineering. Went to University of Sydney and didn't complete Arts. Became a high school teacher of mathematics. After three years, left and became psychiatric nurse. Went to Mackay, Queensland and taught mathematics there.

Moved to far north coast of New South Wales in 1976 and ended up in Kyogle. Stayed for 20 years. In that time, three partners, five children, several gardens.

Numerous jobs – teacher (manual arts and maths) at St Marys, Casino; project officer, program for unemployed youth in Kyogle; project officer (community services) for Casino Municipal Council; adult education coordinator in Kyogle; manager for Challenge Foundation (disability services).

Wrote *Places in the Bush* (a history of Kyogle Shire) in 1988 and *Kyogle Public School Centenary Book* (1995).

Went back to university – Southern Cross University at Lismore. Finished this time – Bachelor of Business (Honours, University Medal).

Ended up back in Sydney as a writer and editor for CCH Australia – business information services (human resources, employment law, training and development).

Went back to university (definitely a recidivist) and obtained Master of Education (Online Education) from University of Southern Queensland.

Became single again.

Wrote book on ethics – *Human values and ethics in the workplace* – in 2006. It becomes (in 2007) a self-published shelf companion to this book and *Flames in the open*, my other book of poems and stories.

Working from home now, mostly; writing, mostly.

Mission: To see truth and say what is helpful.

There are many episodes that make up a life – traumas, victories and kindnesses. And the words about those episodes throw light, and small harnesses around the wildness. *Love and armour* is the interplay of experiences and the words that tried to accord those experiences respect.

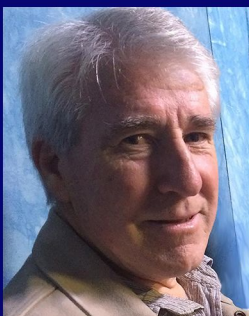
Spanning 20 years of life in the city and the country, relationships that worked, if but for a time, and relationships that were never going to work. Spanning the movement from suburban frustration to revolutionary zeal, and back again to a point of deemed balance.

There are worldly battles and failures at close quarters. Harshness and its counter-point, the spaces where harshness would not intrude. Hope and fantasy, and striving for solid ground. No matter the cruel sky, watch the slow burn of irrepressible light.



Glenn Martin is a writer, more known for his work in business and professional publications – books, articles, essays and commentary on management, human resources, training and development, and ethics. He is, nevertheless, a poet. He has another book of poems and stories, *Flames in the Open*.

He dwells in Sydney, Australia.



BOOKS

To purchase Glenn Martin's books, go to:

<https://www.lulu.com/spotlight/glennpmartin>

* * * * *

WEBSITE

To go to Glenn Martin's website, go to:

<https://www.glennmartin.com.au/>