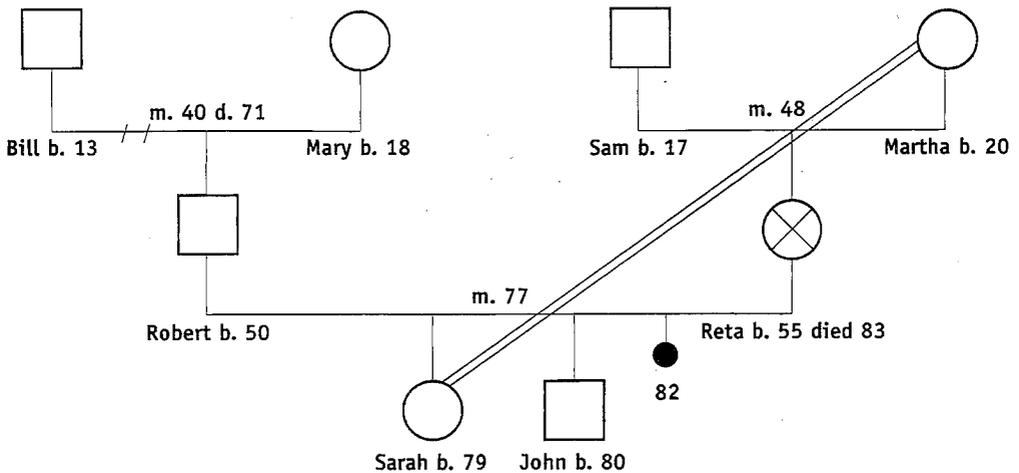# Understanding the Genogram

The purpose of the genogram is to allow us to visually observe the structure of our family, its history, and the nature of relationships within it. Sarah's genogram provides an example for you. Sarah was born in 1979 and she has one younger brother. Her mother, Reta, had a miscarriage, followed by cancer and death in 1983. Her father, Robert, never remarried. Robert's parents have been divorced since 1971, and he, Sarah, and John moved in with his mother, Mary. Bill, Robert's father, is a regular visitor to their home but lives alone in a retirement condo. Sarah's grandparents on Reta's side live across the country. Sarah feels close to Martha but not to Sam. Martha has made extra efforts to maintain her relationship with both Sarah and John. Grandpa Sam has talked to Sarah only once since her mother's funeral and that was when he happened to answer the phone. Sarah attends community college and lives at home. She has a steady boyfriend but has no plans to make any long-term commitments. You will notice that we did not include Sarah's aunts, uncles, or other relatives. Genograms can be as detailed or simple, comprehensive or brief as you want them to be. Use the space on the next page to plot your own genogram. Be as comprehensive as you like. Start with yourself and work outward through you family. It is advisable to use a pencil so that corrections can be made.

Sarah's Genogram

Bill b. 13   m. 40 d. 71   Mary b. 18   Sam b. 17   m. 48   Martha b. 20

Robert b. 50   m. 77   Reta b. 55 died 83

82

Sarah b. 79   John b. 80

Key to Genogram Symbols

m. = year married	b. = year born	Description of Relationships
d. = year divorced	died = year died	- - - - - - - - Distant
Male	○ Female	—┤├— Estranged or Cutoff
⊠ Deceased Male	⊗ Deceased Female	∿∿∿ Conflictual
△ Pregnant	⊗ ⊠ Stillborn	═══ Close
● Miscarriage	X Abortion	═══ Very Close
		Close and Conflictual

Marriage   Divorce   Cohabitating Couple