

**Publication:** Taranaki Daily News

**Headline:** Who is Lesley Martin?

**Print Run** 5/08/2006

**Date:**

**Text:** Few women in New Zealand polarise people more than **Lesley Martin**. The euthanasia campaigner, who was jailed for attempting to kill her mother, has just published a frank book on her life since her conviction. She talks to **MICHELLE SUTTON**

"I'M a nice girl, really, " insists the woman who tried to kill her mother, who is broke, getting over a failed marriage, still not talking to her sister. It has been 18 months since **Lesley Martin** was released, emotionally and physically shattered, from Arohata Women's Prison for attempting to kill her chronically-ill mother with an overdose of morphine.

**Martin**, sitting on the couch in her New Plymouth home, looks anything but nice. Striking, yes, driven, definitely, but certainly not nice. That's far too tame.

Her marriage to New Plymouth real estate agent Warren Fulljames is over.

She is in debt, she survives on a student loan, living with her 12-year-old son and her dog.

She thought 2004 was a tough year. It was, but last year was worse.

"I was exhausted. I really just wanted to quit. My marriage had broken up, then my eldest son was in an accident, then my brother died. It was just staggering."

She has vented her pain and anger \_ and there was plenty \_ in her new book, To Cry Inside.

There was always going to be a second book, says **Martin**, very matter-of-factly.

It was all part of her "master plan", a tongue-in-cheek term she uses, but it's no joke.

You see, **Martin** planned on getting charged with attempted murder and going on trial. It was why she confessed in her first book, To Die Like a Dog, to helping her mother die.

There needed to be a trial to bring her mother's mercy killing into the public, forcing national debate on voluntary euthanasia.

The master plan, which she formed in the months after her mother's death in 1999, was all about getting maximum public exposure in support of her cause to change the law.

"If you Google **Lesley**, plus **Martin**, plus euthanasia, there's 91,500 hits and obviously I'm not all of them, but there's a phenomenal amount of stuff out there. The whole point of that was to be heard, and I have succeeded."

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But success has come at a cost. **Martin's** marriage was one of the biggest prices paid, ending after two years.

"At the age of 40, both Warren and I had baggage . . . and I am neither going to betray his privacy by telling you his, nor tell you mine, " she says in the book.

Yet her analysis is intensely personal as she ponders whether the passionate marriage would have worked, even without the stress of an attempted murder charge.

The pair were married after **Martin** was arrested and just before her trial. From then, the relationship quickly deteriorated.

"By the time the trial came around, our marriage was causing me more heartache than the court ever would."

She says she and son Sean were kicked out of Warren's house two weeks before the trial. Money was a huge issue. She is still paying back the \$40,000 she owed her ex-husband.

In her words, she was a train wreck of a wife. Warren continued to work, controlled the finances, tried to control her work and looked after her son while she was in jail. She refused at first to apply for home detention.

"The only hope for our marriage, by that time, was that I go to jail and give Warren the peace he needed."

She changed her mind in jail and applied, but was turned down.

The signs for the marriage were not good, and they became worse when she was released from jail and wanted to live in a mobile home and keep moving, rather than live in her husband's new home.

"There was no longer any area of our marriage in which we stood on solid ground, and so, when Warren evicted Sean and me from his house for the fourth time, we simply left."

**Lesley** gives special thanks to Warren in her book. But he refused her offer to read the manuscript and declined to make any comment to the **Taranaki Daily News** this week.

The media is another love-hate focus throughout **Martin's** account. She is wary of

the media, but during this interview is confident, clever, always pushing her cause, occasionally flippant.

"The media are a powerful tool", she says, and one she has used well, appearing in almost every newspaper in the country, on television and radio. Critics labelled her a media slut, but she claims it was no ego trip, it was necessary to promote her cause.

"The media came to be both my best friend and my worst enemy, delivering either support, ridicule or hostility, seemingly on a whim, " she tells us in her book.

But she gives as good as she gets, criticising photographers and journalists by name who, she believes, have been unfair.

She is still fuming over an unflattering photo snapped in court and names the photographer in her book: "She knew that the resulting image would appear sinister."

But perhaps Leslie's harshest critic has been her younger sister, Louise. Louise has been blunt in her comments and the two don't talk.

"**Lesley** is selfish. She acted for herself only, " reads Louise's victim impact statement, in the book. "There is another side to **Lesley** that has been missed out of all this and that is her nastiness."

**Martin** says the two have never been close, they never got on, even before the trial.

It has taken **Martin** a year to recover from her month stretch in prison. Inside she became depressed, retreating to her cell. The only escape was weekly "buy-ups" where she bought handfuls of junk food and gorged on it.

She made friends, narrowly avoided any physical violence and worked in the library.

"You get so sluggish and so worn down. The less you do the less you want to do. It's very hard to rise above that **daily** and get your energy."

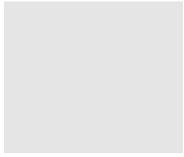
This year, for the first time in five years, she claims to be content. Campaigning for euthanasia still consumes her, but it's more of a job. She has found a balance now: she shops, walks the dog, exercises, tries not to eat too many chocolate biscuits.

At the end of the year she will move to Palmerston North where she is studying politics and psychology at Massey University. She wants to combine her own experience with academic research into the psychology of mercy killings, interviewing others who have helped someone to die.

She predicts that euthanasia legislation will be introduced to New Zealand within 10 years. Already she is mulling over plans to open a palliative care centre where euthanasia is also an option.

"The moment of my mother's death changed my life, ' **Martin** says, "so this is my life now." \*

\* **Martin's** book, To Cry Inside (Penguin, \$29.95), will be launched in New Plymouth



tonight.