

A celebration of life  
John Martin Leo ('Martin')

09 March 1951 – 3 December 2020

10.00–10.45 am, 16 December 2020, St Marylebone Crematorium

*a personal goodbye*

Humanist  
*Ceremonies*

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Martin had a good life. It was good in many senses – he formed lasting and deep bonds with people, he was kind, he had many skills which he utilised in his work and in his private life; he enjoyed himself; and most of all he loved and was loved. We talk loosely of quality of life, but Martin had that in a very real sense: he sought out quality and he strived towards ensuring that everything he made, from dormer windows to personal relationships, was of the highest quality. What he aspired to was, simply, the best.

In our tribute to Martin we shall concentrate on the time he and Mili spent together – a 30-year partnership of mutual devotion during which they shared with each other, and with others, much joy. Martin always had a gift of establishing long, sustained relationships, and he met one of his oldest friends, P.J., when they were at university together.

Another friendship was struck up with Chris from round the corner. They met by virtue of being neighbours. Casual good-mornings in the street became chats about this and that, and soon they found they had things in common, not least an interest in building projects. From Martin's office window he had clear sight of Chris's office window, so if either of them were needing a break, or were looking for a bit of advice, they'd just signal to each other for a quick chat.

Mili talks of friends being those you meet at the level of your soul – although shared interests may be a spur to relationships, beliefs don't need to be shared. They can be discussed, or even argued about from time to time, but they are never something to fall out about. And Martin never did. He kept his friends, and many of you are proof of that.

Martin was born in County Limerick to James and Mai, the ninth of ten children. He studied for his degree at University College Cork. He had an Irish lilt to his voice and bags of charm. Helped by his good looks, he could talk you into anything if he put his mind to it. But he was also helpful and kind. He had a wonderful relationship with his nephew Sobo, whom he helped with his schoolwork. But they also sat watching cartoons together, made porridge or went out on their bikes. Sometimes they would go to the Mossy Well for lunch, or to the seaside to look for shells.

Martin did not do things by halves. Their four bunnies had a special place in the family home. Having been brought up on a farm, Martin respected animals, and understood that bunnies who do not already know each other need to bond. He put a lot of time and care into that and succeeded. He also built them a wonderful

enclosure at the back of the garden where they could be safe, but could also run free as they should.

His approach to rabbits typified his approach to everything – firstly the kind thoughts, followed by thinking about what he could do in a practical way to make their lives pleasant. Then the careful planning down to every last detail, and the neat, precise way he carried out the work.

Martin had a large network of contacts. He would often ring someone in Ireland who could find him someone in London with a particular skill he needed. He was a very good networker – all part of his openness and interest in other people.

Seeing things through was another feature of Martin's character. It no doubt made him a very exceptional accountant. He had a sharp mind and an excellent memory for facts and details. Indeed he continued his further education by completing his MBA.

He was very keen on sailing – no holiday near the sea would be complete without a boat excursion, whatever the weather. He learnt to sail on the Welsh Harp and gained a high-level qualification which would have allowed him to sail round the world.

With Mili, he enjoyed travelling. She travelled a lot for her job so Martin would sometimes join her and they would extend the visit together, especially in the States when Mili was advancing her professional expertise. They roamed across Europe, northern Africa and Thailand, admiring the architecture and artefacts inspired by different cultures and traditions. They didn't plan trips meticulously – it was more a case of one of them suggesting where they might go and the other agreeing. They enjoyed the spontaneity of being able to take off at short notice, but they also loved sitting in the garden with a glass of wine, or entertaining friends with a barbecue. Mili and Martin took hospitality seriously and always offered it generously.

The bond Martin had with Mili was reinforced in the three years of Martin's illness, during which Mili devotedly cared for him. They had always treated everything they did together as if it was the last time, and they continued to do so. Martin was strong, positive and brave throughout. Some time ago, Mili promised him that when the time came, he would die in her arms, and she kept her promise.

Martin and Mili knew that, however difficult things are, you can find a funny side. Whatever they did, they laughed about it – they could find humour in every situation

– even if they were arguing they would end up laughing. Life was about ending on a funny note, and this is just how Mili wants to remember her beloved Martin.

Mili and Martin made the absolute most of their 30 years together. Mili loved, and will forever love, everything about him – his essence, his presence, his warmth, the shape and touch of him. He was kind, open, handsome, trustworthy and capable, but most importantly, he connected to people. His long partnership with Mili and with family members and friends, the fact that everything in the home is linked to someone in one way or another – this is what made him special.