

# ***A Tribute to Martha***

***May 2008***



***Merv Norton***

# A Tribute to Martha

by  
Mervin L. Norton

## Introduction

For the past eleven months I have been attending church services at two different churches, one at 8:30 and one at 11:00. One recent Sunday both of my pastors used Luke 10: 38-42 as the foundation for their sermon.

*As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"*

*"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better and it will not be taken away from her."*

This passage describes how there are two ways that we can serve our Lord. One is by prayer, studying the word and being a disciple of Christ. The other is by doing good works, helping others, giving of yourself and your gifts. In this passage Mary was the *disciple* and Martha was the *servant*. Jesus was not only a teacher of the Word, a *disciple*, but a *servant*<sup>1</sup> as told by John.

As I listened to these sermons I began to realize that this passage describes a lady I knew named Martha. She was both a *disciple* like Mary and *servant* like Martha.

This is my tribute to Martha.



Martha grew up in a less than affluent family of nine. She had two older brothers and four sisters, three younger than she. Both parents worked in a textile mill. Martha left high school at 16 to work in the mill to help the family. Her two older brothers were in the service. A few years later Martha worked for a legal firm in a major city. At 23 Martha married an army officer. During the next 13 years she lived in Germany, New Jersey, Japan, New York state and finally, in northern Virginia. During her three years in Germany she gave birth to her two sons, Michael and David. This tribute primarily covers the 43 years she lived in northern Virginia.

---

<sup>1</sup> John 13:2 *The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. 3 Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; 4 so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. 5 After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.*

During the early part of Martha's married life, she spent most of her time raising her children. Martha was known as a competitor, she always strived to be her best in everything she did. She was an outstanding card player, any game, a worker of crossword puzzles, an avid reader, always learning, an outstanding hostess and a wonderful mother to two growing boys.

Her husband's job required family relocation every few years. When the family moved to Virginia there was long term stability for the first time.

## Martha the Disciple

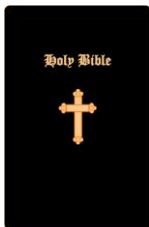
Martha was like Mary in many ways. She was a student of the Word, a teacher of the Word and a prayer warrior. She was a *disciple*.

### Sunday School Teacher



Martha began to teach Sunday School shortly after moving to northern Virginia. This continued for the about twenty plus years. There are many adults that benefitted from her teachings. During the early years, her two sons were not in her Sunday School class and occasionally they would sneak off from Sunday School, and go to a nearby drug store for a Coke. They were never discovered but talked about it after they were adults. In spite of these mischievous acts, they both turned to be outstanding adults with wonderful wives and wonderful children.

### Disciple Bible Student and Teacher



Martha attended a weekly Disciple Bible<sup>2</sup> study course that covered the entire bible in 34 weeks. She did well. This course was taught by her pastor. These courses were to continue with lay teachers. Martha and another good lady friend attended a training course in Baltimore and then taught the same course for the second time in her church. Now, more than 15 years later this disciple Bible course is still being taught by laity.

A year or two later Martha attended an advanced Disciple Bible study course that concentrated on four specific books of the bible.

### Prayer Group



For nearly 10 years Martha attended an early weekly prayer group. I say early morning; it was at 5:30 AM each Wednesday morning. On several occasions Martha hosted this prayer group. Martha always brought a birthday cake on the birthdays of those in the Prayer Group.

### Walk to Emmaus

Martha went on a Walk to Emmaus<sup>3</sup> and continued to attend their weekly gatherings for many years.

---

<sup>2</sup> A 34 week study for adults, this first level of Disciple moves through the biblical story from Genesis to Revelation. This bible study is sponsored by the United Methodist church.

<sup>3</sup> The Walk to Emmaus is a four day spiritual renewal program intended to strengthen the local church through the development of Christian disciples and leaders.

## Striving to Learn



Martha was a constant reader. She read the newspaper cover to cover. She had and read a vast collection of religious books. Her favorites were the Joshua books by Joseph Girzone and books by Henri J. Nouwen. She was always striving to learn.

## Elderly Caregiver



During these years Martha took two elderly ladies into her home for an extended period of time. The first was her husband's aunt who could no longer live alone. She lived with Martha and her family for about a year until she had to go to a nursing home. The second was her mother who lived with Martha and her family for more than five years until she made her Heavenly journey. Each of these ladies had special needs which Martha lovingly provided.

## Martha the Servant

Martha was a competitor. She always strived to be the best at what she did. I believe that a good competitor, striving to be better, is a good role model to all others in the game.

## Bowler



Martha was an avid bowler and she bowled in competitive leagues for several years. Two years in a row she was a member of the Virginia State Champion Bowling Team. None of the other team members were on the team both years. As a bowler she was an example to other ladies as to what one can accomplish if they try.

## Sandwich Making



One day a week, Martha and two or three other ladies would make one to two hundred sandwiches at church to be taken to the needy in the local area. She enjoyed this activity and also enjoyed the fellowship with the other ladies, her good friends.

## Vacation Bible School



For many years Martha was a supporter and a helper in the annual Vacation Bible School. She helped with the teaching and preparation of snacks. On at least one occasion she had her granddaughter there as an additional helper.

## Food for the Needy

Once a month the church collected canned goods and other packaged foods for distribution to needy families. Martha never forgot to get this food together on Saturday night to be taken to church on Sunday.

## Soup, Song and Story

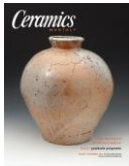


During the weeks of Lent, Martha's church held a Soup, Song and Story on Wednesday evenings. Families brought big pots of their favorite soups. Each Wednesday there were at least five or six different soups. In addition there were sandwiches for the children and some of the adults who thought that they were still a

child. Martha was always the first one at the church to get things going, tables and chairs set up, dishes and silverware prepared in addition to keeping her own soup warm.

Following the soup there was singing of songs followed by a entertaining story, not a sermon.

### **Ceramic Artist**



When Martha's youngest son went off to college she had a lot of time on her hands. In short order she got involved in ceramics through a friend. She located a local ceramics store and made friends with the owner and began to spend a lot of time in the shop. She talked the owner in to letting her work in the store for no pay but to learn. Over time she began to take lessons in making ceramics from a professional ceramics teacher. Martha worked in this store for a year or two. She became a certified ceramics teacher and developed an artistic talent I don't think she ever imagined she had. She made beautiful ceramic pieces and won many blue ribbons in local ceramic shows. Of all of the hundreds of ceramic pieces Martha made, most were given to family and friends. Many of her friends commented on the painting of eyes on her ceramic pieces. They always looked extremely life like.

### **Ceramic Teacher**



Making ceramics was not enough for Martha. She turned her basement to a ceramics shop complete with a large kiln, hundreds of molds, supplies and paints. She began to teach two classes on making and finishing ceramic pieces. One class was of local youth and the other a group of senior citizens. This continued until old man arthritis came to visit Martha and she could no longer handle the heavy molds. She had to terminate her ceramic activities. During her ceramic teaching she accepted no compensation except for the cost of materials and supplies; she gave of herself for the joy of giving.

### **Ceramic Donations to an Elementary School**



She put out a call to anyone who knew of a school that could use her kiln, molds and supplies. She identified an inner city school that had a ceramics class. She arranged to donate her ceramic kiln and all of her molds and supplies to this elementary school in Washington, DC. A few months later Martha was honored at the school's annual grandparents Day. She was given a tour of the school and met the teachers and the ceramic students. Martha was a proud lady that day.

### **Ropes for Emmaus Cross**



Prior to Martha terminating her ceramic activity she went on a Walk to Emmaus. Each person that goes on a walk to Emmaus is presented a wooden cross on a thin multicolored knitted necklace. Martha did not like the necklace. She thought that the necklace should be a larger diameter and in bright "Emmaus" multicolor. She then created her own in bright colors. As other friends from her church went on a Walk to Emmaus they were presented with a bright, multicolored necklace from Martha.

## Baby Blankets



During the period that Martha worked in a major city she lived with her aunt. Her aunt did not believe in “idle hands”. She taught Martha to crochet. Martha was not happy about that but she did learn. Then many years later Martha realized what a gift her aunt had given her. She began to crochet baby blankets. In the beginning these baby blankets were donated to her church. She made more than the church needed and made arrangements to make a major donation to young soldier’s wives who had babies with medical problems. This offer was accepted by the US Army Walter Reed Medical Center and Martha was able to present many of these blankets directly to the mothers. This really made her very happy to help these young babies.

## Shawls



The outgrowth of making baby blankets was to make ladies shawls. Although the first one was for her own use she continued to make them at the rate of as many as two a week. Over a several year period Martha must have made one or two hundred shawls and gave all but two away.

## Pool Parties



Martha was an exceptional hostess. She often had pool parties for her many church friends. Sometimes these parties were for some special occasion and many times they were just to have good fellowship with her many church friends. On several occasions she invited a family to come to her pool and bring their out of town relatives to have a mini reunion at her home.

## Martha as a Wife, Mother and Grandmother

How do I know all of these things about Martha? You see, she was my best friend, my lover, the mother of our two boys and my wife for 56 years, six months and one day.

### Met in Auburn



I need to back up about two or three years before I met Martha. I was a student at Auburn University and dating a girl in Birmingham. I was with her every weekend for about 18 months. She was a beautiful lady with a good personality. I was very much attracted to her. One night, while walking in a park, she ran away from me. I caught up with her and she said that we were through. I was heartbroken. I found out later that she had another boy friend that was working and had more resources to take her to dinner and other events. I prayed that somehow we would get back together. For the next year I did not date and had no interest in even meeting young ladies. That is until an evening in May 1949.

Martha was a local girl working as cashier at a local diner. The first Sunday night in May 1949, a few of my friends went to the diner for coffee for the first time. I was immediately attracted to this beautiful young lady. This was the first girl that I had an

interest in over a year. Was it “*love at first sight*”, maybe, but since I had been hurt before I was careful. She reminded me of Rita Hayworth, the movie star. I played the juke box and selected Hank Williams “Love Sick Blues”. It was quickly obvious that this was not Martha’s favorite song. So what did I do, I kept playing it over again and again. Why she ever spoke to me after that I will never know. I then went to the diner every night thereafter for coffee. Well that is not correct. I went to see the beautiful lady. After a day or two I ask her if I could walk her home after work. The diner manager quickly said that he was responsible to Martha’s mother and he would walk her home. After some discussion he agreed that I could walk her home but he would be only a few steps behind us. About a week later I met her mother, was accepted and was able to walk her home alone the remainder of May.

God always answer prayers. It is not always the answer you requested but it is always the best answer. I did not realize it at first, but Martha was the answer to my prayer.

I went home for the summer and upon returning I asked my friends if they had seen Martha. They said that they had seen her sisters and that Martha had had some serious surgery in Atlanta. She was back home but had not been able to get out yet.

Like many on this day before classes began, I decided to go to the movies. The theater was full. I finally found one empty seat about three rows from the back and right in the middle of the row. I went in, sat down, and much to my surprise and joy, I sat down by Martha. She had trouble speaking, very hoarse. I laughed and Martha got up and left the theater. I followed, apologized and she explained that she had a goiter removed and this was the first time she had been out of the house. She wore a black, turtle neck sweater and she looked like a million dollars. We returned to the theater and held hands for the rest of the evening.

We dated until my graduation in March the following year. I had received a commission as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant in the Army. Only one month after graduation I received orders to Germany via Fort Dix, NJ.

### **Married in New Jersey**



I realized that I did not want to go to Germany without Martha. I bought a ring, proposed, she accepted and I left for New Jersey. After a few days I arranged for her to fly to New Jersey where we were married in the Post Chapel. We spent our honeymoon in New York City. We were allowed to travel to Germany together. These arrangements took a month and we were free until the ship sailed so

we spent nearly a month in New York City. We had a wonderful extended honeymoon.

### **Two Baby Boys in Germany**



Martha gave birth to two boys in Germany, 19 months apart. Michael was born in 1951 and David in 1953. Both were born in the Military Hospital in Heidelberg. Martha was a loving mother. She loved to take the boys outside in the good weather and sit on blankets together with other new mothers. We lived in a military complex that included four apartment buildings in a U shape. The courtyard had several large trees that provided plenty of shade.

Martha, the shy lady I married, quickly learned how to be a good Army wife. She mixed well with all ranks and was a great asset to me.

Martha, the shy lady I married, quickly learned how to be a good Army wife. She mixed well with all ranks and was a great asset to me.

### **Pre School Years in New Jersey**



The next three years were spent in New Jersey where the boys begin to develop their unique personalities. Martha was a stay at home mom and was always there for the boys. She managed well for the periods that I was away, six weeks on maneuvers and three months in Brazil.

Our income was not great and we lived from month to month. Martha always made sure she had plenty of money near the end of the month so she could take the boys to a local store and buy them picture books. The boys always came first but I was always next.

### **Early School Years in Japan**



In our four years in Japan we lived in five different cities. I traveled a lot and Martha was always with the boys. They all adapted to the frequent moves and all made new friends quickly after each move. They started to school while in Japan and Martha was involved with their school work and all school activities. During the summer Martha took the boys to the swimming pool where both boys learned to swim even though Martha never learned herself.

### **With the Air Force in New York State**



We spent three years stationed on an Air Force base in New York State. We were the only Army family on the base and Martha was accepted by the

Air Force wives immediately. Our boys attended an Air Force school as the only Army brats among all of the Air Force brats.

Martha was an excellent representative of an Army wife at all of the social functions, of which there were many. It was our custom to have dinner each Friday night at the Officers Club which was only about three blocks from our home. We always joined our many friends at dinner. Martha always feed the boys before we left with instructions to call us if they needed anything. Martha always told the boys to get permission before they did anything out of the ordinary. Many times one of the boys would call us at the club to get permission to get a snack or something else. This never bothered us but actually made us proud.

### **Growing Up in Virginia**



Our boys really grew up after we moved to northern Virginia. When we moved in our household goods did not arrive until late the first night. We had done grocery shopping so we had plenty of food in the house. Martha took the boys to school on the first morning. When they came home from school they brought their new friends back to our house. There was no furniture so they all sat on the floor and had some snacks. Our boys always adapted quickly to a new environment.

Many mothers had many activities and were not always home when their children came home from school. Martha was always there. When the boys came home they would call, “Mom”. As long as Martha answered everything was alright. She was always there. I worked long hours and traveled a lot. It fell on Martha’s shoulders to attend all of the school functions, which she did as well as attending all of the after school athletic events.

Martha was very active in the PTA and was a member of a PTA sponsored “Dunn Loring Minstrels” This group performed each year for many years and well after our boys went off to college. The minstrel group became a social group that always went to someone’s home after rehearsals to continue to sing and have a good time.



There were times when there were activities at school where the students were on the stage, behind the curtain waiting for the performance to start. There were peep holes in the curtain. Our son David was overheard one time saying, “See the lady in the front row, that’s my mom, she is the pretty one”.

## Off to College



The boys went off to college, Michael to Madison College (now James Madison University) and David went to Virginia Tech. For the first time in Martha's life she had a lot of free time. She was not idle. She quickly got interested in ceramics and over the next few years developed long dormant artistic talents. After several years she began her crocheting which continued for many years.

## Son's Marriages



Our oldest son, Michael, got married to his high school sweetheart during his second year in college. Both families cut off all funding except for schooling. Michael had to go to work to feed his new family. He graduated with a full four year fellowship to Ohio State. His marriage was terminated after seven years but thankfully there were no children. About a year or two later he remarried and this one worked out perfectly. Michael graduated from Ohio State with a PhD in Music. After graduation Michael worked for me where he learned computer programming. He spent a few years as the Director of Music at the Church of the good Shepherd (United Methodist) in Vienna, Virginia. He was then offered the position of Director of Music at Asbury United Methodist Church in Harrisonburg, Virginia. After three years he ran his own computer software business for several years. For the past seven years he has been teaching computer science at James Madison University.

Michael's wife, Janis, received her master's degree in Social Work from Ohio State and currently runs her own Family Therapy business.

Our youngest son, David married in his senior year at Virginia Tech. His bride had already graduated with a degree in horticulture. They both worked as District Supervisors for 7-Eleven in Harrisonburg, Virginia and Fredericksburg, Virginia. David also worked for me for a few years where he learned computers. He is now a Senior Computer Systems Engineer working for a government agency.

David's wife, Bonnie, spent a few years as an aid in an elementary school. She took additional college courses, obtained two masters degrees and became qualified as a teacher. She taught in elementary schools for several years and was appointed as an Assistant Principal this year.

### **Granddaughter Born in Harrisonburg**



Our first grandchild was Jennifer born to David and Bonnie in Harrisonburg, VA. Both parents were Supervisors of 7-Eleven stores. Martha was there only hours after the birth and stayed for the first week. She and Jennifer bonded in this first week and this bond lasted a lifetime. Jennifer was a clarinetist as well as a pianist. Martha enjoyed going to high school events where Jennifer was in the marching band as well as the drum major. Martha also attended many of Jennifer's piano recitals. Jennifer received a master's degree in Education from the University of Virginia. Since graduation she has been an elementary school teacher.

### **Grandson Born in Fredericksburg**



Our second grandchild was Steven, Jennifer's new brother, born in Fredericksburg, Virginia. Again Martha was there only hours after the birth. After a few years they moved to Stafford, Virginia. Steven was a soccer player from an early age. Martha and I attended as many of these games as possible. Steven graduated from James Madison University. He is now working in Phoenix as the sole representative of a major moving company.

### **Adopted Grandson arrives from Korea**



Michel and Janis were not able to have their own children and adapted a boy from Korea. At the time they lived in Reston, VA near us. Mathew was eight months old when he arrived at National Airport. The parents wanted to pick him up alone so we did not see him until the next day. Since they lived so close we were able to see Mathew frequently during his first few years.

Mathew got involved with Young Life<sup>4</sup> in his early teens. In his junior year in high school he moved in to a young Life home where he has been a leader for several years. He has been a counselor at Young Life Summer Camps.

### **Adopted Granddaughter arrives from Korea**



Three years later Michael and Janis adopted a daughter from Korea. This time we were invited to accompany them to National Airport for the arrival. It was a snowy night and the flight was several hours late. Martha was in her glory and held Hannah while the parents finished some paper work. Hannah could not quit looking at all of the Christmas lights in the terminal. Due to the bad snow we all went to

---

<sup>4</sup> Young Life seeks to carry the message of Jesus Christ into that tumultuous tide and points teenagers toward life as they were created to live it.

our home for the night. Martha also immediately bonded with Hannah a bond that lasted a lifetime. Hannah is an excellent student and an outstanding soccer player. Martha was able to see Hannah play many times.

### Granddaughter's Wedding



Grandchildren have a habit of growing up. Jennifer's wedding in August of 2006 was the last major family event Martha was able to attend. How proud she was to see her granddaughter get married to a fine young man, Andy. They met while both were teaching in the same school.

### My Wife



As I reflect on our life together I am reminded of our wedding vows. "Till death do us part". I no longer believe this vow. We are not parted in death. Martha is still with me every minute of every day. We are just separated for a while. I know that we will be together again in a Heavenly place.

How do I describe our wonderful life together? As I think of all of these years I do so with my emotions overflowing. My box of Kleenex is close at hand. This section of this tribute will be the hardest to write and will be interrupted many times so that I can regain my composure.



The early part of any marriage is the getting to know each other in new ways. We arrived in Germany just two weeks before the Korean War started. We initially lived in a fifth floor walk up apartment in a large German apartment building in Karlsruhe. No radio, no TV, just two new love birds. I quickly learned that Martha was a quick learner and a competitor. We would sit on the bed and play cards. I do not know what the card game was but you had to try to get rid of all of your cards. I never won. After a few months of this I quit playing cards with Martha. She was a card player the rest of her life and always came out on or near the top. Our two sons were born in Germany.

During our three years in Germany Martha developed into an excellent Army wife and she was liked by all of our fellow officers and wives. As our children came along she would spend time during the days with other wives and their children. We also had a good social life.

Upon return from Germany we spent time with my family in Birmingham. Although we had spent three years in the Army, I had never discussed with Martha how she liked the Army or what she would like me to do for my life's work. I liked the Army and would prefer to remain in the service. My brother was a newscaster at a local TV station. I visited the station and was quite interested in the station engineering since I was an electrical engineer with a specialty in communications. After this visit I talked to Martha about a civilian job. She was quick to say, "don't you like the Army?". There was never any more discussion, the Army was for us.

We then spent three years at Fort Monmouth, NJ where our children continued to grow. I went to school initially and I went to Rio de Janeiro for three months on a training mission. This was the first real test of Martha, as a mother of two boys, to make it all on her own. Of course she came through this ordeal with flying colors. I was extremely proud of her.



The four years we lived in Japan I traveled frequently leaving Martha alone with two young, active boys. They grew up with a loving, caring mother that had no problems while I was traveling. We had a good social life and Martha was the perfect hostess at the many parties we had in our home. For several years Martha would go to the Officers Club for lunch and bridge. Then I would join her for a delightful dinner with our friends. We had a live-in maid that took care of the boys.

After our three years living with the Air Force in northern New York we moved to Virginia. Martha continued to be the perfect hostess for parties with our military friends, our business and our church friends. Our pool parties were always great events.



During our more than 40 years in Northern Virginia Our life together was exceptional. After our youngest son went off to college we were able to spend more time together. We saw our boys grow up, get married and bring us our grandchildren. We had many summer weekends with our children and grandchildren at our pool, going to church on Sunday followed by wonderful brunch at a local restaurant. What a joy Martha and I had seeing the love our grandchildren had for their "Granny".

During our last 15 plus years together, I was either working out of our home or was fully retired. We were together all of the time. We were together so much that a very good friend gave us the nickname of “M&M” During this period I had two heart attacks, five years apart. The second one put me in the hospital three times for a total of six weeks. I had many weeks to learn to walk again and regain my strength but Martha took care of me better than a trained nurse. The servant in Martha took over and I was waited on hand and foot. Martha was always the “giver”.

There are three special events that took place during our more than 40 years in Northern Virginia.



The first was our 25<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary. We had a wonderful party with enough silver gifts to fill our china cabinet. I have many picture and wonderful memories of that event.

The next was our 50<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary. We had a second wedding with many friends in attendance, followed by a reception. Again I have wonderful pictures of that day plus many unforgettable memories.



On Martha’s 70<sup>th</sup> birthday I gave her a surprise birthday party that may have been the most memorial event in our lives outside of our original wedding. A close friend made many pictures of this evening, placed them in an album and presented it to us. Today this is one of my treasured possessions and it brings back wonderful memories.

**Martha’s Wit** - One Sunday, about three years ago, we were in church. During the sermon, Martha placed her hand on my arm and said, “I don’t feel good”. Then she passed out cold. I stood up and asked if there was a doctor or nurse in the house. I got immediate response and moved out of the way. They quickly moved her into the foyer, but not before Reverend Plummer said a prayer for her.

It was not long before the fire engine and ambulance arrived with several paramedics. As several were attending to Martha, I was being questioned by one of the paramedics. The paramedic asked, “Has this ever happened before?” I said, “No, we have been married for 53 years, and this has never happened before”. That *unconscious* lady said, “Yes it has”. I asked, “When, honey?”. Martha replied, “The day I married you”. My Martha was back, alive and well.

**Declining Health** - About six years ago, while we were having a pool party of church friends, Martha fell and fractured her kneecap. She went through several weeks of therapy and rehab at Walter Reed Army Hospital and ended up having to use a cane. This was the beginning of her failing health. A few months later she developed two compressed

vertebrae. She had many procedures to help resolve the problem to no avail. She was placed on morphine for pain. I then became the caregiver. Martha never fully accepted my new roll. She always wanted to do for herself. She was the perpetual giver but found it hard to receive.

During our last two years together Martha needed a wheel chair any time out of our home or apartment. During our last year together she needed a walker to get around the apartment.

For the last two or three years Martha had some dementia and had lost a lot of weight. In August of 2005 she fell and broke her ankle. After a few days in the hospital she was transferred to the Rehab Facility at Greenspring. In short order the dementia evolved into Alzheimer's. Ten weeks later she developed pneumonia, went into a coma and died four days later.

When I look back on her last several months I have to look at the positive side. She remained very positive and even though her memory was fading she knew everybody until the very end. For the 10 weeks in the Rehab Facility she had no pain even though she had been taken off of morphine. She went into a coma on a Wednesday night and was immediately taken to the hospital. Miracles do happen. On Friday morning she was awake and stayed awake for six or seven hours. She knew every family member as well as several friends that came to visit. She went to heaven at 9:05 pm Sunday night with all of the family present. Her last few days were painless and peaceful.

**The Miracle within Death** - During Martha's four days in the hospital, she was essentially comatose and without any pain. We knew from the beginning that she would not survive. For the four or five weeks prior, most of her speech was not intelligible. There was no personality, and she showed little emotion. During these last four days, all of our immediate family was there as well as other family members and many friends. On the second day, she was somewhat responsive and she recognized Reverend Plummer early in the morning but she was unable to talk intelligently. In the late morning when family was there, she became agitated and tried to get out of bed. David heard her say "I want to get my bra on and get out of here." I gently pushed her down on the bed and told her that she had to stay in bed. I repeatedly told her that I loved her. Her speech was difficult to understand but it was clear when said, "No you don't." I told her again that I loved her. She then said, "No you don't, you don't listen"... This was my Martha!

About an hour later she began to speak more clearly and recognized all present. My sister Carolyn arrived and when she saw my brother-in-law, she said, "Hi, Bryan." During the following hour or two she talked to several people with clarity and emotion, including a long conversation with Barbara Carter.

After this miracle, she again lapsed back into a comatose state, where she remained until she went to heaven.

During our nine months together at Greenspring, Martha would frequently tell friends, "If I live until December I will be 80". She missed it by 37 days. What better tribute to Martha than to celebrate her life and birthday. We did that in January 2006. We had many of the same friends that had attended her 70<sup>th</sup> birthday party. This party was not free. Each guest had to bring a written report of their memories of Martha. These writings are now treasures of mine for they show many of the Martha's attributes as a disciple and a servant. I have attached many of these tributes to this document.

As I reflect back over our life together, Martha always supported all of my career decisions. Twice, after I retired from the Army, I quit my job on a minutes' notice. I could not work for a man that I could not trust. I got immediate support from Martha even though I was unemployed.

## **Epilog**

Although Martha made her heavenly journey on November 12, 2006, only 37 days prior to her 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, she is still with me in spirit and my memory of our life together will remain with me the rest of my life.

# Memories from Martha's Family and Friends

## Mom's Hair

When she died Sunday night, my mother was nearly 80 years old. It seems incredible, but she had not a single gray hair on her head. This is particularly astonishing given that she was married to my father for 56 years, and that she raised two constantly fighting boys only a year-and-a-half apart in age.

## Mike and Eddie's Great Adventure

When I was 15, Dad was in Vietnam, and Mom (with the help of her mother, my "Granny") had the thankless job of dealing with two teenaged sons. My friend, Eddie, was spending the night, and we had planned to walk down to a dance at the fire house in Vienna. For reasons I can no longer remember (I'm sure it was something that I had done - or perhaps not done), Mom would not let us go. Not to be denied our evening's adventure with the ladies, Eddie and I got suddenly tired, and we headed to bed somewhere around 9:00 pm (if not earlier). We carefully prepared our sleeping bags with pillows in the lower-level family room, and we quietly slipped out the sliding-glass door, leaving the door unlocked (but looking like it was locked - we had done this before).

I suppose all teenagers think that their parents are idiots, but we had really gone over the edge on this one. Not only did we not consider that my mother would be even a tiny bit suspicious when two 15-year old boys choose to go to bed early on a week-end night, we also failed to consider that my grandmother had to pass through our "sleeping area" in the family room on the way to her room later that evening.

As it turned out, the dance was not that exciting, and we returned home. We carefully and quietly slipped in through the back door and reentered the lock. All seemed well. We had succeeded in our evening's adventure, even if it was a bust. We were headed for our sleeping bags when suddenly the lights came on. There at the switch, at the foot of the stairs, was my mother ... giving that stare that only a disappointed mother can give. She turned, and headed upstairs without saying a word.

The rest I'll leave to your imagination (or perhaps your own memory).

## The Smartest Women I Know

During the Second World War, my mother's parents left Alabama to work in New York. When Mom was 16, her mother, my "Granny," took sick and returned home. Her father remained in New York, permanently leaving his family behind. At 16, my mother had no choice but to quit school to support her sick mother and her three younger sisters. She never finished high school, and she worked many jobs at which even the most desperate of the unemployed would flinch.

But my mother was strong, and she was determined to leave the poverty into which she was born. Perhaps what set her apart from others in similar circumstances was her passion for learning. Mom was always reading -- biographies, novels, histories, magazines, almost anything she could get her hands on. She completed every crossword puzzle she ever attempted. The newspaper puzzles were little challenge, and she often sent Dad out to buy books of puzzles, not

just any puzzle book mind you, but very particular puzzle books. Anyone who ever challenged her at any card game learned to rue that decision. Mom rarely lost. I certainly never won.

She was also a singer and a guitarist, and once she no longer had my brother and me tormenting her, she turned her talents to art. She learned, and then taught ceramics for years. When her arthritis prevented her from continuing her ceramic work, she donated her kiln and molds to an inner-city school, and she took up crocheting to the benefit of many people here.

So, while Mom may never have completed her education in any formal sense, she was probably one of the most knowledgeable, one of the most talented, and certainly the smartest women I have ever known.

Mom, I'll really miss you.

Mike  
(First son)

---

I will miss her. She has always been there for me.

The thoughts of coming in the door from school, everyday there was a Hello David!

All the parties, field trips and PTA functions at school, she was there. I told everyone that my Mom was the pretty one.

Little League and the concessions stands, my Mom was always there.

I learned to play a card game called Set Back with my Mom and Granny, that was late night Friday fun which grew into the game my wife and children learned as well. Mom was quite the competitor.

Coming home from college there was always Mom and a pan of fried chicken livers which we shared because no one else ate them and an occasional pan of rice krispy treats were there for dessert.

The presence of my Mom followed me even as the principal asked if he needed to call her on an occasion. My reply was a definite, "No Sir".

Even as she has departed us I am grateful that she was allowed the time to attend her oldest granddaughter's wedding this past July. I am happy for the time we have had her.

Love,  
David  
(Second son)

---

## **Mom, a reflection**



**November 14 - January 11, 2007**

She loved the sunflower. That is fitting as often she was the ray of sunshine to all those around her. I will lift my head towards the sun as those lovely flowers do and be reminded of her. She had a can do attitude and welcomed almost any adventure. She was a trooper among shoppers as I have often gotten some of my best workouts going shopping with her. We have shopped almost the entire east coast together.

I was welcomed into the family immediately as there was camaraderie in that we were both southern, but more importantly we both loved Dave. She gave her time when both Jennifer and Steven were born and often resisted interfering when we were disciplining them as she did not want to watch. She would say, "Honey I know it is for the best but they are my grandchildren." Meanwhile Dave would say I could have never gotten away with that stuff. A loving and doting mother, grandmother, and wife that was my Mom.

My thought brings a smile of the humor and playfulness in mom. Forgive me if the subject is offensive. Our family and Mom had made a trip to Florida to visit one of her friends. We were shopping in a gift store. Envision all of us milling around in different aisles. Suddenly in one of the aisles was an odor. She was nowhere to be found as we were trying to make a rapid exit. We found her in a back corner grinning and smiling as our daughter says, "Was that you Granny?" She never owned up, but the laughter was proof enough. I still see that smile, the coy cover up over her mouth. And I am reminded that in life there is humor. She brought a smile to my life and that of my children. For that I will always love her.

**July 1975**

Upon my first meeting at a summer time party Mom was welcoming and open. She said our son has brought home a daughter. You often reflect and think that perhaps your new mother-in-law is just being polite. As the years went on she called me her daughter. I came to know that she meant it, but the real test was that I felt like her daughter and I loved

her like a mom. She was my second mom. She was open and honest and we could talk about anything. To this day we shared some things that have never been spoken about a second time and that are where they will remain. We had trust with each other. You want to know about open and honest, I was married in August and her birthday was coming in December, so I asked what you might like for your birthday. She replied anything surprise me honey, but it better be wrapped in birthday paper. That message was loud and clear. Humor and card playing were times remembered in fun and laughter. Those late evenings and weekends will never fade in my memory. You see these are vivid and quite etched because they involved my children, Jen and Steve and her. She loved them deeply and the gift of time and shared stories that she gave us will always be remembered. Whether the times were good or bad, someone ill or just spending time together it seemed to turn out just right with mom.

She shared a love of cooking and even passing on healthy tips. I continue to make many meals that remind me of her. We did ceramics together and talked. Sometimes I think more talk than ceramics. We shared an interest in sports. We pulled for the same teams and had the heart of one man between us who loved sports, Dave. We shopped frequently and ate lunches together until she could no longer make the trip. Those were always fun and I was sad when those times ended as I now shop alone or occasionally with Jen. Travel, oh she loved to travel and frequent the Cracker Barrel for a Catfish dinner from Florida to Virginia. We had many great times.

**September 1979**  
**The birth of her first grandchild, a granddaughter**

Besides Dave and me she couldn't wait to get on a gown and hold her. I remember that picture and the look on her face. She jokingly said that she finally had a girl to spoil and buy for. That was no joke! She fulfilled that promise even up to the months prior to her passing in seeing that granddaughter married and walking down the aisle, in a dress that she and granddaddy had purchased as a wedding gift! I thank God that he let Mom see Jenny get married.

**September 1982**  
**The birth of a first grandson**

As Steven grew more boy like every day she delighted in telling me that is "Little David". Once evidenced when Steve was swimming and diving at the pool. He had concocted a move called a weed whacker and hit his head on the diving board. She relished in telling David and Michael stories of how they had been just like that, often bringing a few tense moments only to be soothed away over time.

Summers passed, many hours by the pool, swimming and having snacks and chats with Granny will long be remembered. Right before our eyes the children grew up and we grew in years ourselves. The children took on their own lives and only returned on the occasional weekend from college. Mom delighted in introducing the grandchildren at church and the club when we would gather on a Sunday.

## November 2006

Mom had fought the good fight. Mom passed away after a good deal of pain and suffering. She has gone on to a place where the pain does not exist. She always loved me and treated me better than any in-law I can imagine. I was lucky. She was generous with me in time and her resources. I only hope I was a good daughter-in-law, good enough in her eyes to her son that I love very much, and a good mother to her grandchildren. She definitely left her mark on my life and I hope to impart that example to my children's spouses and grandchildren someday.

Love you Mom,  
Bonnie  
(First daughter-in-law)

---

## Meeting Mike's Mother

My first memory of my mother-in-law is probably my fondest. I was engaged to Mike and had come out to Virginia from Ohio to meet the family for the first time. I was pretty nervous about it and actually rather dreading the work of meeting all these people and trying to fit in. I found it was no work at all. Mom was so welcoming from the first hello. Within minutes we were down in her craft studio and she was telling me to choose from her collection of beautiful ceramic pieces. I kept choosing and she kept telling me to take another piece. That's the way she was; if you told her you liked something of hers she would find a way to give it to you. I think she really loved giving things to people; she seemed to light up with generosity.

Janis  
(Second daughter-in-law)

---

I remember Granny sitting on her end of the couch crocheting. She always kept a lapboard in her lap to keep Midnight, her mean black cat, from laying on what she was working on. I liked to sit next to her on the couch and watch her work. I still have several blankets that she made for me. The last one was a blue and orange one she made me my first year in college. She had to tell Granddaddy it was not for him, it was my UVA blanket, not an Auburn blanket for him.

Mom, Steve, and I used to visit in the summer and spend the day at the pool with Granny. She sat under the umbrella at the end of the pool and watched us play. We would go inside to eat lunch around the same time everyday because that is when the "Young and the Restless" was on. I still watch it from time to time now since being hooked watching it with Granny.

I remember spending Friday's in the summer with Granny. She always went to get her hair done at noon. She liked to take me with her. I would get my hair braided while Granny was getting her hair done. We would then go to the club for lunch. We always had a good time laughing and talking while we ate lunch. She loved to tell stories about my Dad when he was a little boy.

I still think back to Christmas morning two years ago, when I got engaged. Granny shared with me the story about her and Granddaddy getting engaged. She laughed as she talked about Granddaddy proposing with her Mom and sisters in the next room. She waited for their response before answering Granddaddy. I am very grateful that she was able to be at my wedding.

Jennifer Wolfenbarger  
(Dave and Bonnie's daughter)  
(First Grandchild)

---

My memories of Granny are always the times when we were all at the pool. The days when dad would bring Jenny and me on his way to work or the weekends all of us would come up on Friday and stay for the weekend. On the days it was just Jenny and me. Granny would sit out there all day watching us and making sure we didn't get into any trouble. We would get there early in the morning and Granny would make us breakfast, usually sausage and eggs. Then we would sit at the table for a while and Granny would work on her crossword puzzle for the day. Then the three of us would head to the pool where Granny would sit at the patio table, with either a diet rite or her iced tea and the occasional cigarette; then shortly before 12:30 it was time to go in for lunch. Dad would show up and then we all sat at the table and watched Granny's soap opera of choice, "The Young and the Restless." Of course she would always say how trashy the people were, but we never missed a minute of it.

The times that we would come up on weekends she would always have an Oreo Ice Cream pie for me. So when we got to her house Friday night or Saturday morning she would always have it ready and in the freezer. Saturday we spent out at the pool and then at nights we would sit at the kitchen table and play cards. I could never beat her, but the times when Jenny or someone else beat her she would always become more competitive and occasionally use the term "you little stinker". Then on Sunday we would get up, have breakfast and then head off to church, where she would always introduce her grand babies to everyone in attendance. Then after church it was over to the club for Sunday brunch. And then back to the pool where and of course Granny wouldn't miss a minute of us in the pool.

Steve  
(Dave and Bonnie's son)  
(Second grandchild)

---

*"If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interest, but also to the interest of others. " Philippians 2:1-4.*

Granny was always looking out for, and loving, everyone she knew. Whether you were a grandson or a waitress she loved you the same with all her heart.

Mathew  
(Mike and Janis' son)  
(Third grandchild)

---

**Dear Granny,**

Your presence was delicate  
Wonderful and loving  
When you became sick  
and entered the hospital,  
your family stood beside you,  
until your last breath.  
When you weren't the same,  
forgetting who we were,  
we still knew all the memories we shared.  
Even though you lived a full life,  
I still shed tears.  
Please let me know  
how you're doing up there?

**Love**

Such a long life  
Lying so sick and frail  
This was his partner  
His life  
Seeing her take her last breaths  
Each one more shallow  
He stayed there  
Watched her  
Whispered to her  
Even though she didn't understand  
Held her hand  
Cried by her side  
Not wanting to let go  
But does  
Letting her go to a better place

**Walking amongst the clouds**

I must be dreaming! But really I saw her  
It took no effort but just to soar

I reached the clump of clouds.  
Through the clouds I saw this light  
I saw so many people  
She was in the middle of them all,  
being herself Generous and Caring  
That was her.  
I touched her and we hugged.  
Then I said goodbye

Hanna  
(Mike and Janis' daughter)  
{Fourth Grandchild}

---

In early May 1950, I was sitting in my dorm room at Huntington College in Montgomery, Alabama on a beautiful afternoon and was called to the pay phone booth just down the hall. I picked up the phone and Martha was calling me before she left for Fort Monmouth to meet Mervin and get married. We had a short but wonderful conversation. I knew then that I was going to have a wonderful sister that I had never had.

It was 1951 after Michael was born that I decided to save my earnings and plan to go to Germany in the summer of 1952 to be there for Michael's first birthday in July and to meet Martha in person. That trip materialized and I arrived about a week before the birthday celebration. I loved my new sister from the first day we met and we had many good times together.

One day we were invited to the apt downstairs from Martha to meet Pat Jones, visiting a friend. She told me she had a bachelor in the battalion her husband Bill was in and he needed a date for a party that Saturday night. She asked if I were interested and I said yes. That is how I met my husband of 52 years!

Martha and I had such a great relationship and loved each other so much. She was indeed a real sister.

Sis  
(My sister Carolyn)

---

Two things immediately pop into my mind whenever anyone mentions Aunt Martha. Those two things are her love of anything decorated with daisies and her ever popular Caesar salad. As a child, when visiting Aunt Martha and Uncle Mervin, I always looked forward to going into their kitchen to see what new daisy items had been added since my last visit. More than daisy hunting, however, I anxiously waited for dinner to be served in the hope that my prayers had been answered and that Caesar salad would be on the menu! That was my favorite part of the meal and I was never disappointed! When I grew older I asked Aunt Martha for her

recipe which she happily shared with me. I can honestly say that it has never tasted as good as it did when I ate it in their daisy kitchen!

Love  
Melanie Griffin  
(Niece)

---

I knew Martha for nearly 13 years and over that time found her to be a caring and sharing person. Martha always was well aware of where her roots came from and knew she had found something better than tall cotton when she met and married Mervin Norton. She often talked about the days of traveling and living in a military life style. You could take the girl out of Alabama but you could not take the Alabama out of the girl and that was Martha.

Martha's life was centered on her family and always had plenty to tell you about her two sons and daughter-in-laws along with the four grandchildren. They were special to her and their success in life was great satisfaction for her. With Merv at her side, life was now complete and she lived it to the fullest. Oh let's not forget Midnight and Freckles her couch companion cats that would give her a gentle nudge to let her know they needed her attention also.

Martha thought there was only one team in the NFL and that was the Washington Redskins. It didn't matter if they won or lost they were always the winner to her. There was another thing like this with Martha and that was she loved the U.S.A. second to none.

Oh how Martha loved her home in Vienna and she vowed never to leave the place till the end but somehow Merv convinced her of a place in Springfield would be much better for her. The last time I saw her in Springfield she said, "you know Merv was right; I like it here very much."

I firmly believe that had Martha been given a chance to change anything in her life she would not have changed a single thing and was happy with her life.

Many people did not know that Martha was the personal dictionary for Merv who often would summon help with the words "Honey how do you spell" -----?

Mary Daniels

---

Merv,

First of all, thank you for the opportunity of celebrating Martha's birthday, Martha's memory.

Dozens of times I have been in your home in Vienna for a variety of reasons – computers being a "minor" interest you and I have had in common. But in all of those times I always received such a gracious greeting and warm hospitality from Martha. She usually had a story about kids or

grandkids, her fingers were busy with something beautifully crafted, the TV was showing an old movie, and as I was leaving there was always "Hail to the Redskins:!!

Love,  
Jay Hanke  
(Our former minister)

---

Dear Merv,

Every memory is one that brings smiles to my face!

Three characteristics still stay very much alive for me and they are :

1. Her laugh
2. Her voice
3. Her smile

What a treasure for all of us assembled to celebrate Martha and these three memories!! She always had all given out in such loving ways and I will always remember her for her generosity!! What a special lady!

Harriett Hanke

---

I knew Martha Norton for many years as a fellow member of the Church of the Good Shepherd and through my friendship with her husband, Merv. Cris, who calls me her husband, also came to be friends with Martha as they shared, among other things, a love of handicrafts. Over the years we had many visits and meals together. Merv and Martha were gracious hosts and guests.

When Merv and Martha decided to move to Greenspring, we found to our delight that their apartment was just down the hall from my mother's apartment that had moved to Greensprings a few months earlier. Our meetings continued.

My memories of Martha are quite vivid and clear. Martha was in every way a fine southern lady. She had the bearing, decorum, and good manners that would have made her mother proud. But that description is incomplete. The southern lady stereotype will mislead one into thinking that such a person was all aflutter with easy conversation and frilly dresses and a demeanor always subordinate to the men in her sphere - be it father, brother, husband, or social male friend. My grandfather Matney, himself a father of five daughters, often said that he would not give a mouthful of warm spit for a woman who could not speak her mind. He would have loved Martha. Please do not misunderstand - Martha was always polite and gentle to a fault, but when she had important and good points to contribute, she with good manners, said them and acted on them. Good for her! I recall one time when our church was auctioning off some crafts and one very intricate piece made by friend of Martha's was receiving only low bids. Martha was sitting beside Cris and passed along her concern for the hurt feelings of her friend. Next thing I know I am bidding away and came home with a nice item at an exceptionally high but fair price.

In the best sense of the word, Martha was feisty. Personally, I am extremely fond of feisty women. If you doubt this, you should meet my wife, daughters, granddaughter, mother, and grandmothers -- feisty all. I was very fond of Martha.

One other endearing quality of my friend Martha, was that she never forgot her humble origins and always cared for and reached out to help others who were not as fortunate as she. She often told me about her growing up years and how much even simple things in her current life were so greatly appreciated. I know she made special efforts to help the family and friends she left in Alabama. So sweet Martha, we know the saints in heaven welcomed you with rejoicing. Here is always room in heaven for another sweet, caring and feisty woman.

Joe Matney

---

My first memory of Martha was when Joe and I would sit in church - usually in front of or behind you and Martha. Over time we developed a treasured friendship.

When you were no longer attending Church of the Good Shepherd, we missed seeing you as often. What a joy it was when you and Martha moved into the same building at Greensprings down the hall from Joe's mom. It was so wonderful to be able to see you and visit with you again.

Joe and I are thankful for sharing many wonderful meals after church on Sundays at Westwood Country Club with you and Martha. We also enjoyed being able to take you to some of our favorite restaurants.

I always felt so moved by the obvious love, respect, and care which you and Martha shared. You had the kind of loving marriage that all of us strive for and hope we can achieve and maintain through the years.

Martha was every inch a southern lady. She was profoundly sweet, kind, and caring toward others. She never failed to help where she saw a need, volunteering for many needs at Church of the Good Shepherd during your time there. Beneath her gentle loving way was an iron will. She often used her wit to counter your teasing and never let you get the upper hand.

I am so blessed to have had Martha as a friend and I miss her. I know she is now in her heavenly home. God now has Martha as one of his precious angels.

My love to you and Martha  
Cris Matney

---

### **My dear friend, Martha Norton**

Martha always carried joy and light with her and she was herself 100%. She had an incredible gift of hospitality.

At Church of the Good Shepherd she was frequently the one someone met on their first visit. She never met a stranger and made everyone comfortable. As Kipling said in the poem "If" - she could walk with kings, nor lose the common touch. Her radar could pick out those in need and

she knew just what to say to make them comfortable and they wanted to return to church to get more of that love.

She and Merv were the original members of a Wednesday morning (5:30) prayer group that met at the home of the pastor. When we could not hold our weekly prayer group at the pastor's home, we met at the Norton's - at 5:30 in the morning. They were genuinely delighted to welcome us into their home.

Family was so important to her. I can still hear her voice saying she was going to visit her baby sister each summer. Her sons and their families meant everything to her and we loved hearing about their lives.

Martha and I facilitated a Disciple Bible Study group one year. She was very disciplined in the preparation and had genuine love and concern for each member of the group. She loved the Word and constantly wanted to study to learn more. She loved the Lord and would share her stories of the situations in her life when her faith had made such a difference.

She was always a giver. I am one of many who still have the shawl she crocheted for me. The praying beanie bear she gave me sits at the top of my bookcase. For many years she made a lariat necklace to hold the cross for each person in our church who attended an Emmaus weekend. Merv and Martha drove up many times to support those who attended.

Laughter always surrounded her. She could make the cleverest remarks that would leave a room in hysterics.

Her early life was not easy, but I never heard a bitter word from her. She simply worked always to make things better. God matched Merv and Martha beautifully. They adored each other and modeled wonderful support for each other. That's why it is hard to talk about Martha without mentioning Merv. They just went together perfectly.

She loved her Redskins - win or lose. But she really loved it when they won. She loved football. She had an afghan and so many other things in Redskin colors. There was a constant friendly rivalry among those who supported Auburn and those who supported Alabama. She was in the Auburn camp, wasn't she, Merv?

I still remember the last time Dave and I saw her in the hospital. She was at peace and her skin was so beautiful, translucent porcelain like the angel she was in life and was to become too soon. We will always love you, dear Martha.

Carole & Dave Yoho

---

I write this memory of dear Martha as I look at one of several Beanies Baby "creatures" Martha has given me over the 11 years I worked at her church. It makes me smile when I remember the times when she would appear at my office door with her sly grin, knowing she was about to make my day with one of her furry little gifts.

Working in a church has its many, many rewards as well as its many, many challenges. God is well aware of this and so gave me "Martha". The most stressful time periods in a church often come at holidays or annual report times - when deadlines need to be met or extra work is required in order to make our Christian celebrations meaningful to all. I can remember several times when I (no, *we*) would be up to our ears in the "details of the season". Then it would

happen, the big blue car would come rolling into the church parking lot – Merv would be driving, Martha navigating at his side.

Merv would come in, bustling around the church building, addressing the needs of the church and faithfully serving. Martha, though I may not have known it at the time, came into my office to serve ME. She never asked for it, she never expected it, but while she sat across from me, she had my undivided attention. As I sat and listened to her stories, her tasks of the week, or her frustrations with trying to wean her beloved husband off of eggs and bacon, I would feel the tightness in my shoulders relax. I would put my pen down so that the whiteness in my knuckles would turn back to pink and enjoy the simplicity of Martha’s love. She would make me laugh, sometimes cry, but she always she brought a light into my day.

I am so thankful for this memory of her, and now perhaps I can pass on a little piece of this dear woman by showing up at someone else’s office door on a busy day with a “light” of my own.

Marcie Tuggle  
(Former church secretary)

---

Martha was an elegant southern belle and I dearly loved her. I treasure the several knitted blankets I have to remember her by. I can see her now in my mind's eye her perfectly manicured fingers with the knitting needles flying! She had such a wonderful God given gift of creating almost any craft to which she set her mind. I loved to hear her memories of life as an army wife which she experienced during her many years as one of the best Army wives ever. She always had and kept the high honor of making you, her dear husband, and fine sons love and respect her. That came so naturally and never was she at a loss to encourage those who knew her in her most engaging way. That's why we all loved her so! She will always be missed so very much! I will say you were a lucky man to capture her heart. This she always knew because you so often expressed your love for her in thousands of wonderful ways. Let the many happy memories sustain you and yours always.

Love, Peace, and Blessings  
Mary Shroyer  
(Mary and Martha are now together in Heaven)

---

We met Martha Norton only three years ago when she and Merv attended our church services. Because of Merv’s Auburn tie, we immediately recognized each other as fellow Alabamians. Martha made an immediate impression on us as the epitome of a southern lady – her quiet beauty and smile, her obvious caring for her family and acquaintances, and her quick mind made her a joy to be around. She made many new friends at our church and, typical of her generous nature, gave a number of us beautiful hand crocheted shawls that I treasure to this day.

We enjoyed hearing about her courtship with Merv and being married at Fort Dix before going to Germany. Many years later it was to Martha as new and fresh as if it had happened yesterday in her obvious devotion to him. Our time with Martha was much too short, we will

always remember her courage and determination in the face of declining health to live each day to the fullest that she was able. It was truly a blessing to have known her.

Linda and Hal Sveinsson

---

Martha always welcomed everyone into your home--even at 5:45 in the morning when Prayer Group arrived. When I came in the teakettle was whistling, coffee was waiting, people were milling around giving hugs and Martha was all smiles and enjoying the commotion. What a hostess!

Martha was always ready to share memories of the boys' growing-up days. She was so proud of both of them--and still so in love with you, Merv. She was such a good example of mother and wife!

Martha loved all her crafts! We still have the rainbow lanyards she made for our Emmaus crosses, and I think of her whenever I wear mine! Her hands loved to be busy!

Martha always had good ideas for books to read. And she chose great gifts for people. One of the most distinct things I remember from Prayer Group days is Martha's description of "arrow prayers"; she always pointed toward heaven when she described these communications with God.

We are so glad to have known Martha. She was a wonderful friend and cared about everyone.

Judy and Neal McKinley

---

Dear Merv,

I'm hoping to be able to see you when I bring the orchestra to Greenspring on Saturday. I've responded to this note many times --- not to you, per se, but with prayers, both for Martha and you. Stay strong in your faith, and God will take care of the rest. I'll always love you both for the support and laughs (and great pecan pies!) you've given me over the years. Hope to see you soon.

Dingwall Fleary

---

I am so sorry to hear of Martha's passing. She was a wonderful woman: full of life, a great sense of humor, and always made us feel welcome when we invaded her brunches at the club or Merv's swimming pool. I always wished I could see her more often and now I truly regret that I let so many opportunities go by.

I am in Cambridge for two days and have some meetings in NYC on Wed and Thurs. I am hoping that your schedule will allow me to attend her funeral and I will make every effort to be there. Please keep me posted on your plans as they firm up. I can pass along the information to Joe and save you the trouble, if you like.

If there is anyone that you would like us to help notify about Martha, please let us know and we'll get the word out. If there is anything else that you think we could help with, I hope you will not hesitate to ask.

Also, I appreciate your voice mail—that arrived while I was on the plane. Both Joe and I are honored that you made the effort to let us know. We always really liked Martha and looked forward to seeing her. Please accept our condolences and pass them on to Merv.

Betsy Nichols

---

My memories of Martha are her SMILE that warmed and wrapped around everyone in her presence...her timely wit that brought many smiles to our faces...and her generous gift of time, presence, talent that were all integrated in her hand made cross necklaces for our 4th Day Emmaus experience. I will NOT be able to attend the January 27th gathering in person but do plan to "attend in spirit". THANK YOU MERV for your generous invite.

Sue Rothernberg

---

Dear Merv,

It is so good to hear from you...I'm so sorry to hear about Martha's decline, but know where she will be and in that there is great peace. I think of you both every time someone new joins the Church. I recall you and Martha taking us to dinner and standing with us when we joined COGS.

I will keep you both in my prayers.

Much Love,  
DeColors!  
Eve Thompson

---

### **Watch her eyes!**

Martha's eyes told of her compassion and love of service. Her eyes focused on people's needs. Through her eyes we see the world as a much better place as she believed in the goodness of people. She always found the love in people and shared her heart with everyone she met. Her generosity was boundless. Her eyes could visualize spiritual and material needs for soul and stomach. She was truly a loving servant. In her personal relationships, she lovingly watched over her husband, Merv, and her large family. She was a caring matriarch. Usually Martha was not in the spotlight, relinquishing that to others, but it was always clear that she had the power. Martha quietly made things happen for the good. She made her presence known in many ways and deeds. Martha would reach out to others and could see what they needed at just the right time in their lives. She had patience, stability, caring, love, compassion, drive and a loving mother's spirit.

Yes, Martha's eyes are still with us.  
We were fortunate that she was our friend!

Connie and John Weis

---

We met Martha at the Church of the Good Shepherd, Seeing her always at Merv's side with smiles on their faces, we knew she was his soul mate and a model wife.

To us, we could see how she was a loving mother, grandmother and a friend to all.

We feel it was a blessing to have known her and will remember her always with the devotion and love she always shared with us.

Barbara and Richard Tarby

---

When I think of Martha, I will always think of you as a twosome ... never as a single entity. Her gracious smile and soft voice were always welcoming not only to those whom she knew but a stranger as well. Being with her and you, there was always a sense of levity and wonderful stories .... sometimes at the expense of you or her! So to be invited into your home or nest was always a privilege and an honor. Your love for one another was quite evident.... when you were ill, she was your "earth angel" nurturing you back to good health... and when she was dealing with a variety of health issues, you were her best friend.... and your presence was the only "medicine" she needed or wanted. Both of you modeled what marriage should be and ought to be. Her stories were real gems with a great sense of humor and forthrightness.... with you occasionally adding details. I will always feel blessed knowing this saintly woman and having witnessed a "love story" unfold before my eyes.

Your Brother in Christ,  
Doug Bursch

---

Martha was such a dear person...always feeling "Happiness is a choice." She chose to exemplify this always...even when we knew she wasn't feeling well...As she said "to carry worry to bed is to sleep with a pack on your back" and she wouldn't accept that burden.

Martha was kind and thoughtful. One day she surprised me with a lovely hand knit shawl she had made. I think of her now as I cozy up in it these cold nights. Every time we parted she'd say, "I love you." We loved her too. She lives on in our memories.

Jean and Doug Jennings

---

Dear Merv,

You should know that you and Martha were in the prayers raised at your old church this morning. So any disruption in your message was obliterated by the power of 200 voices raised at the Church of the Good Shepherd, prompted by Karl Heeter and embraced by all. The church, as you have probably heard, is going through a transition from Jim Noland's reflective ministry to a more energized ministry of another fine person named Steven Proctor. Unfortunately, he is a Virginia Tech man, so you are no closer to generating sympathy or support -- depending on the weekend results -- for Auburn than you were when Jim was here.

We were pleased to receive your e-mail message even if the news of Martha's health was discouraging. We take comfort in our knowledge that she is in good hands (yours) and that you are still banging away on your computer. In the time we have known you, the percentage of people over 60 who use computers and have visited the internet has exploded from less than 5 percent to over 30 percent. You were and likely are still a pioneer. Congratulations.

Jim and Haydee Toedtman

---

Smiles, kindness, friendship, caring, sharing. Healthy diet for herself and attempts for Merv. Pleasure of daily glass of red wine. Ceramics. Knitting and crocheting for everyone. Beanie Babies collection. Sunflowers of all sizes. Everything and anything REDSKINS. Auburn War Eagles memorabilia. A true Southern lady!

Betty Woods

---

Martha and I shared a kinship with each other. We were born just days apart in 1926. We met men of the Christian faith and shared in belonging to the Methodist Church with them. We both were married the same year, 1949, and celebrated our 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversaries in 1999.

Martha was a beautiful person and she had a beautiful smile and spirit. She exuded a calmness that I admired. She was a friendly person, inviting us and others to their home and swimming pool and she was generous with foods for her guests.

She was generous also with her time, spending hours on her hobby of needlework making craft items for the church bazaar.

Many times I've heard her express her love for her family. She and Merv were proud of their two sons and their wives, and were especially delighted in their grandchildren.

She had a wonderful life—could anyone ask for more.

Jean and Dick Graff

---

We met her on her way out. We got to know her on her way up. Since then, we

have viewed her pictures and listened to reports of her courtship, travels, marriage, and parental abilities. We know enough to wish we had been neighbors and friends for years. The Martha we knew physically was confined to a wheelchair and bed. The Martha we knew was not confined or defined by her illness. We still know her and see her through reflections. She is reflected through the life of Mervin and her loved ones. Her family calls her blessed. Her life is eternal incorporating the life of her Lord.

In her waning hours, she spoke to all of us of faith, hope, and love In Christ. We thank God for every memory we have of Martha.

Neal Jones  
(My Baptist pastor)

# Acknowledgements

This Tribute could not have been written with the support and encouragement of many of my friends and especially Martha's friends.

- To Martha, who inspired me from the moment we met and throughout our 56 ½ years of marriage. Our mutual love for each other will sustain me for the remainder of my life.
- To my two pastors, Dr. John Plummer, pastor of the Oakton United Methodist Church, Oakton, VA and Dr. Steve Proctor, pastor of the Church of the Good Shepherd, Vienna, VA, who were the initial inspiration for this tribute.
- To our two wonderful sons, Michael and David together with the daughters that they brought into the family, Janis and Bonnie, all of whom have given me continual loving support during this past year.
- To Michael, David, Janis and Bonnie for their support in reviewing this tribute and offered suggestions.
- To our wonderful grand children, Jennifer, Steven, Mathew and Hanna for their loving and comforting support.
- To my good friends, Dr. Neal Jones, retired Baptist minister, who with his wife Betty, have helped me through my grief.
- To my good friends, Rev. Bill Reynolds, retired Methodist minister, together with his wife Jean, who gave me excellent advice on this tribute and guided me to the my publisher.
- To our good friends, Rev Jay Hanke, past minister of the Church of the Good Shepherd, and his wife Harriett, who help to guide both of us into a more Christian life.
- To all of Martha's good friends that contributed to this tribute.
- To Martha's family, her mom, two brothers and three sisters who helped to shape her character. They are all together now.
- To my mom and dad, who Martha loved as if there were their daughter. She is now with them.