

Eulogy for Jean Martin, 3rd January, 2007



(Photo: Jean Martin, at Peter's house, Salisbury, Wiltshire, England in 2005)

Celebrating Jean Martin

- * Our Mum, Jean Martin, was diagnosed with terminal lung cancer only in early December and as a family we've been dealing with all of that since then. The Martin family 'comfort committee' was brilliantly led by Dad, Peter, Jackie, Erika and Lisa, with back-up support from myself, my wife, Deana, & my son, Sam – all making Mum's last days in hospital as stress-free and as comfortable as was possible. Mum had said she wanted to have her family around her at this time, and we certainly achieved that between us all.
- * Yes, of course it's a sad time and none of us could begin to tell you just how much we miss her. We've already done lots of grieving (so we've have had a bit of a head start on some of you!)
- * But let's put our sadness aside for now because we think Mum's life is a thing to be celebrated.

Highlights

- * But Mum didn't get a great start in life. She grew up in poverty in the East End of London. Her father died when she was very young and her mother struggled to bring up our Mum, her sister and 3 brothers. Things were so tough that Mum's brothers had to spend time in children's homes, because there was simply not enough money to feed them all at home.
- * This tough time was made worse for Mum when, during WW2, a V2 rocket exploded near Mum's house in South London, perforating her ear drums, leaving her with the need for hearing aids.
- * But I've noticed with Mum that all these hardships, which might well have floored the rest of us, just seemed to make her stronger and stronger!
- * She and Dad married on 25th June, 1949 and eventually moved to our house in Glenhurst Avenue, Bexley, Kent, where Peter & I grew up and where Fred spent the first 10 years of his life.
- * As most of you will know, Mum was always strong willed and often strict with us as kids. Though, as Peter & I got a bit older, we started to get our own back on Mum. When the nagging got above what we thought were acceptable levels, Peter & I would pick her up between us and carry her, accompanied by her laughs, to the bottom of our garden and leave her unceremoniously near the compost heap. Though Mum was quite a swift mover in those days, she was no match for Peter & me and we knew we could run back to the house and close the back door before Mum could catch us and giving us a good hiding.
- * Neighbours would often come out into their gardens to hear what the fuss was about, saying – "Oh, it's just those Martin boys sorting their Mum out again!"
- * Having trained to become a cook Mum then studied touch typing and gradually worked her way up to become the Personal Assistant to the Director of a property company in Smithfield in London.
- * Over the years Mum's brothers, sisters and mother had all emigrated to California. So, in the mid-70s, she decided she wanted to go too. Initially she went with the 10 year-old Fred, and Dad followed soon after, once Peter & I were settled into jobs and homes.
- * With good references from her London job, Mum, then aged 48, embarked on her new life. She started work in a typing pool under a tyrannical boss, who took pleasure in ill-treating all the staff. Of course Mum wouldn't take that from anyone. She gave as good as she got and consequently was soon asked to leave.
- * She went across the road to another typing job but soon became secretary to the property manager. When he left, the company asked her to train up a new manager. Most of you won't be surprised to hear that Mum refused! She said: 'Not only will I not train someone else to do the job that I can do standing on my head, but I'm applying for the manager's job myself!'

- * With Mum's hallmark tenacity and dogged determination she got the job and succeeded in letting out all the office space and creating such a good business asset for her company that they sold it for \$1m more than expected – and all in the space of 6 years.

So What Was Jean Like?

- * Our youngest brother, Fred, now lives in Mum & Dad's old house in Phoenix, Arizona. He and his wife, Kristen, announced the birth of their first son, Adrian, on 17th December. Mum of course was very proud to have another grandson, though she never got to see Adrian. With a brand new baby in the house Fred couldn't join us today but he reminded us of how strong willed our Mum was. It would be an understatement to say that she didn't suffer fools gladly – in fact she didn't suffer them at all!!
- * When we were growing up, Mum once said to me that her **family** was her **religion**. She **believed** in us all and loved, nurtured and encouraged us through our childhood and teenage years and on into adulthood. Together one of the main maxims that she and Dad instilled in Peter, Fred & me was that "you can do anything if you really apply yourself and put your mind to it". And all three of us brothers have lived our lives in that way. This, for me, is one of the great gifts that Mum & Dad have given us – and we are eternally grateful to them both.
- * Mum took great pride in cooking for our family. However it didn't always run smoothly. Dad told me that the first time Mum cooked a curry for him, she'd been used to catering for all the people who ate in the canteen she worked in and poor Dad got enough curry powder for about 50 people!
- * As the Martins will know, Mum's **bread pud** was **legendary** and she'd bake it for us as an **occasional treat**. In my first year of **university** I'd come home at weekends and take back a **baking tray** of it. It's amazing how easy it is to **make new friends** when armed with some of Mum's **fantastic bread pud**!
- * Deana reminded me that the first time she met Mum, we'd traveled from Kent down to Southampton for a few days' break. We stopped at the side of the road and Mum, true to form, produced a fantastic picnic from the boot of the car, fit for royalty. She asked Deana what she'd like to drink and produced, from the boot of the car, what was effectively **a bar**. Not being a spirit drinker, but not wishing to cause offence, Deana went for the Baileys but wasn't quite expecting it to be served in a half pint glass! Well, that was Mum! That was probably the only thing she did **'by halves'**!

Retirement

- * When they retired Mum & Dad returned to Wiltshire. Dad's favourite retirement activity is probably playing golf, while Mum used her retirement to get involved in all kinds of **new projects**.
- * She's always been an **avid reader** and a pretty good **artist** – **painting mostly in oils**. But in recent years she'd started writing a book of her **memoirs** and taught herself how to use **computers** and the **internet**. In the last 5 years or so, the thing that really impressed me was how much **energy and passion** she had put into researching our **family history**. But there again, one of Mum's strengths has always been her energy and passion. At a time of life when other Mum's are relaxing and enjoying their retirement, our Mum insisted on having her own website to display her research and maybe even attract long-lost family members. This is now in place and I'm proud that I'm able to continue Mum's family tree research and will publish the results on her website.
- * Of course, there are lots more things we'd like to say about our Mum. I wrote her a poem for Mother's Day, in 2000, which I think captures the essence. I'd like to finish by reading it to you.

TO MY MUM

(Mothering Sunday, 2000)

Almost all of my friends' Mums, to
Occupy their leisure time,
Turn their hands to knitting, sewing,
Baking – that's the paradigm!

It's the kind of thing that ladies
Seem to want to do for fun,
When their children long have left
The former family mans-i-on.

This may help to ease the gentle
Passing of the hours of light.
But I wonder, do they do it
Just to prove that they're polite?

No such dross for my Mum, she's
A budding expert with I.T.!!
Taught herself to speak computer
– Gone and made a family tree!!

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When the needlework and sweaters
Of the other Mums are junk,
My Mum's family tree will still be
Sprouting branches from its trunk.

So you see I'm proud of Mum
- No ordinary parent, she.
Loves a major project challenge:
GENEALOGY (and me!).

*Written and read at her funeral service by her son, Bill Martin,
at Salisbury Crematorium, on 3rd January, 2007*