Synopsis

Born 1943 in Cuba
At 12 sent for two years to school in Canada
Varsity HS football star
Emigrated Miami 1960
Car mods/racing 61-65
Univ of Fla 65-67
BS Engineering 1967
Married 1967
Caltech (MS) 67-68
To Wash DC 68
Satellites 68-87
Remarried 1973
Charlie born 1975
Consultant to GE, govts, others
Went to Miami 1987
Jet engines 87-98
Lauren born 1992
Remarried 1995
Semi-retired 1998
Became pilot 1998
Divorced 2014
Maggie Roche>2014

Foreword

This is **not** a great biography. Just something for me if I forget and a resource for my descendants. It covers key moments in my life, so it includes explicit (sexy) material, but they're well marked.

Some pictures can be enlarged by clicking them (zoomable). Depending on your browser, videos and MS Word documents may be downloaded rather than displayed.

For briefness, some details have been relegated to footnotes, but they contain information of importance to those wanting a full understanding of this biography -- (e.g., that I was a D/F student as a child but went on to graduate *Summa Cum Laude* in Engineering and go to Caltech for my Master's).

Ernesto R. Martin

An Autobiography

A short synopsis appears at left.

This web version lacks some parts.

Chapter I: The Early Years

It was 1943, roughly in the middle of the Second World War. Let me set the stage: no cell phones, no color TV (let alone satellite TV) and no computers.

I was born that year, on October 27, in Havana, Cuba, the oldest of what would be three boys. At the time, our life in Cuba was essentially the same as living in the U.S. All of my great-grandparents were from Spain and had emigrated to Cuba[1]. We lived then at #317 16th Street, Unit 2, between 3rd and 5th Avenue, in Miramar, a trendy neighborhood of Havana. We were middle class, both my parents worked, and we had two live-in maids. Don't assume that's a big deal -- while in Cuba most things were like in the U.S., other things were different[2].

A year and a half later came my brother Ricardo, better known as Dicky (with me in the picture below). And I had friends next door, principally Hector ("Tico") Betancourt, with whom I remained friends most of my life and who I would join as a business partner 45 years later.

Life went on. In 1948, after 2 years of Pre-K and Kindergarten, I was enrolled in first grade at The Phillips School, one of several American schools in Havana catering to the sons and daughters of American businessmen and diplomats. And, in 1949, my second brother, Jorge, was born.

Our social life mostly revolved around a social, sports and yacht club we belonged to, **Miramar Yacht Club**, or simply "the Club". In the summers we spent most every day there, swimming on the beach or playing organized sports or sailing or just hanging. Often with little parental supervision, since the members knew each other well. It was not unusual, as the kids got bigger, to just be dropped off at the Club, with friends of my parents alert to our activities.

One noteworthy item was football (the American version, which in pre-Castro Cuba was far more popular than soccer). Noteworthy because I was horrible and my Dad, a star player in his youth, was like the lead football person at the Club: he had introduced it, had gotten the equipment, coached the adult teams, and was on the Club's Board of Directors as the football representative. I was short, chubby, slow and unaggressive -- an embarrassment to my jock Dad. In fact, my round body[3] and a large birthmark on my left cheek earned me the nickname "Bola de Churre", or "Ball of Dirt", with other kids teasing me that I had failed to clean dirt off my face; to this day, friends still call me "Bola"[4].

Chapter II: Off to Canada

To Canada? Yep, at the tender age of 12, in September 1956, having finished eighth grade at Phillips[5], I was sent[6] to a boarding school in Oakville, Ontario, to start my High School education. Appleby College, an all-boys boarding school with an ROTC-like military program on the shores of Lake Ontario, offered the promise of improving my English to near-perfection (which it did). The other hope -- that I would improve my eating habits of not eating any vegetables, salads or fruits -- that didn't work.

On Sundays I was required to walk about 3 miles to the Catholic church in town. Not a big deal normally, except we're in Canada and it was often 30 degrees below freezing and the winds from the lake were fierce.

An unintended consequence of Appleby College is that I became a star football player. A combination of rapid growth (nearly a foot in nine months, to 5'10"), an active life of sports and 5 AM military drills which eliminated fat, and a persistent coach who taught me that the harder I hit, the less I would feel it, did the trick. I was a starter the first year -- receiver and running back on offense, secondary on defense -- and by the second year had become one of the best players in the JV team. The monthly reports sent by the school to my family were gleefully received by my father.

But it was a tough time for me. Short and chubby initially, with a darker skin color and an accent, I was not the popularity poster child among Nordic (read: blonde) boys. And the birthmark on my face didn't help. I wasn't discriminated against, but I was an "other". I had essentially one friend.

On weekends, most boarding students were invited to the home of friends who were day students and lived nearby. I was seldom invited, and spent most weekends by myself. That Christmas of 1956 was particularly tough, because I was not able to go back home for the holidays. Fortunately, a Cuban family which I knew slightly invited me to join them on their Christmas visit to New York City. But it wasn't the same. In a hotel, with essentially strangers, no family, no Christmas tree, no gifts.

To add misery, my mother, the disciplinarian in the family, insisted that I also study Cuban courses (Spanish, Cuban history and geography, etc.) while in Canada. She would send me the material for me to study, so that when I returned to Cuba in the summer I would pass the "bachillerato" (Cuban High School) exams. "It will keep you busy on your lonely weekends", she would say. This on top of my regular classes, where my grades had improved to B's and C's.

Needless to say, I was relieved to return to Cuba for the summer holidays. And this summer was special. First, we now lived a mere two blocks from the Club[7], at 9209 Avenue 3B, between 92 and 94 Street. Second, my Dad had bought a boat for skiing and running around, and allowed me to use it. Third, my brother Dicky, always handsomer and more social than I had been, had discovered girls and quickly introduced me. Fourth, I wasn't the same pudgy kid of 9 months earlier; I was now a tall, athletic and more confident boy, whose exploits on the football field had been dutifully reported by Dicky.

So that summer was an awakening. I had a wonderful time, went to lots of parties, was very popular, and had several girlfriends. I mention just one of them, Mariate, because of what was to come. She was my girlfriend at the end of the summer, when I left for my second year in Canada. Parting was very tough. I was, I thought, deeply in love. Yeah, I know I was only 13, but that's how I felt. And a popular romantic song then, *La Barca*, was of a couple separated by travel, and became our song.

Of course, I had negotiated my return to Canada with my parents, insisting that it include a trip home for the Christmas holidays. I simply refused to go without it. Those four months in Canada until Christmas were easier. I had Mariate to daydream about (and her letters to fuel those dreams) and I knew that I would soon be home.

The only hiccup in this whole deal came when I finally got from my parents the tickets to go home. I had been waiting for the thick envelope that would signal their arrival, and opened it with great haste. Only to find that, yes, there were airplane tickets in the envelope, but from Miami to Havana. From Canada to Miami I was going Greyhound bus. Alone. At 14 years of age[8].

It was a great Christmas break, but at the end it was tough saying goodbye. Especially separating again from Mariate. And getting back on the bus in Miami for the 2-day trip road trip to Canada. And going back to the frigid north in January.

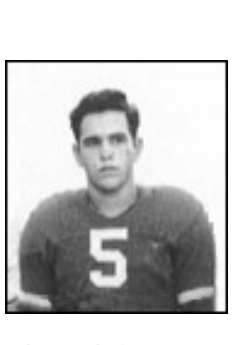
Time passed. Then, about two months later, one of Mariate's letters was a "Dear John" letter. In retrospect, of course, it wasn't unusual. I was 14, she 13. This was puppy love.

But that's all with the benefit of hindsight. At the time I was devastated. It took months for me to recover. And if school had been tough the first year, it was a breeze compared to what I was going through now. If it seems that I'm devoting far too much time to this, it's because it had a profound effect on me. You need to understand that in Canada, without friends and in an alien environment, I had built an illusory world around the relationship with Mariate. It would not be inaccurate to say that my life revolved around her. And then, suddenly, it ended.

There is another reason....[**Caution:** Explicit material follows; to read it **click here**].

Chapter III: Back in Cuba

Returning to Cuba in June of 1958, I went back to my social activities at the Club. In the first football season after my return, I was unquestionably the best player in the Club's 15-and-under team (like JV). For the next two years, I starred in this team and then in the 18-and-under team (like varsity); my performance was heralded in the sports pages of several of Havana's leading newspapers and 50 years later I would be inducted into Cuba's Sports Hall of Fame[9]. This success came mostly because of my tall, athletic build and the training in Canada, but I had also developed a strong and accurate arm for forward passes. My Dad was delighted and the girls flocked.



In addition to having lots of girlfriends, I made a new group of friends. We called ourselves the "Pito-Pitos" and attended most parties given by girls our age, whether we were invited or not. A favorite activity was reading the "sociales" in the newspaper, calling the homes of "quinceaneras" as if we were caterers to get the address and time of the party, and then crashing it. Most in our group were handsome, good dancers, very social, well dressed and from good families. So, even though we often didn't know the celebrant, the girls and their parents welcomed us, in part because the invited boys were often shy and didn't dance or hung around in boy-only clusters for much of the party. Our arrival was often followed by whispers of "the Pito-Pitos are here", gleefully by the girls, who recognized that there would now be some dancing and that the party was about to get lively, and despairingly by the boys, who knew that new suitors had arrived.

One humorous anecdote during this period....[**Caution:** Explicit material follows; to read it **click here**].

For my last two years of High School, I was enrolled at another American school in Havana, Lafayette School. Aside from football and girls, my time in Cuba was unremarkable, despite the turmoil at the start of 1959, when Castro overthrew the dictatorial regime. At first there was wide support from all sectors. But his communist bent soon appeared and my Dad's business, the distributor of Westinghouse electronic products (TV's, radios, record players) was threatened. Things went from bad to worse, and on October 23, 1960, four months after I graduated from High School, my parents sent Dicky and me to Miami, where they soon followed with my brother Jorge.

One of the consequences of leaving Cuba is that my family lost everything they had, including the house in Miramar (bought 10/12/56) and other real estate property[10]. But property paled by comparison to what else we lost. Our lifestyle, our beloved Miramar Yacht Club, the ability to have two live-in maids who pampered you, going out on our boat. Selfish, I know, but when you've been used to something for over a decade, it's tough to live without it.

One of the other consequences....[**Caution:** Explicit material follows; to read it **click here**].

Chapter IV: Immigrants in Miami

I was 16, about to turn 17, and the life I had known was gone. More significantly, my expectations now were very uncertain. In Cuba I had expected to go to college, get a career and live a pretty good life, with my parents there to help if I needed it. Now, we were dirt poor, my Dad couldn't find a job, and I had to go immediately to work to help support my family. Although I had graduated from High School in Cuba, my plans for college had to be put on hold.

I bounced from job to job -- stock clerk at a woman's lingerie store (which in later life would be blamed for my near-fetish with women's breasts), shoe salesman, gas station attendant, deliveryman -- all in the course of about a year. Then, in 1961, looking for yet another job, I spied an advertisement seeking an auto parts salesman for Murray's Auto Supply, then at 901 NW 62 Street, the biggest speed equipment supplier in Miami. This, I felt, was for me.

I had been a car enthusiast for years. Many of my lonely moments in Canada had been spent devouring car magazines, from Road & Track to Motor Trend to Hot Rod. I could not only recognize just about every car on the road -- even the most exotic -- but I knew all the tricks to juice them up. Four-barrel carburetors, special camshafts and headers were part of my vocabulary. And after Canada, when I returned to Cuba, I had been involved in racing in what you would now call a "groupie", someone who hung around the races, knew the drivers and did odd jobs to prepare the cars.

The problem, however, was that the ad called for an experienced auto parts salesman. I needed to get in the door for an interview. But how? The plan I devised was to, well, lie. I claimed to have been a parts salesman at the Volkswagen dealer in Havana. This had two advantages. First, no one could possibly check, because the VW dealer had long closed and because commercial relations with Cuba had ceased. Second, with a rear, air-cooled engine, the VW Beetle was so vastly different from virtually every other car, that if I got the job and made mistakes, it could be explained by that, instead of exposing my utter lack of experience.

I was upset with lying but rationalized it on the basis that I was far more knowledgeable than a Volkswagen parts salesman. Anyhow, I got the job. I made a few mistakes, but I knew my stuff and spent many a night poring over catalogs and technical papers. Within two years I was made head of speed equipment. I was 20 years old, still living with my parents at 7770 SW 19 Street.

And with a steady and growing income, I started modifying and racing cars as a hobby **(more)**. I was pretty busy, what with my job, racing, and girl friends (especially one, Fifi, who you will meet in a moment). But I found time to go to school at night. I was first admitted to the University of Miami and after a semester transferred to Miami-Dade Junior College, where I slowly progressed towards an Associate Degree.

Shortly after being promoted at Murray's Auto Supply, the owner of a competing business, Sav-On Auto Parts, wooed me to run their store on West Dixie Hwy and 125 Street in North Miami Beach (they also had two other stores, in Hollywood and Fort Lauderdale). For two years I grew the business, expanding into exporting racing equipment and later modifying cars for racing, including complete engine, suspension and brakes modifications on a car for then-famous Peruvian racer **Pitty Block** for him to run in a race akin to the ***Carrera Panamericana*** -- and racing these cars on the track to fine-tune the modifications was a nice perk for me, especially since I was getting paid for it! The North Miami Beach store, which had been doing half the business of the flagship Fort Lauderdale store when I was hired, now became the lead store.

Chapter V: Off to College and Marriage

And then, in 1965, I quit. The job had become mundane. I had now been working on making cars faster for nearly five years, but I didn't have the basic foundation to go beyond what I was doing. Without an engineering degree, I had gone as far as I could. And I wanted to go further. Sav-On's owner, Sonny Swartz, offered me a blank check to stay, even equity, but my mind was set.

I had my Associate Degree from Miami-Dade, so I enrolled at the University of Florida and headed for Gainesville. In High School and Junior College my grades had been average, more C's than B's. Could I cut it? If I couldn't, I knew I could go back to Sav-On and the deal Sonny offered. I decided to find out quick, by choosing in my first term, not only a full load, but enrollment in the two toughest courses: modern physics (relativity, quantum mechanics, etc.) and strength of materials.

I aced both. I spent two and a half years in Gainesville, getting straight A's in engineering and physics courses, and living away from my family for the first time. I learned much, and not all technical. One professor, Dr. Nevill, urged me to subscribe to Time or Newsweek and read it cover to cover weekly, to widen my knowledge base and vocabulary. "Telling it well is often as important as doing it", he said, "you're destined to be an extraordinary engineer, but expressing yourself in an articulate and compelling manner, having the ability to give "Wow" presentations, will spell the difference between regular success and overwhelming success". I followed his advice.

Another professor, Dr. Schwartz, encouraged me to change curriculums, from mechanical to aerospace engineering. I met him when I took an aerospace engineering course as an elective and he soon learned of my plans to practice automotive engineering after graduation. "That's a dead end", he said, "everything mechanical about cars is already known, old stuff -- the future is out in space, that's where you need to go".

In 1967, at the age of 23, I graduated with High Honors (*summa cum laude*). My degree was a Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering, and I would eventually become a member of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME) and the Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE).

But I took Dr. Schwartz's advise to move more towards aerospace by accepting an offer to go do my Master's in Jet Propulsion at the California Institute of Technology. Caltech offered me a Teaching Assistantship, where I would help teach undergraduates and in return get free tuition plus a monthly stipend of $200. I had used student loans to finance my Bachelor's, so I was happy not to have to add to my debt.

So in August of that year I packed my bags and headed west -- but first I got married.

Over the past several years I had been dating a Cuban girl called Fifi part of the time and another Cuban girl part of the time[11]. Fifi and I ended up in love and, even though she knew that I would probably move to an aerospace job far from Miami and that both she and her mother would hate it, she wanted to get married and said that she would happily go with me anywhere.

So I married Fifi (real name: Ofelia Perez Tejera) in August of 1967. After honeymooning in Las Vegas, we arrived in Los Angeles and the first thing I did was buy a new Mustang fastback, my second new car (the first one was a 1963 Corvair Monza, which followed several used cars, the most notable of which was a 1955 Chevy convertible).

Caltech was great. There was, however, a hiccup upon arrival. My counselor informed me that all the professors had chosen their assistants and that, regrettably, they would not need me as a Teaching Assistant. I guess my facial expression revealed my panic, so he quickly told me that the deal was still on, just that I didn't have to work (he said "regrettably" because graduate students at Caltech look forward to assisting professors; I was most happy to get the free tuition and the money, and not have to work). That allowed me to pursue my studies quicker and in just 10 months, in June 1968, I graduated with my Master's.

Chapter VI: Off to Work

I had expected to find work with an aerospace corporation like Hughes or Lockheed. There was only one problem: I was Cuban. And Cuba was a communist country. And most of the work at these firms was military. (That I had left because I was anti-communist didn't matter to our bureaucratic government.) So I accepted an offer from Communications Satellite Corporation, better known as Comsat, the world's largest provider of commercial (not military) satellite communications in the world. Comsat was located in Washington, DC.

In the paragraphs that follow, my work at Comsat may be too detailed, so I'll summarize it here and put the details in light green below, so you can skip it. I spent nearly 20 years at Comsat. The first five were in research, working on satellite and rocket issues that were cutting edge because we knew little about space (this was before we had landed on the moon). Over the next 15 years I advanced from project engineer to project manager to division director to assistant vice president to vice president, including a 2-year stint in Europe working with the European Space Agency. At the end I was involved in business and financial matters, regulatory affairs, and mergers & acquisitions. Abstracts of two of my published papers show the transition. The first, on the effect of fuel slosh on the dynamic stability of a satellite, may be seen here (that work in the pioneering field of rotating fluid dynamics was acknowledged by the satellite manufacturer here) and the second one 13 years later on the business aspects of Direct Broadcat Satellite services (like DirecTV) may be seen here. In addition to my published papers, some of the work was recorded in various publications and newspapers, including two articles in The Financial Times (Europe's equivalent of The Wall Street Journal).

My wife, Fifi, who had worked as a bookkeeper in Pasadena while I was at Caltech, was also hired by Comsat and we made many friends upon arrival at Comsat.

But my work filled my life. I was working on satellite and rocket issues that were cutting edge. This was before we had landed on the moon, so a lot was still to be learned about space matters. For instance, one of my first assignments was to determine how wide does the exhaust plume from a small rocket expands. Does it expand so wide that it turns back and hits the body of the satellite? We didn't know.

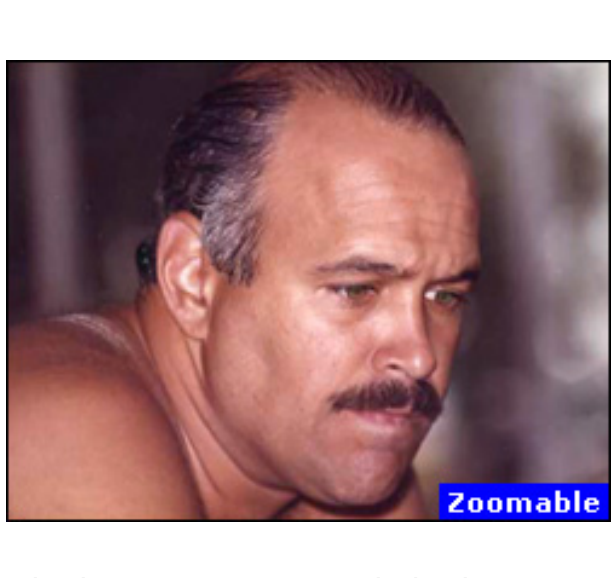
At Comsat Laboratories I was surrounded by brilliant scientists and engineers who, like me, had advanced degrees. If one thing distinguished me from all of them, it was my business sense (from having run Sav-On) and my practical, can-do smarts (from years of preparing cars for racing, having to improvise when something went awry).

Two examples illustrate. In the first example, I did what most in the department thought was impossible**:** I was able to get a zero-gravity motion simulator a year earlier than planned, for $20,000 instead of the $100,000 that had been planned for next year's budget, using funds that had been budgeted in the current year for something else but were going to be lost. From then on, when the impossible needed to get done, the motto was "Talk to Ernie". I'll leave the details to **this footnote**[12].

The final example led to the first major engineering program under my direction. I got the assignment because, while my peers wanted to get an accurate solution to a critical problem, I lobbied for just getting an estimate. I'll again leave the details to **this footnote**[13], but suffice to say that my investigation of the effect of fuel-slosh on satellite stability saved us from losing an $80 million satellite that was only weeks from launch. And it brought me, less than two years into my first engineering job, to the attention of all the senior executives at Comsat. At the program's conclusion I was not only heralded for the results within the company[14] and spent weeks interacting with Comsat's President/CEO and most senior executives, but my research contributions in this pioneering field of rotating fluid dynamics was acknowledged by the satellite manufacturer, Hughes Aircraft Company, in this **paper**.

Chapter VII: Career Up, Home Life Down

A combination of factors -- including luck and showmanship -- had vaulted me to the attention of just about everyone at Comsat, barely two years out of school. But all was not roses. Things at home during this period had deteriorated. One reason was that Fifi was never happy. I probably neglected her, as I focused on these cutting-edge technologies and the demands of heading the critical fuel-slosh investigation. Also, she longed to be in Miami and it bothered her that her mother, widowed and with no other children, was desperately lonely. Soon her unhappiness started affecting me, and soon we started talking about separation and divorce. She left me in 1970 and returned to Miami. In 1971 we divorced.



But my life outside the office continued. I became a U.S. citizen and, after the separation from Fifi, dated frequently. I also continued my close friendship with many Comsat Labs employees, both male and female.

I had three relantionships with women, none of which led to anything, but two of them I remember because they were, well, different. One was with a beautiful married woman who worked at Comsat and had an exotic polynesian-like appearance. But what was noteworthy is that she liked risk in her lovemaking. Once she insisted we go make love on a golf course, during the day, with golf balls flying around us and players near us as we did our thing among the bushes. Another time she invited me to her home because she said her husband was out of town on business, and in the middle of our thing we hear the front door open, so I had to run semi-naked out the back door; when I learned a couple of days later that she knew her husband's return time, that she wanted the risk of being with me at about the time her husband was returning, I ended it with her. The other notable relationship was with a woman with whom I had to practice *coitus interruptus*.

At about that time, a couple which had been close friends with Fifi and me and had earlier accompanied us on a trip to New York, Augustine and Judy Calvo, started separating after Fifi left. Judy was a senior personnel administrator at Comsat Labs and someone I had gotten to like after a rough start (she and I had gotten in an argument shortly after I first joined the Company over a temporary secretary that was unqualified). Soon, Judy and I started spending time together, not romantically, but as friends going through the same process. We'd sit together at a pizza joint with other employees after a Company softball game, or ended up getting a bite to eat together after work. But one thing led to another and we were soon dating.

She took up skiing, which I had a passion for, and we went on trips together, sometimes as part of a group, other times just the two of us. A romance ensued. Things started getting serious. And Judy one day admitted to me that she had fallen in love with me while I was still married to Fifi. In the trip to NY which the four of us had taken, Augustine had been hitting on Fifi (and I, already unhappy with her, didn't care), so Judy had spent a lot of the time during the trip with me. She had loved me, she claimed, since before that, and the time in NY was the happiest she had been in years. We married in 1973 (picture above with my Mom and Dad) and soon moved into my first house at 6 Renwick Court in Rockville, Maryland.

Judy had one characteristic ....[**Caution:** Explicit material follows; to read it **click here**].

My rise at Comsat continued. After five years at Comsat Laboratories, I was transferred to headquarters to work, not on research, but on managing the design and construction of our satellites -- in essence, the machines which generated our revenues. I was promoted to Senior Engineer, and later Department Manager. My role entailed both engineering and program management, and required me to deal with our contractors (the people who built our satellites) and our clients (the people we sold satellite circuits to), all while supervising the Department's staff. The transfer and promotions were a recognition, not only of my management and business skills, but also of new skills I had developed beyond those I had. At Comsat Labs, while my peers stuck to their specialties, I found time to study communications technologies (antennas, transmitters, modulation, etc.) and computers so that I had broadened my expertise, from propulsion and space systems, to all the technologies used on communications satellites. I was now as much an electrical engineer as I was an aerospace engineer, and I became a member of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) and the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics (AIAA).

Chapter VIII: Off to Europe

In early 1975 I was relocated to Holland to work with the European Space Agency on a joint program between the U.S., Europe and Canada. We had an integrated program office, wherein I reported to a Frenchman and had several Europeans (as well as Americans) working in my Department. I would spend one and a half years there. During the first year, we rented a lovely home at 3 Kasteelhoff in Leiden.

Judy was also sent by the Company to Europe to provide administrative support to the dozen Comsat employees and their dependents sent to Holland. With two salaries, overseas cost-of-living allowances, and free house and car, we were saving quite a bit of money. And political hiccups in the program, with the Europeans wanting to go in one direction and the Americans in another, led to frequent work stoppages which allowed us to travel extensively throughout Europe. We had the Company car and just went. Paris for one week during one of the stoppages, Scandinavia on the next. And Paris was a city I got to know well due to my frequent visits on business trips, since the headquarters of the European Space Agency was there.

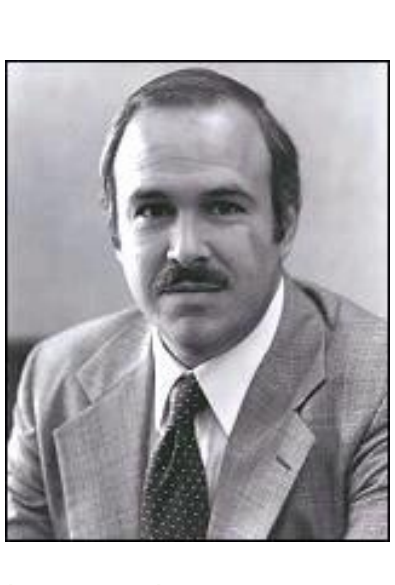
It was on a trip to Italy and Austria that fate smiled on us. We were having breakfast at the hotel in Salzburg on a warm morning in August of 1975 when we were summoned to take a phone call at the reception desk. Virginia (Ginny) Oehler, my boss' secretary in Holland and a good friend, asked me if I was sitting down. I said no and she said "Sit down" and when I did she said "You have a son". An attorney who for over a year had been trying to arrange a private adoption for us had a newborn boy for us and we had to get our butts to Kansas City ASAP.

For a couple of years back home, Judy and I had tried for her to get pregnant without success. We had gone to fertility specialists and they had found nothing, but still no pregnancy. We pursued state adoption, but the wait for a white newborn was so long, and our ages -- 30 and 33 -- such, that by the time a baby would be available we would be over the maximum age of 40. Kind of a catch-22. We weren't too old now, but we would be at the time of adoption. We were fortunate that a good friend from Comsat Laboratories who had moved to Kansas had met an attorney, Mrs. Leek, who specialized in private adoptions[15].

Mrs. Leek had agreed to help us and had been at it for about a year when we moved to Europe. She had assured us that the Europe posting would not reduce our chances of adoption, but we wondered. And here she had come through, with a baby boy born about a week earlier, on August 15[16]. We raced back to Holland, jumped on a flight to Kansas City and a day later had our son, Charles Sterling Martin, in our arms. We returned with him to Holland and spent the first year of his life there (1975 Christmas card picture above); we were fortunate to meet a lovely Dutch nurse, Louise Nelson, who cared for Charlie for about a year, allowing Judy to go back to work. In late 1976 we returned to the U.S.

Chapter IX: Back to the U.S.

In that last year in Holland, work stoppages still occurred and, now with a baby, we sometimes stayed home rather than travel[17]. And it was during those times, bored and with nothing to do, that I studied architectural books and became an amateur/frustrated architect. That soon led to designing a house for us, a bit roomier than the Rockville house, and when we returned to the U.S. I started looking for a lot to build our designed-by-me house. I found it in Gaithersburg, Maryland, and within two years we had built the **house** and moved in at 8109 Plum Creek Drive.



My career at Comsat accelerated after we returned stateside. Over the next ten years I became a Program Director, with several departments under me, and became responsible for programs and contracts worth hundreds of millions of dollars. Later I was promoted to Assistant Vice President and now spent considerable time in non-engineering endeavors. In addition to running programs (dealing with contractors and clients), I was responsible for regulatory matters, helping the U.S. State Department in international meetings and agreements. I advised the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). I had to travel overseas, sometimes advising foreign governments, sometimes trying to sell our services and products. Some of the work was recorded in industry publications and newspapers, including two articles in *The Financial Times*[18] (Europe's equivalent of *The Wall Street Journal*), but other work was not, at times because of its sensitivity[19].

In 1980 we had a house built for us at 6351 Lynwood Hill Road, McLean, Virginia. It was a large home, with lots of design ideas borne from my architectural bent, in one of the ritziest areas around Washington[20]. For 12 years I had lived a largely Anglo life. American wife. Suits, ties, and wingtip shoes. I expected much of the same in this expensive neighborhood. Imagine my surprise when a close neighbor turned out to be a Cuban architect, Carlos Deupi, who not only became a good friend but slowly started to bring me back to my Cuban roots -- from music to food.

The seven years we lived in McLean were very good years. I was continuing to enjoy Charlie (**3 pictures**) and was very involved with most facets of his life, especially sports. Charlie showed early signs of being an exceptional athlete, and I coached or helped coach his football and soccer teams.

I rose to become a Vice President of Comsat. In addition to engineering, business and financial matter, I started working on developing satellite services ***directly*** to consumers, and was now involved with such new areas as population density, per capita income, and mergers & acquisitions. It was the pioneering work of direct broadcast satellites ("DBS"), where satellite television would be received directly at the home by pizza-size dishes, like DirecTV but 10 years earlier. Although common now, it was revolutionary then, when reception of satellite television required massive dishes on the ground -- like 10 - 30 feet. In addition, DBS was ideally suited for delivering new subscription services to consumers, such as high definition television. I not only led the engineering team that developed the systems architecture for the first system in the U.S., with parameters that are used by today's systems, but was the only advocate of increasing cost/complexity of the home receiving unit to reduce the cost of the satellites, an approach used today but viewed as heresy at the time. As you'll see in a moment, Comsat never launched its DBS system, but when DirecTV was introduced 10+ years later using a complex home receiver, I was called by some the "inventor" of such systems. And my contrarian position was only one of three controversies[21].

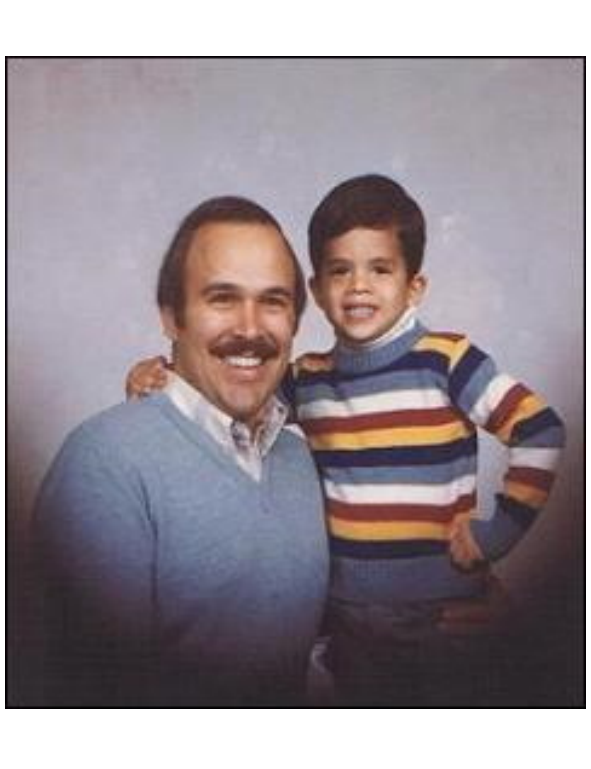
Although my work had shifted mostly to overall satellite systems and business matters, my earlier research on propulsion led me to participate in a 1983 request that the U.S. government made to the aerospace industry for an opinion on liquid rocket propulsion. The government wanted to know which were the strong areas and which were the weaknesses where more research was needed. I co-authored that **industry paper**.

In 1987, after many years of development and planning, with the two satellites nearly finished, Comsat abandoned the DBS program and wrote off $400 million, partly because it failed to find a suitable partner that would provide the television programming and partly because of uncertainty on whether the subscription service would be profitable in light of the large capital investments in the project. I made half a dozen trips (3 to Beijing) to try to sell the satellites to overseas entities without success. Even though my responsibilities had been increased and I was now far more involved managing financial and contracts matters, the end of the DBS program and other factors led me in late 1987 to leave Comsat, after 19 years, to go back to Miami. Actually, I was kept on Comsat's payroll for an additional year -- it was a form of "golden parachute", a way for the Company to reward me for the nearly 20 years of dedicated service and a distinguished record of publications in trade journals[22], since at the age of 44 I was too young to get retirement.

Chapter X: Headed Back to Miami

The seeds leading to the Miami move had been planted about four years earlier. Tico Betancourt, my childhood friend mentioned very early in this story, had become an engineer, had worked for an airline and now owned his own company of jet-engine parts. When I was single, between Fifi and Judy, we often met out West to go skiing and later our families often vacationed together at a house Tico rented in the Florida Keys (my earlier picture without a shirt was taken there). His company was growing rapidly, and he had asked me in the early 1980's to join his company's Board of Directors, largely because unlike me, he was a pure engineer and wanted my counsel on financial, management and administrative matters.

At the time, the company, named Amtec, was relying on scribbles on 3 by 5 cards to determine inventory, write invoices, etc. It was obvious to me, and he concurred, that his growth would come to a screeching halt without modernization. Specifically computers. Because I often found lots of idle time at Comsat (this is typical of the aerospace industry, in the periods between one program and the next), I offered to design, develop and implement an integrated business system custom tailored to his firm. For free.



I had developed and was developing similar computer systems at Comsat. The one I had in mind would be on a network, accessible to all the salesmen and other departments (accounting, inventory, etc.), and would provide instantaneous information on any given part -- how many we had in stock, what we paid for it, what we've been selling it for, etc. And a few keystrokes would allow the salesman to write the invoice, which would be distributed to the administrator for printing, to the warehouse to pull and ship the parts, and to accounting to update the accounts receivables ledger. Same for purchases.

In a few months I had written the software and developed the system, at times working from my office at Comsat, at times working from home in McLean. The network of computers and my software were installed in Miami and from McLean, using remote-control software, I would test, debug and resolve problems. It worked like a charm, and Tico was ecstatic.

In early 1987, about two years after the computer system was installed, Tico called me one day to say he was coming to Washington and would I please pick him up at the airport. He was kind of secretive, didn't want to say why he was coming. I picked him up and he soon disclosed the purpose of the trip: he came to recruit me. He wanted me to leave Comsat, where I was a Vice President of a $400 million company traded in the New York Stock Exchange, making a big salary and big perks (including a huge office), to go work at Amtec, an $8 million firm where I would have a tiny office.

I won't bore you with the details of why I said yes -- in part my feelings that Comsat's growth had peaked (as mentioned earlier, they had abandoned the DBS program), in part that I'd been in the same business for 19 years, in part the challenge -- but after months of negotiations we structured a deal where I would be the chief operating officer, running the business day-to-day, and gain equity if certain goals were met.