William Ivan Martin was born in Hiawatha, Kansas in 1916. Bill grew up with no books in his home. Thus, when he started school, Bill said, “school was a painful experience as I was a struggling reader.” His first positive experience with reading and books did not happen until he was in fifth grade. His teacher, Ms. Davis, would read aloud to the class twice a day and use different voices and intonations to make the characters of the book come to life. All through elementary and high school, Bill was very good at hiding the fact that he could not read. Most of his teachers thought he was just lazy rather than illiterate. It was not until he went to college and majored in education that he read a complete book. He credits poets Robert Frost and Walt Whitman for his success in reading, as he loved their poetry. After graduating from Kansas State Teacher College in Emporia with an Early Childhood Degree, Bill taught high school journalism, drama, and English in Kansas.

Next, Bill served in World War II as a newspaper editor. During that time, Bill wrote his first book, *The Little Squeegy Bug* (1945) and his brother, Bernard Martin, was the illustrator. After the war, Bill became a principal at Crown Island Elementary School in Illinois for a short time. However, he quit his job and started working for the Holt-Rinehart, and Winston publishing companying. After several years, Bill became a free-lance writer and began speaking to other educators about the importance of loving to read and loving to teach. Bill considered himself a teacher first and a writer second. At the various professional development seminars, he shared stories about his childhood with the participants. Because he did not read an entire book until he was a freshman in college, he felt it was important that “on the first day of school, the child should have some sort of whole book success, the feeling of exhilaration that comes with the completion of an entire book.”

Bill was an advocate for creating books that have a strong voice. His books are full of rhyme, and musical language. Each book is unique with lively words that are rhythmic and highly patterned. “Descriptive adjectives and adverbs keep his books rocking, prancing, and wriggling across the pages.” Bill has authored or co-authored over 300 books. Bill said, “I don't write books, I talk them. I need to hear what I have to say.” He wrote books for over 40 years.

Bill spent the last 11 years of his life in Commerce, Texas. He passed away at the age of 88 on August 11, 2004. He is remembered for capturing the hearts of children, teachers, and parents with his loveable characters and unforgettable phrases. He donated both his library and a scholarship to Texas A&M University-Commerce. The library includes many of his published works, manuscripts, and letters from the great authors of children’s literature that illustrated his books. Each year, scholarships are given to students wanting to become teachers who will use the literature-based approach in the classroom while teaching reading. You can learn more about this and other scholarships at [http://web.tamu-commerce.edu/academics/colleges/educatio nHumanServices/departments/curriculumInstruc tion/resourcesAndOrganizations/scholarshipsFellowships.aspx](http://web.tamu-commerce.edu/academics/colleges/educationHumanServices/departments/curriculumInstruction/resourcesAndOrganizations/scholarshipsFellowships.aspx)

In addition, as a tribute to Bill Martin Jr, the Kansas Reading Association established a picture book award in his honor in 1996. One picture book is honored each year with a Bill Martin Jr Picture Book Award.