

Review

This career-spanning book offers insight for anyone venturing into engineering, and how to build on the life lessons you learn along the way, writes **Patrick Augustin**.

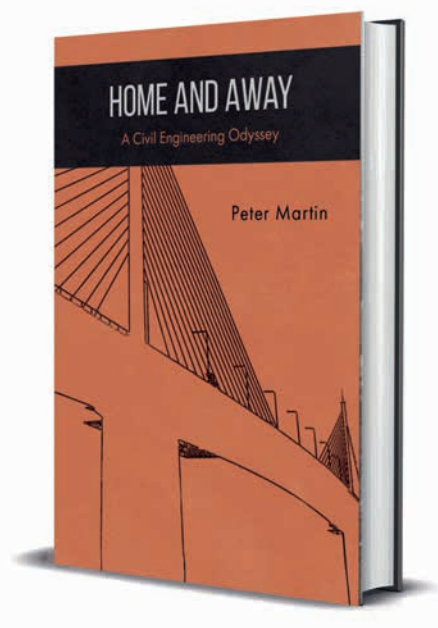
Home and away: A civil engineering odyssey

Author: Peter Martin

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HOME AND AWAY IS A RECOLLECTION of a civil engineering career that spans mostly the British Commonwealth countries as well as the development of friendships and family. Peter Martin's engineering designs progressed from slide rule, electronic calculators and onto computers.

This book is also accessible to the general reader. My wife, an English Arts major, enjoyed reading it as it was well crafted.

Martin traces his career from finishing school and then earning his degree in Scotland. His choice was influenced by his father who was a merchant marine officer who saw the works of British engineers and contractors around the world in the 1940s through the 60s. He was also influenced by the owner of an estate in Perthshire for whom his uncle worked as head gamekeeper, the 'laird', himself a civil engineer, who had won the Military Cross in a bridging operation under fire in the Second World War.

Martin's book does not set out to educate or teach. The joy and satisfaction of a fruitful career shines through.

The insight for engineers and others, that comes across in the book is, you make your own career. A career only becomes rewarding when you have been continuously applying yourself and accumulating the lessons learned, consciously or unconsciously, to make the next project better. Your career is not a job. It is a calling that you may come to realise later, when you have given yourself to it: a vocation. The accumulated lessons had become his entire career's CPD. Tilbury Docks Floodgate in southeast England and Smith Quay in Peterhead, Scotland, are just two examples of a lifelong CPD.

Immersing himself in the project landscape brought joy in a small way, he could see a way to harness the power of nature in a way that would benefit society: 'Engineering is the art of directing the great sources of power in nature for the use and convenience of man,' wrote Thomas Tredgold. Each completed project sometimes wrestled

from difficulties or near failure, brings it own satisfaction. He did not tire of seeing the good outcomes the projects brought. The trunk road in Hong Kong and Kinabatangan in Sabah, Malaysia, come to mind. The unsuccessful bid for work in Bhutan showed great potential which was unfortunately taken up by an Australian firm.

Martin had all of the above and also a successful family. He remarked that his career would not count for beans if there was no Margo by his side throughout the years to share the joy and companionship. Then came the three boys, David, John and Steven. All stalwart young men with families of their own.

Martin's recollection is remarkable in a career spanning almost five decades. With Google Maps at your fingertips, you can travel around the world in time. What a privilege to share this adventure. His thoughts about the future of civil engineering contract management are moot. The role of the civil engineer has been diminished in the new forms of civil engineering contract management. Costs have multiplied with no discernible improvement on quality. The promise of better delivery has also not materialised.

I met Martin in September 1981 when I was seconded into his team in Kuala Lumpur for the Sabah rural trunk roads. I designed several small steel bridges under his guidance. He was open and easy to work for. In January 1982, Margo, David and John attended my wedding to my wife Philomena. Over the years we remained friends and sometimes collaborated on work. I had the pleasure of meeting Martin in Singapore in February of this year; 42 years of a wonderful friendship.

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