

The Arc of the Family

Book 1

A Modest Quest



Glenn Martin

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G.P. Martin Publishing

A Modest Quest
By Glenn Martin

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Family photo circa 1956: Glenn, Brian and Helen Martin, Valerie Brissett (cousin) and Sid Martin (father).

Author's Foreword

A Modest Quest describes the beginning of my quest to find out about my family. It was, at the outset, intended to be a modest quest – simply to find out about my parents' brothers and sisters and their parents. Growing up, I and my sister and brother thought that all our grandparents were already dead; nor did we know much about our uncles and aunts. But the quest has not been easy; it took about two years and some deep digging just to settle the questions about these relatives. By then, of course, the quest had embedded itself in my life, because you don't understand a person until you know something about their parents, and so it goes on.

The intention is that other books will follow, addressing particular generations or particular themes that are emerging. For example, a forthcoming book is called *They Went to Australia*. This looks in particular at the direct ancestors who came to Australia – all in the period from 1835 to 1860, and all from England, Scotland and Ireland, although let it also be said that Cornwall figures prominently.

The Arc of the Family

This is the title of the proposed series of books. It might require seven books to tell all of the story that I now know, and I am still digging, discovering and being surprised.

Glenn Martin
Sydney, December 2016

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Chapter 1: The beginning

*The past becomes interesting and I
become curious to know.*

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The family I grew up in was a pioneer family. It wasn't just that we lived in a temporary dwelling on a bush-covered block of land on a dirt road, with few other houses around. The family itself was a pioneer venture. There was (almost) just us. Neither of our parents had parents of their own alive. Both of them had a few sisters and brothers, vaguely – we had met some of them and knew their names, but mostly they did not have much to do with our lives. Beyond the occasional fact about our parents' parents, there was nothing.

Yet, there was, in all this, a spirit of hope. We were to be the children of opportunity. We would grow up with good schooling and learn an occupation – perhaps school teachers or nurses. Both mum and dad had had to leave school young. In dad's case, he was about thirteen when he had to leave school and get a job. In mum's case, she was about fourteen, although she went back later at night time and did Intermediate studies (which you normally finished at fifteen years of age in those days).

Essentially, we would achieve more than our parents had had the opportunity to do. There was something

honourable in this, and we accepted the venture and looked to the future. Occasionally, as children, we would visit Aunty Frances and Aunty Pearl, mum's sisters. Mum had grown up with Aunty Frances from age twelve, so she was her closest family contact.

On dad's side, we knew Uncle Norm, because we had actually lived with him when we children were young. He and his wife were separated, and there was a daughter, Diane, a couple of years older than Helen, my big sister. Mum helped to look after her and the house. We moved to Greenacre when I was four. It was August 1954. I remember that I made an effort to memorise this date because it was an important date in my life.

We were on our own at Greenacre. It was silent and dark at night, and there was no one to call on. Nowadays you think of the telephone, television, instant contact any time. You assume you have a car, transport. No, we didn't – no car, no phone. No television until I was fourteen. There was a mantel radio that mum had on during the day when she did sewing. Occasionally I think she received letters from her sisters.

Down at the next intersection of the road there was a telephone box, about one hundred metres away. We went there if we had to ring someone, with four pennies. After a few years, in an emergency, there were now neighbours who had a phone, and we could go there and ask if we could use their phone. There was also a bus stop near the phone box, and we went to Bankstown or Strathfield (if we were going into the city) to go out. There was a butcher and a grocery store a few hundred yards the other way, from which mum ordered the weekly groceries.

We didn't have much money and we made do. The family was building for the future. And we did. We children, me and big sister Helen and younger brother

Brian, all grew up and finished school and yes, we became nurses and teachers. In all those years there was little contact with other family, and we figured that was the way of it. Modern life, living in a city that spread out to engulf us, looking towards membership in society as qualified, competent participants who earned money, started their own families and acquired their own houses with requisite mortgages.

We did have contact again with mum and dad's brothers and sisters. Dad died when I was sixteen. It was sudden, one Saturday afternoon when unusually, he and I were working together, replacing the roof on that temporary dwelling, which continued to stand, now at the back of the new house into which we moved in May 1959. We were on the roof, replacing sheets of rusty iron with new sheets (don't imagine for a moment that I was competent, I was just helping).

He got pains in the chest and had to come down. Mum was worried, and called the doctor. The Italians over the road had a telephone. The doctor came, and examined him. He advised rest, and said he shouldn't get back on the roof today. He should get someone else to finish the job. The doctor was just packing his bag to go when dad had the heart attack. The doctor sprang into action, hauling him onto the floor and starting to pump his chest. He summoned me to start mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, then he told mum to call for an ambulance. Someone went back over to the Italians' place. Dad's face was rough from not having shaved that morning. He didn't respond. The doctor said to keep at it until the ambulance arrived.

Mum went in the ambulance. I'm not sure what happened after that. Somehow I was at the hospital at eight o'clock that night with mum, and dad was lying on a table, dead, just completely still and cold, gone. I wasn't thinking much. All the thoughts had been pushed away. I knew I had

a responsibility to be grown up and be a support to mum. She was shattered. I was empty, black.

Family arrived then. Mum's brother Victor came. He lived not far away at Bankstown, and his daughter was engaged to a policeman, who volunteered to go to a camp where my sister Helen was spending the weekend with a St John's Ambulance group. I don't know who was at the funeral. That was a blur, except for my seeing lots of my class mates from school, and the small church we went to being packed out into the street.

It was shocking to see my class mates. I was thinking, why are you here? I hadn't realised that death opens doors everywhere, and the most unexpected people walk in. You think your life is private, and suddenly it becomes quite clear that it is not. Everyone is there.

What was to happen to us? It was as if the roof of the house was still intact, still covering us, but all the walls had been blown out, and I couldn't understand why the roof was still standing up. This could have been a re-run of our parents' lives, with everything collapsing sometime in the teen years. But mum was resourceful and determined, and Aunty Frances turned up.

Mum is still alive at age ninety-two, and she still vividly remembers her sister Frances helping her then, sitting down and being practical, figuring out how mum could keep the family together and survive. She went with her to see the Department of Social Security, and worked out what support she could get with the Widows Pension, and how we children could stay at school and finish our education.

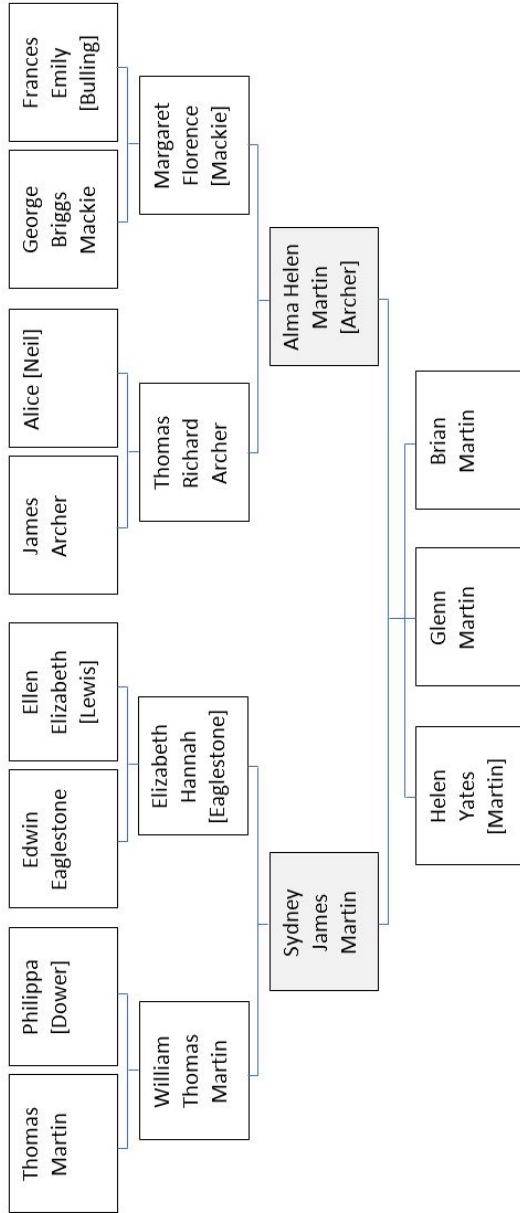
From such things I have some ideas about family. One aspect is this: it could be about people whom you may not see much, but you are in their mind and they will come around if you find yourself in need. Mum

occasionally had her opinions about people in her family – sisters, brothers, her parents – so I knew she had some notions about family too. Life wasn't all about putting the past behind you and building the future.

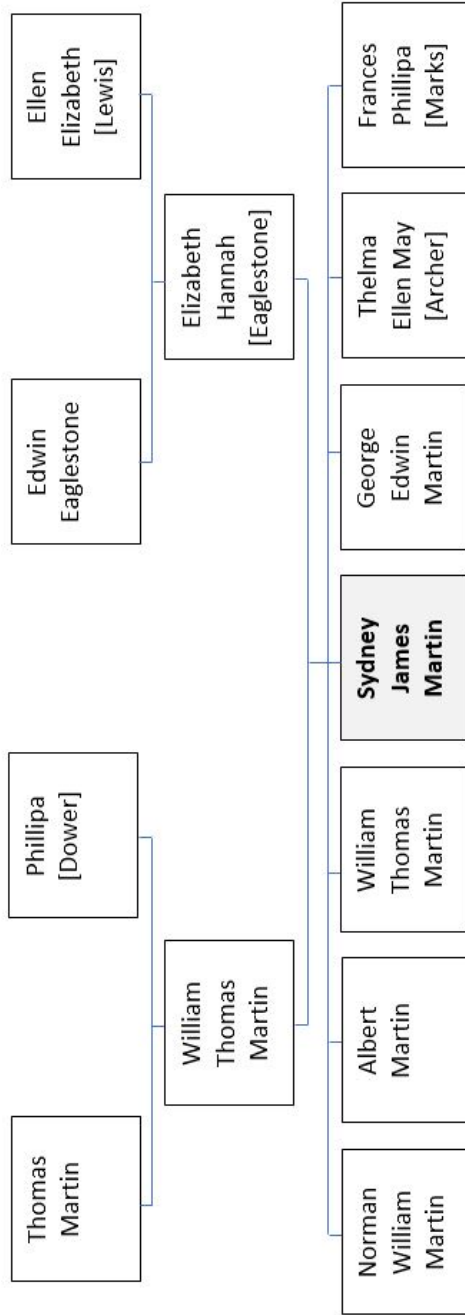
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Family trees

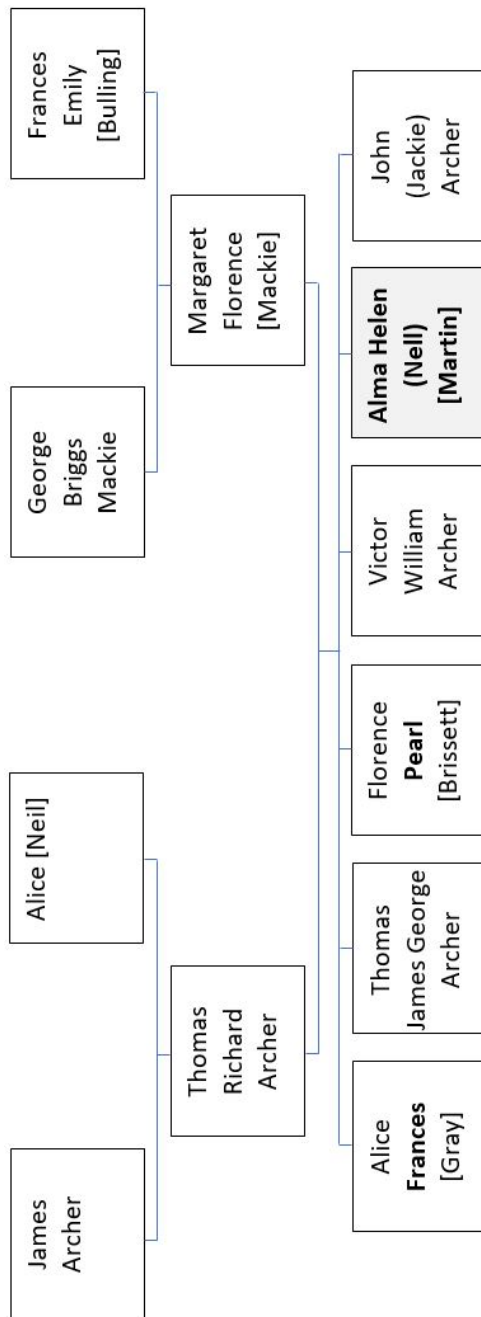
Mum and dad (Sid Martin and Nell Archer)
Four generations shown



Dad's parents (William Thomas Martin and
Elizabeth Eaglestone)
Three generations shown



Mum's parents (Thomas Richard Archer and Margaret Florence Mackie)
 Three generations shown



Glenn Martin (1950 -) grew up in Sydney, Australia. He lived in the hills on the far north coast of New South Wales for twenty years before coming back to Sydney. He has worked at many occupations: high school teacher, manager of community sector organisations, psychiatric nurse, community development worker and social researcher, as well as being a writer on management, employment law, training, and business ethics. He has been an editor of professional and academic publications, and is currently an instructional designer for online tertiary courses.

His previous books include:

Human Values and Ethics in the Workplace

The Little Book of Ethics

The Ten Thousand Things: A story of the lived experience
of the I Ching

Sustenance

The Big Story Falls Apart

To the Bush and Back to Business

Places in the Bush: A History of the Kyogle Shire

See Glenn's website at www.glennmartin.com.au

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