

TRANSCRIPT: TAKING TIME FOR FAMILY



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Interview: Martin Marty

My Turn: Rebecca Thatcher Murcia

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BURTON: You may have heard or seen him on the evening news, when a spokesman on religion in American life was needed. You may have heard him at a college commencement, or conference, or read one of his 50 books or over 5,000 articles. In any case, we're pleased and privileged to share with you an exclusive interview with Martin Marty on *Shaping Families* today. I'm Burton Buller and here's our producer, Melodie Davis, with more.

MELODIE: I felt like I knew Dr. Marty just from reading his weekly column. For over 50 years "Memo" appeared in the *Christian Century* national weekly magazine. Dr. Marty would share fun and quirky musings, reactions to various issues on the religious or cultural scene, and heartfelt stories arising out of his every day experiences. He remains very active and accessible even though he is in his 80s. He was quick to grant an interview opportunity when we were in Chicago recently.

BURTON: Dr. Marty is professor emeritus at the University of Chicago where he taught at the Divinity School for 35 years. Even though most people know him as a considerable scholar and religious historian, he was ordained as a Lutheran pastor and is also a dedicated family man and father to seven children. But how did he balance family life with his very busy and far-flung career speaking at many conferences and events?

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I share a common heritage with Dr. Marty, who grew up on the plains of Nebraska. He recalled some memories from his childhood and how important *place* is in forming who we become.

MARTY: I have a very strong sense of place and heritage. I was not on a *farm*, I was in a small town, but spent my summers on the farm. My father went to summer school every year, so for six weeks my brother was farmed out to my grandfather's place, and my sister and I to an uncle and an aunt. So they were almost a parallel family to us. We wouldn't see them much during the year, we lived 65 miles away, but that's like 650 today, very rare that you'd buy gas to go that far. So summer was just unbroken pleasure on the farm.

BURTON: Dr. Marty credits his parents as having the most influence on who he became.

MARTY: My father was a church organist and he was also my teacher for a couple of years. So we grew up on Bach and, and literature. It was an environment in which it's hard to describe, pre-television, how much culture there was. The lectures, the state historian would come to town, we'd all be there, etc. So I was influenced by all of that. My first son had traveled much further within ten weeks of his birth than I had in the first 14 years of my life.

We knew no African Americans, we knew no Jews, we shopped at stores which were Jewish, but we didn't know the people. I grew up eleven miles from a Winnebago and Lakota and Omaha Sioux reservation and we didn't know a single person, of them. Played basketball against the Winnebago Indians, but we didn't know them. So in that sense, my whole world began to break open only when in my sophomore high school year, I went to... we were then Missouri Synod Lutheran... and we went to a preparatory school.

BURTON: For fun, Marty and his prep-school roommate would devour books in a library.

MARTY: Every day of the year that we were at this prep school, we would borrow the streetcar passes of the office secretaries and head down to the Milwaukee library. I had the passion to read through the poetry section and he had a passion to read the philosophy section.

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BURTON: Martin and his first wife, Elsa had four sons by birth, but opened their home to others.

MARTY: We took in a brother and sister, Mexican background, and we were told by the agency that asked us to take them that it would be like adoption, that you would have them all our life. And we do, that was 1962.

And we always took in foster children, foreign students. One year we had two boys from Uganda and I don't know how we did it, looking back, we had seven boys aged 9-14 around the table every night.

BURTON: How did they manage?

MARTY: My sainted wife did it more than I did—although I get birthday cards now from the kids who always remember. Every day when they came home from school, and I came home from school, we'd toss the football. We had... we lived among parks and we bought a big old house that had a swimming pool, which was *not* my dream, and it really was a bonding thing. During the week one of them could have a friend each day. We didn't watch television during the week. They'd watch their hockey on Saturday night and stuff, but we didn't, we watched very little during the week.

BURTON: The Marty's also set as a goal to go camping to all 48 contiguous states in the U.S and a number of other countries.

MARTY: You take a three-week camping trip or so with each other, you really get to know each other very well. Each had his own assignment on tent set-ups and camping gear and so on. We had the mission and joy, a goal of camping in every state. And we got to all but Hawaii, Alaska, and we forgot Delaware. We did 13 European countries, just at the right age for them to do that. And now they're doing it with their families.

BURTON: Marty also managed to take the children with him on some of his business trips.

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MARTY:because dealing with five isn't always the best for this one, I would often take one along if I was speaking somewhere mid-west, driving distance, take them out of school a day and they'd go along. So Peter had Madison, Wisconsin, and John had Notre Dame, and so on. And we had good visiting time. So we had that kind of one-on-one too. You need separate time with just one of them.

BURTON: Marty talked about their children's public education.

MARTY: ...it was a good school system, public school system, and we really trusted the teachers. Every teacher that had a passion for something was a good teacher. One had a passion for travel and instilled in the boys, the succession of boys, that Miss Nicks taught Micah, when he was a second grader, the difference between Monet and Manet. And so I have good memories of most of these teachers.

BURTON: When the children were grown, Marty's first wife, Elsa, contracted breast cancer.

MARTY: They were wonderfully humane oncologists. The way they would put it is, "Marty and Elsa, I know you always planned to take an ocean cruise, I would do it this summer or the next summer instead of indefinitely in the future," which was enough signal to us to measure our days without it haunting us.

I think I once counted that in that two-and-a-half years, some 39 weekends we were somewhere or other. I took a lot of speaking engagements I wouldn't normally take, meeting in Nassau and the Bahamas, and things like that, so we really stocked up on that.

The kids had left home by then. She, the last trip she made was for the graduation at St. Olaf of our youngest son. But the last nine months, when it was a brain tumor, they really rounded out. Our foster son came up from the University of Illinois, baked a cake and showed her that he cared and so on. Our youngest son, then, she was at his graduation, and from June till October he helped me take care of her. She wanted to die in the house, and did.

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MUSIC BRIDGE

The last time the family was together, was the marriage of our second son and they then saw Peter off to the airport to go to Africa. And he had a pact with his mother that he shouldn't come home along the way. She said if I'm healthy you'll feel frustrated. You'll spend six days and seven thousand dollars and disrupting your work, and if I'm emaciated and so on, I'd rather have you remember me as I am. So I wrote him every day.

BURTON: Marty found that the death of his wife impacted his ministry in a helpful way.

MARTY: In that role I was often with the terminally ill and while the church that I was at, the founding pastor was in a suburb where the people were younger, even there death was very vivid to them. But it's very different to have it happen to your, to their mother and my wife. So yes, that's when you have the test of everything, you know. What do we really believe and I think it, in that sense, it came through.

BURTON: Dr. Marty had the good fortune to re-connect with his former roommate's first wife, Harriet. With both of their spouses deceased, Martin and Harriet married. They have enjoyed their retirement years and a long second marriage together. We thank Dr. Marty for sharing from his personal life today and invite you to explore the many varied links to some of his work through our ShapingFamilies.com website. Since the Martys have always been great entertainers, we welcome our Potluck contributor, Rebecca Thatcher Murcia, as she shares one of her favorite recipes for a crowd. Rebecca?

REBECCA: These days, recipe writers seem to want time-pressed cooks to cut corners. They also seem to assume that nobody knows how to make their own dough anymore. My standards are pretty low but when a recipe calls for dough from a cardboard can I just turn the page. Dr. Marty's interview reminds us of the importance of slowing down and taking time. It makes me think of a very old and very popular recipe for spinach tomato quiche. It takes about an hour to make and then you have to bake it for 90 minutes. It's not difficult, but there are several steps to follow. It's worth it— especially if you do it as a family.

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I used to make this spinach tomato quiche recipe for potlucks held by my preschool mothers' play group in Austin, Texas. One of the mothers loved the quiche so much that she asked me to bring two of them to her daughter's birthday party as the main dish. Flattered, I agreed, and then promptly forgot.

The morning of the lunch-time party, my husband took our only car to a meeting, leaving me at home with our sons, who were two and four. My friend called to confirm the plans for the party and I realized I was in a pickle. I had not bought the ingredients and the grocery store was almost two miles away. "Of course I'm still making the quiches," I said, suppressing the urge to panic. As soon as I hung up the phone, the race – literally – was on. I threw both the children into the double-wide running stroller and took off as fast as I could. I grabbed the quiche ingredients at the grocery store and ran all the way home, panting, as I told my happy passengers that it was all hands on deck as soon as we arrived at the kitchen. Surprisingly, considering their youth, both the boys seemed to understand the urgency. The two-year-old washed spinach as fast as he could while the four-year-old grated cheese and broke eggs like a professional. I whipped up the pie dough, rolled it out, pierced it to prevent bubbles and baked it for ten minutes. Then I fried the onions, garlic and spinach, added the spices to the milk mixture and sliced the tomatoes. In record time I was turning the oven back on and the boys were putting the grated cheese – after a taste to make sure it was good – into the pre-baked crusts and I was layering the spinach mixture on top.

My friend's husband arrived to take us to the party just as I was taking the lovely-looking pies out of the oven. "Thank you so much for doing that," he said. "Were there any problems?"

"Oh no," I answered, smiling. "It was no problem at all."

So the next time you are expecting company, you can double this recipe and make two quiches. You can also put the pie crust in a big baking pan to make an extra large quiche or add pieces of bacon to make it richer. Let your imagination go, but remember to make a note of all commitments. In Akron, Pennsylvania, I'm Rebecca Thatcher Murcia.

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BURTON: Thanks, Rebecca. You'll find Rebecca's recipe at the *Shaping Families* website, where you can also sign up to get the recipe sent to your e-mail every week. Just go to [Shaping Families.com](http://ShapingFamilies.com).

And from our mailbag today, our producer Melodie Davis will share a family summer activity idea sent to her by one of the readers of her *Another Way* newspaper column.

MELODIE: Cherri writes, "I loved your book review in today's column. We did a pre-bedtime nightly book read on the couch with both of our kids for many years. I particularly recall a book called *I am the Dog; I am the Cat* by Donald Hall, which saw some pretty heavy use. My hubby and I passed it back and forth and did the two parts with funny voices. The kids couldn't wait to take a turn with it once they were old enough to read themselves. It made for some very memorable times filled with laughter and fun. If asked, I would have to say that our book reading ritual was one of my favorite things about parenting young children. Also, the side benefit was that both of our children became very early readers. I feel sad for some of today's kids who are given electronic books that "read themselves" with the press of a button. While they're kind of fun, they are no substitute for one-on-one time with a parent or grandma sitting next to you reading aloud and sharing the time together."

BURTON: Thanks. Most families are always looking for ways to get kids out of the house and away from the electronic games or the television. We invite you to share your own stories at ShapingFamilies.com.

If you want to help support the kinds of things we emphasize on *Shaping Families*, I invite you to send a gift or support us in prayer. You can click on the Donate button at our website or send your gift to Shaping Families, Box 22, Harrisonburg, VA 22803. You can also get our free bookmark with "100 Great Ways to Praise Kids." At ShapingFamilies.com, just click on "Current Offer" to get the bookmark. Our mailing address again is Shaping Families, Box 22, Harrisonburg, VA 22803. Until next week when you'll hear from a well-known Christian musician, Ken Medema, this is Burton Buller

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MELODIE: ...and Melodie Davis, reminding you to carve out time for your children and grandchildren while you can. *Shaping Families* comes to you from Third Way Media and the Mennonite churches.