

*When
They Were Mine*



MEMOIRS OF A BRANCH DAVIDIAN
WIFE AND MOTHER

SHEILA MARTIN
edited by CATHERINE WESSINGER

WHEN THEY WERE MINE

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WHEN THEY WERE MINE

Memories of a Branch Davidian
Wife and Mother

by

Sheila Martin

as told to Catherine Wessinger

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This book is dedicated to my mother,
Muriel Elizabeth Wheaton,
who has loved me all my life,
and
Joseph and Helen Martin and family,
who have borne a great burden,
and
all who have helped in my *going home*.
—Sheila Martin—

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FOREWORD

I met Sheila Martin on February 23, 2001, on my first trip to Waco. I and some other scholars were attending a conference at Baylor University in Waco hosted by the J. M. Dawson Institute of Church-State Studies and presenting papers there on new religious movements and religious liberty in America.¹ Sociologist Stuart A. Wright of Lamar University in Beaumont, Texas, made arrangements for some of the surviving Branch Davidians to come and meet with us after the conference. The Branch Davidians and some of the scholars subsequently adjourned to Waco's Cracker Barrel restaurant for further discussions.

The next day, Sheila Martin, accompanied by her daughter Kimberly, gave Susan J. Palmer and me a ride out to Mount Carmel, the site of the Branch Davidians' residence that became so famous in 1993 when it was the focus of a fifty-one-day siege by federal agents. The siege culminated in a tank and CS gas assault carried out by FBI agents, which resulted in a fire that killed seventy-six Branch Davidians

including twenty-three children. Sheila's husband and four oldest children died in the fire. We joined the other visiting scholars, who were given a tour of Mount Carmel by Sheila Martin, Clive Doyle, his mother Edna Doyle, Catherine Matteson, David Koresh's mother, Bonnie Haldeman, and her husband, Roy Haldeman, and groundskeeper Ron Goins. On the drive out to Mount Carmel, Sheila shared that she thought that Branch Davidian women's voices should be heard more. I certainly agreed and at that time I wondered whether I could facilitate that.

I had already written *How the Millennium Comes Violently: From Jonestown to Heaven's Gate*, which contains an extensive chapter on the Branch Davidian case. After returning to New Orleans I sent copies of the book to Sheila, Bonnie, Catherine, and Clive.²

I got to know Sheila and Kimberly Martin, Bonnie Haldeman, and Clive Doyle a little better when they came to New Orleans on February 10, 2002, for the appeal of their wrongful death lawsuit against the government being heard in the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit.³

I was back in Texas twice in 2003. David Tabb Stewart of Southwestern University in Georgetown, Texas, organized a symposium on "Waco: Ten Years After" to correspond with the tenth anniversary of the raid conducted by agents of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF) on February 28, 1993, which erupted into a shootout that killed four ATF agents and five Branch Davidians, wounded many, and precipitated the fifty-one-day siege. A sixth Branch Davidian was shot and killed by ATF agents later that day as he attempted to return to Mount Carmel on foot. Guest scholars James T. Richardson, Stuart A. Wright, and I, along with David Tabb

Stewart and his students, attended a memorial service in the new chapel at Mount Carmel on February 28, 2003.⁴

I returned to Mount Carmel on April 19, 2003, for the tenth anniversary memorial service commemorating the fire and all those who died at Mount Carmel in 1993. While I was there, I resolved to devote my 2004–2005 sabbatical to collecting the oral histories of Sheila Martin, Bonnie Halde-
man, Clive Doyle, and Catherine Matteson, if they would permit it. I drove back to Waco in August 2003 to ask them if I could interview them extensively during my sabbatical, and they agreed.

Sheila Martin's autobiography is based on four ninety-minute audiotapes recorded on March 9 and 10, 2004; a fifth interview in February 2006 about the meaning of her drawings (see the appendix); and a sixth interview recorded in April 2007. In 2004, on the very first night that we got together in her living room, Sheila immediately spoke about the traumatic experiences of 1993 when her husband, Douglas Wayne ("Wayne") Martin (42), and their four oldest children, Wayne Joseph Martin (20), Anita Marie Martin (18), Sheila Renee Martin (15), and Lisa Marie Martin (13), died in the fire that consumed the residence at Mount Carmel. Sheila had come out earlier in the siege hoping to be rejoined with her three youngest children who had been sent out, Jamie Martin (11), who had been severely handicapped by meningitis, Daniel Martin (6), and Kimberly Martin (4). Jamie subsequently died in 1998. Sheila wanted to speak of her experience of these traumatic events and her feelings about them in our interviews.

Sheila then suggested that we continue the interview while on a drive the next day from Waco to Six Flags over Texas in

Fort Worth along with her daughter Kimberly. They wanted to pick up some season passes at Six Flags. I was surprised at the idea, but it worked out perfectly. It was raining that day. With the windshield wipers going, I drove, while asking Sheila questions about her life, and Sheila spoke into my small tape recorder. The rain stopped long enough for us to enjoy a brief visit to Six Flags, including a memorable experience on the Sponge Bob ride. We continued the interview on the drive back to Waco, again in the rain. The trip to Six Flags was exactly the fun break we all needed from complete immersion in Sheila's story of her keenly felt loss of loved ones. The interviews were concluded back in Waco.

Sheila reports that her mother was always busy and always moving around. Sheila is a lot like that herself. She constantly has a project going to improve her house. She works hard to provide a nice home for her children and herself. I have assumed that she learned her construction skills while living at Mount Carmel and participating in David Koresh's building projects. Sheila loves taking care of her children, and Daniel and Kimberly will soon be out on their own. She also loves taking care of the small children in her charge at the Christian daycare center where she works. Sheila loves to nurture life and growth, whether it is her plants, animals, the children at the daycare center, or her own children. Sheila values life.

I am impressed with Sheila's spirituality. She trusts in God's grace and love. She is keenly appreciative of the small blessings of daily life, including the interest and kindness of people who have helped her, her family, and the other Branch Davidian survivors after the fire. I have learned that the Branch Davidians at Mount Carmel were a large, uncon-

ventional family and that the sense of kinship among the survivors remains strong. Sheila wants the general public to get to know her immediate family members and the Branch Davidians as real people; those who died in 1993 were human beings who are missed by their loved ones. This is the reason she is publishing this autobiography.

The Methodology

The audiotapes recorded in 2004, 2006, and 2007 were transcribed by several assistants and corrected by me. The initial copyediting was done by Alanda Wraye, and I did the final copyediting and arranging. Sheila Martin proofread the manuscript three times making additions and corrections. Sheila gave me the title, *When They Were Mine*, on one of my visits to Waco.

I visited Waco in December 2005 to scan Sheila's family photographs and in February 2006 to photograph her drawings, a number of which are included in this book.

This autobiography is in Sheila Martin's own words. Grammar has been corrected throughout, but not extensively to preserve the spoken nature of Sheila's account. I have added footnotes to provide context and further information about the events and people that Sheila discusses.

Acknowledgments

I thank Sharon Orgeron, Erin Proven, Deborah Halter, and Alanda Wraye for their care in transcribing the audiotapes. I am grateful to Alanda Wraye, who has ably served as editorial assistant. Without her work and interest, this project

would have taken much longer to complete. I thank my son, Clinton Wessinger, for serving as my technical assistant in converting the audiotapes to digital files.

I thank Loyola University New Orleans for a grant that paid for part of my travel costs to Waco, and for the Rev. H. James Yamauchi, S.J. Professorship in the History of Religions, which since 2006 helps to fund my continued Branch Davidian research. I am very grateful to my parents, Bryson and Ellen Lowman, for a financial gift that supported my sabbatical, and also paid for transcribing and the initial copyediting. I thank them for all their love and support.

I am grateful for the vision of Carey Newman, director of Baylor University Press, in publishing this second Branch Davidian autobiography; and to Diane Smith, production manager; and Jay Bruce, the Baylor University Press copy-editor, for their expert and professional handling of the manuscript.

Most of all I thank Sheila Martin for so generously sharing her life's story with me. It is a privilege to know her.

Catherine Wessinger

PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK

The most important thing I want the readers of this book to know is that there were people at Mount Carmel with David Koresh, who were living lives every day, who had the same hopes, dreams, wishes, and desires as everyone else to do well. They believed in God. They wanted to please God and the people around them. They wanted to be able to learn how to love more—to love not only themselves, but the people around them, and first of all, to love God. We knew everything else would trickle down from loving God first. Once we had a true understanding and love for God, we could do everything else, whether it's waiting, or going through times when things are not always good. The people at Mount Carmel just wanted to have a chance to be alive, just to wake up and say: "It's a new day. No matter what happened yesterday I can do better today. With God's help, I can be nicer to a person than I was the day before. If they weren't nice to me, I can show them I can still love them no matter what the situation."

I feel the government took that away from the people who died at Mount Carmel.⁵ The little babies and the young people, especially, were robbed of a chance to even have a choice about how to live their lives. The adults made the choice to come to Mount Carmel to read and study the Bible; they should have had it.

There's this other thought that stays in the back of my mind. While we were inside Mount Carmel with the federal agents outside, David said they were obeying their commanders. They needed to do what they were told to do. David said that we should strive to have that same relationship with God. Sometimes God sends a better understanding of how to obey him to people who are open to it. Sometimes God puts these people in a strange place. It happened many times in the Bible, and David said maybe it's happening again.

When we were in Palestine,⁶ David said all we had to do was get up, eat the food that was provided, and read our Bibles, but we made choices to do other things and not to use our time wisely for God. Then we got to Mount Carmel and really started working.⁷ It seemed like there was never an end to the work. Then this situation occurred in 1993 when the federal agents came and people died. We didn't need that. We didn't want it. It wasn't something we would have ever thought was going to happen. Yet under certain circumstances we were willing to accept whatever God chose to do for us, including our deaths. We just didn't know how it would happen, and we didn't want it to be in such a horrible way.

I want people to know that there were families at Mount Carmel, people who loved each other, who wanted the best for each other, and who most of all wanted God.

EARLY LIFE IN BOSTON

I was born in March 1947 in Boston, Massachusetts, a city where history abounds. I lived and experienced it all in the early part of my life. The different lifestyles, the museums and universities, and the neighborhoods, all have influenced me in so many ways. I didn't realize that no matter how far away I moved from my birthplace I would be forever linked by not only family ties but also by a date that I celebrated every year until I left Boston at age 22. The date is April 19! I celebrated it as a holiday from school, Patriot's Day, and I noted the Boston Marathon's popularity and importance in our country and the world. I was always surprised at how it could snow so late in April. I even remember memorizing the "Midnight Ride of Paul Revere," and can still repeat it.⁸

But what happened on April 19, 1993—the day I will never forget until Christ comes again—made the date take on a very different meaning. Now I associate that day with the deaths of my friends and the deaths of my dear husband and four beautiful children. Deaths so horrible, so utterly horrible, that to have to wonder how they looked when it was all over for them that day becomes unbearable. Sometimes now in all the hustle and bustle of life, I can almost forget, but then I only have to look at their pictures and all the feelings of that day in April come back.

My mother, Muriel Elizabeth West Wheaton, and my dad, Harold Charles Wheaton, had six children, three boys and three girls. I was the first of the three girls.

My mother was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, of parents from Danville, Virginia, and Providence, Rhode Island. The racial lines in her family included white, Native

American, and African heritage. It meant many cultures in one family, many different complexions and facial features ranging from very white to very dark and all in-between.

My father's family was from Nova Scotia and included African, Native American, and French and English people. Recently I read of a book that speaks of slave families that left America with the British after fighting with them against the Americans in the Revolutionary War. After the war ended the black families went to live in Nova Scotia. I couldn't believe my eyes. I had told people all my life that my father's family came from there, and now I was learning how they came to be living there. I then realized where the defiant part of me comes from. Perhaps that is what helped me to make a break from my religious background toward a new religion, even though I had to stand alone.

My mother had a brother and two sisters. My father had a big family—maybe there were five brothers and a sister. So we had a big family life and most of us were in the Episcopal Church. I grew up thinking in more of a Catholic mode because the Episcopal church we attended was high church.

My mom was always busy, moving around. Until a few years ago, she had very dark hair. I remember her standing at the stove curling her hair with a little curling iron. She still does that. I am glad I have all these little memories of my family.

I was happy. We did not worry too much about what things we had. We just kind of accepted things as they were.

My earliest memories are of living on the second floor of my maternal grandmother's house. We knew her as "Mama." She had left grandpa and eventually bought a couple of houses. My father and mother, along with their children,

were occupying the second floor of her house in the Roxbury section of Boston. My grandmother, my mother's brother and sister and her sister's two children lived on the third floor. A German couple lived on the first floor. I remember only one other child of color on my street. Some of our relatives, some older and some younger, lived on a few streets around us. The children on our little street attended the elementary school next to our house. We moved away when I was seven.

Our next neighborhood was in the Franklin Field projects. We were the only family of color in our apartment house. These were much nicer projects than the ones across the city. I found out later that there were many cousins living in the back of the project area.

The neighborhood was changing from predominantly Jewish to a Christian neighborhood, with some parts dominated by Irish Catholics. From the fourth through the sixth grades, I was one of only thirty Christian children who attended school on the Jewish Holy Days, which were observed by the Jewish children at my elementary school. This was a very large school in a highly populated area of the city. We also saw the Jewish children attending Hebrew School across the street every afternoon. I realize now that God was preparing me for an understanding of a lifestyle that I would adopt myself much later on.

We lived at the Franklin Field projects for four years. My father, a master plumber, did not work as I feel he should have. My mother took up the banner of working to support the family. There were no school buses or rides in the family car to school. We walked many long roads to school early each morning. Even though we were on our own so much, I know God was taking care of us. I remember arriving very

early one morning at school when I was in the third grade. The teachers let me in because it was cold. They gave me milk and Saltine crackers. That was my breakfast. I appreciate so very much their care and concern. I don't tell this story because I was being neglected, but to illustrate how resilient we were as children. God was surely looking over us. I've not forgotten the taste of that simple breakfast.

I was preparing to attend junior high school in a district I knew was going to be a challenge, primarily because of my race, when I was told we would be moving again. We moved to Lawrence Avenue in the Dorchester area of Boston. My mother still lives there. After being in the previous neighborhood with mostly Jewish people, where I was just one of about thirty Christian kids in school, we moved to a neighborhood that was mostly black. In the seventh grade I was meeting new people, trying to adjust to a whole new life—everything was different.

My school again was next door to my grandmother's house. When we moved there our aunt and cousins were living above us again. This time we were on the first floor. Eventually my grandma, my mother's brother, and a handyman moved into the second floor.

A year later my aunt and her family moved to California and that left the third-floor apartment vacant. We were told a family from New York was moving in. One day in August of 1963 I watched four children climb the front steps. My first reaction was to hope the family would hire me as a babysitter. Then I saw five adults walking behind them. I realized that with that many adults they wouldn't need me for babysitting, but God still would have me involved in their lives and they in mine. I was about to enter the twelfth grade and I was