

Here goes...

I met Martin when he enrolled at my high school (North Sydney BHS). It was 1964 when the family returned to Australia from Greece. Getting Martin qualifications by doing the Leaving Certificate was the agenda item I imagine.

When I say *met*, it was closer to *became aware of*. He being in the literature set and me being in the science and maths set we did not mix all that much. Martin's extensive reading was not lost on the staff. Near the end of the school year there was the obligatory muck-up day but this year's was a deal more intense than most years. The new headmaster was not liked by most of the boys and so to deliver a strong message, the more anarchic painted slogans all over the school. One read *GABDUY Boss* (for Get a big dick up you). Another read cryptically *Where are the Snowdons of yesteryear?* These were all in whitewash so no lasting damage was done to the school. Nevertheless there was much opprobrium.

Mr Crawford called the two most likely suspects into his office. "I know it was one of you who did it," he snarled at Martin and his known literary mate Michael Long, "you are the only two who would know that reference". I do like an educated vandal. Most cannot articulate even the simplest of ideas let alone philosophical literary concepts. Nothing came of it as neither were physically involved. They did admit to some artistic direction of the actual artisans who did the paint job however.

At University in 1966, I took science while Martin studied literature, naturally. He was notorious for sitting at the back of GLT1 smoking black Sobranies. Was it allowed back then? As I recall it was. Although we rarely came in contact on campus, our paths did cross at the Forest Lodge Hotel. Quite a lot actually. Martin could be recognised by his schooner of New augmented with Angostura Bitters or a gin and tonic that glowed pale blue under the U.V. lighting that played on the fluorescent posters of the time.

Martin dropped out of university and we saw each other even less. During this time he joined the *Sydney Morning Herald* as police reporter. When I moved into a share house in Derwent Street Glebe, the Forest Lodge was a stone's throw away.

Martin would be seen with his schooner, book and chess board, welcoming anyone with enough courage to give him a game. I reconnected with Martin in a most agreeable way. I recall apologising for my lack of knowledge of good literature and he dismissed these ideas. "Quite understandable and no need for that. You have knowledge of a different field." I warmed to this and to the man who uttered it, as one would.

In 1972 Martin was living with Julie House in a flat on Enmore Road. We all returned there one night after a boozy session, where Jeremy Gilling and I teamed against him for a game of chess. Martin was too drunk to sit up and move the pieces. He fell back several times, unable to articulate properly but he finally reached out and made his move. Jeremy contemplated the position for some time and looked at me for support. I shrugged and we resigned the game.

Later that year I moved to a rental house in Annandale with Jeremy. We needed a third to make this cost effective so Jeremy and I visited Julie at the Enmore Road flat. It was a delicate thing to steal Julie away from Martin. I do not know how we avoided terminal embarrassment.

Annandale did not last long. I was living there alone most of the time as Julie was always with her beau of the time and Jeremy was who knows where? So I moved to Nadia's place in Camperdown where... wait for it... Martin had moved in. Talk about musical chairs.

This is where I got to know him and to appreciate him. We played chess and my game improved a

lot. I did beat him just once. Early in the game I managed to give him a case of concussion to my advantage. Not really he must have been distracted at the time.

He told stories of his time in Greece illustrated with his knowledge of both forms of Greek, *Thimotiki* and *Katharevousa*<sup>1</sup>. Who knew? Since then whenever the subject of the Greek language crops up, I am quick to ask with patronising tone, "oh um *Thimotiki* or *Katharevousa*?". There were stories of the Junta that ruled Greece at the time, the house on Hydra (approx. pron. *Yhathra*) where he lived, the books that his father, George had written. *They are not biographies* he reminded us. And the music of Theodorakis.

Martin was writing film reviews for the *Sun Herald* at this time. He took little interest in films. Understatement... he hated the job. On one of the famous Balmain pub crawls of 1972<sup>2</sup> it must have been, Martin was ruminating, as we strolled from pub to pub getting steadily drunker, on the review that he was expected to write. Not having actually seen the movie he wrote the review in his head based on imagination, experience and a smattering of facts. The film was a western as I recall. He phoned it in before he became too drunk to speak. Despite its critical tone, the review was published sure enough.

A similar thing happened later. He was not interested so I volunteered. The film was Swedish with a generous measure of nude woman with gravity defying breasts. I watched the film which would have been pretty ordinary but for the precaution of taking a few tokes before attending. I totally enjoyed this film and reported to Martin my own review full of enthusiasm as it was. The other five people in the audience must have wondered why I found it so funny. "Ah," said the Swedish barber as he cut the hair of a newcomer to his shop, the camera looking straight down on his tonsured head, "I see you are Norwegian." I totally cracked up at this. Again Martin's review, this time most favourable, was published without murmur.

I took many photos of Martin. He was very photogenic. His signature long hair. His sheepskin jacket, His permanently attached Alpine menthol cigarette ("they call them *lollies* but too bad. These are what I like.") These all produced a fine subject for the camera.

My then wife Helen and I met up with Nadia and Martin in the village of Paralion Astros in Greece in 1976. We were both working in Boston, Mass. at the time and decided to visit. My boss was stunned. He suggested a holiday in California. We four went on a picnic. On a rocky, sparsely wooded area far from any habitation, we laid out our blanket and our modest fare of bread, olives, wine and cheese and maybe some salami. As we enjoyed our lunch, we noticed on a distant track leading from the town to nearby hills, a donkey and rider appear. Noticing us, the toothless man rode over and dismounted, calling out accurately "*kras*" as he spotted what we were drinking. He sat down among us and helped himself to the wine, all the while chattering away. We could see that Martin, was straining to understand him. When the visitor had relieved us of a significant amount of our wine he remounted and continued on his way. We others did not understand a word but Martin recognised the man's speech as an ancient Greek dialect, belonging to neither of the forms described above. Correction: Recalling that day I do remember one word because he said it many times. It was *rejoice* (χαίρεται) loosely translated as "cheers".

Martin was a gentleman and a scholar. He used words like a skilled pianist plays. Some of his lexical references were obscure and his critics seized on these as pompous. My response was to look them up so as to learn something.

He was also a hopeless drunk as everyone knows but you could not help loving him. He was the

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1 My understanding is (i) the people's language that has developed organically and (ii) a pure form that elite bureaucrats and officials use. The latter is becoming obsolete.

2 I took photos on the day. A memorable one was of Martin and Murray Sime singing as they strolled down a Balmain Street.

genuine tragic artist. His poetry is like no other that I know. I enjoy reading it to this day. My favourite is *Gradus ad Parnassum* for its insight, its personal glimpses and its conversational tone. It is like talking to Martin in person. I miss him. We all do.

Wayne Davies