

Chester “Chet” and Imogene Martin Family



Chester Frederick Martin about age 5, soon after moving to Dalton.



Chet Martin in 1927 at age 22.

Chester Frederick Martin was born on a farm near Bancroft, Nebraska in July, 1905. He was the youngest of the seven children Herman and Mary Martin had when they arrived in Dalton in 1908. During his high school years, Chet worked in a Dalton grocery store and a printing shop as a “printer’s devil.” He graduated from Dalton high school in 1922, and went on for a year at the University of Nebraska. He then worked in a grocery store in Gathemburg, Nebraska before returning to Dalton to become the bookkeeper for the local Chevrolet dealer for two years.

Imogene Mae Wood was born June, 1907 in Quinn, South Dakota to Ralph and Anna Wood. Her family moved to northern California where she lived for several years before they returned to the mid-west to settle in Dalton. Imogene graduated from Dalton high school in 1924, and soon went on to teach in an old country school near Dalton. She and Chet had known each other in school, and a romance developed after Chet returned to Dalton. They married in Dalton June, 1927 and left immediately for a honeymoon which took them to southern California. But, it wasn’t all about romance. Chet had a letter recommending him for employment in the auto parts department of a Chevrolet dealership in Long Beach. Chet got the job and they eventually settled in Wilmington, California. He became the auto parts manager and worked there for sixteen years. During World War II, Chet worked two years for a large shipbuilding company in the supply and parts department.

In 1944, Chet established his own Chet Martin’s Auto Parts business in Wilmington. Imogene gave up her housewife duties to serve as the office manager and bookkeeper. The business immediately flourished and grew rapidly. By 1946, Chet opened a new, ultra-modern store nearby. The building was especially designed and constructed for Chet. It was erected in only seven days with its pre-fabricated steel, concrete, and glass walls. Its unique construction and attractive appearance was a major news event in Wilmington.

At that time, he invited his brother Clarence to work with him in the new store. Imogene continued as the office manager



Chet Martin's Auto Parts innovative new store in Wilmington, California, 1946.

and developed a number of innovative ideas to promote the business and increase sales. Chet and Imogene were featured in an auto parts sales magazine for their successful customer-friendly marketing concepts.

Chet was active in community affairs and served as president of the Wilmington Chamber of Commerce, the Kiwanis Club and as an officer of a number of other civic, service, and professional organizations. Imogene, too, was active with community women's clubs and business organizations. Both were active members and officers of their Presbyterian church. They also enjoyed following college football, gardening, deep sea fishing, and traveling.

Chet died unexpectedly at the age of 52, in January, 1957, in a Long Beach hospital after suffering a heart attack at the auto parts store. Chet's brother Clarence helped Imogene manage the store for sometime, and she eventually sold the business to Clarence. Imogene died December, 1984 in Torrance, California.

Chet and Imogene had a daughter Carmen. She can recall, as a child, the one-week vacations that her parents took each summer to visit Dalton. They would drive straight through, crossing the Mojave desert at night to avoid the heat of the day. The trusty water bag was always hooked over the front bumper and ready in case the radiator became thirsty or overheated. Carmen and her husband John McGee had careers as teachers and school administrators, and currently live in Torrance. They have one child, Martin.



Chet and Imogene Martin on their 25th wedding anniversary in 1952, with their daughter Carmen, center.