

3.0 Pictures of Martha . . .



Tropica

Leatherwood Dahlias

Maggie Valley/Waynesville, North Carolina.

Proverbs 31: 29-30

**“Many women do noble things.
Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting;
but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.”**

Proverbs 3: 5-6

**“Trust in the Lord with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;
in all your ways submit to him,
and he will make your paths straight.”**

Pictures of Martha . . .

My life has been a blessed one—blessed by a wonderful and loving God, a precious wife Martha and family, and a career in which I enjoyed going to work every day. But thanks to Martha and family, I enjoyed coming home every night! How many people can say that??? The purpose of this paper is to try to tell you about my wife, my best friend, my princess forever— my Martha.

We have been married for over 52 years now, best friends for 53, and she has been living a life trusting the Lord, with family and their needs first! She is a great wife, teacher, mother, Nana, world class cook, shopper and professional gifter, one who shops all year long, especially on vacations, for Christmas and birthday presents, doing and thinking of her family and others first. Martha is very smart, sensitive, perceptive, but NEVER selfish or with hidden agendas. In all of my years, I have NEVER known her to be untruthful, NEVER deceitful, NEVER self-seeking or scheming for personal gain. Like her mother and my mother before us, her single motivation for gain has always been to share with her family. She has a “radar gun” to size up people and situations. She can see things in a few minutes that would take me YEARS to see! As an advisor in my own decision making, she is almost ALWAYS right!!

A few years ago, I attempted to write a series of stories called “Pictures of Martha.” These “pictures” were to tell stories about important dates and events in our lives. I wrote the first two back in 2005, and perhaps I will write the rest of them later. Here are the first two:

First Picture: “Miss Dawson”



My first picture of Martha was 35 years ago on March 14, 1970. We were young in those days. I was a young “college professor” of 24 years, and Martha Dawson was an “experienced” teacher herself of 23. My sister Janet was in training to be a teacher, and Janet was assigned to “Miss Dawson” for a teaching practicum through the University of Florida. After the practicum was completed, Janet decided to bring her teacher home to meet the family. In particular, Miss Dawson had heard with mild interest that Janet had an older brother who was a “professor,” and she was definitely interested in meeting such an older and perhaps distinguished educator.

On the other hand, I had been having relationship problems of my own, and I wasn't particularly interested in meeting anyone. I was in my second year of teaching, I loved what I was doing, and that was all I had time for anyway. Besides, at this little get-together, I was supposed to be cooking steaks on the grill, and I was there, dressed in my short shorts and bird-legs, not trying to impress anyone. After dinner, we all talked, and I enjoyed talking with this "Miss Dawson." Most importantly, I explained to her that I wasn't interested in relationships, to which she fired back that she herself had had a few, and was likewise not interested in relationships. (Janet later warned me, "Watch out! This girl has got your number!", which I poo-pood and said that NO girl had MY number." Time would tell . . .) She later disagreed with me that we discussed this on our first meeting, else she would never have gone out with me!

At the end of the evening, I took Martha's telephone number (by now we were on first name basis!) in case I wanted to ask her for a date. She says she knew I would call her, and sure enough I did. Of course, I had plans to be in Tallahassee on school business the next weekend, and I didn't want to appear too eager, so I waited a few days, then called her and asked her out for our first date on Saturday March 28. We went to Harvey's Haufbrau in Mt. Dora, and then I had planned to take her to the Lake County Fair. However, since it looked like rain, we decided to go to a movie instead. "Hello Dolly" with Barbra Streisand was playing at Parkwood Plaza Theater on Highway 50 in the Ocoee/Winter Garden area. It was a classic, and we enjoyed the movie. As we returned to the car, I noticed that my car key was not in my pocket! I looked, and there it was in the ignition. This could have been a serious problem, but it was no problem at all. It seems that I had left the back window down, so we just opened the back door, unlocked the car, and drove away. [Note: The seriousness of this problem can only be understood in the light of the frequency of its reoccurrence. Since this first date, I have locked my keys in the car too many times to remember: at our wedding, on the honeymoon, in Canada, at the office earlier this spring, at day care last week. Each time I lock my keys in the car, and each time Martha rescues me!! It is NEVER reversed!]

Overall, Martha was a lovely young lady, and I enjoyed her company very much. It's like we had become friends. I wasn't trying to be romantic, especially after locking the keys in the car. My confidence may have been sagging a bit, so I didn't try to kiss her on the first date. My first picture of Martha was a young woman of

class, except that she wore way too much makeup and her hair was too poofy!. Nevertheless, I really liked her, and I enjoyed talking with her. I enjoyed her friendship very much.. This is my first picture of Martha!

After our first date, Martha's sister Gwen asked her how her first date had gone. Martha's response: "It was good! But certainly nothing to worry about, that's for sure!" Remember my sister Janet's warning to me: "Watch out, Bob! That girl has your number!!" However, I agreed with Martha, "Nothing to worry about!" Janet was right!!

Second Picture: "Kissed by a princess (but I'm still a frog!)"

In my second picture of Martha, we had had our third date. By now, I felt it was time to kiss this young lady if I was ever going to, so at the end of the date, as we said "Goodnight" I leaned forward and kissed her, and then kissed her again, (and again!)It was a meaningful kiss, and it seemed we were both ready to be "romantic" friends. She sure looked like a princess, and my heart was beginning to get into this. The only question, would I ever get over being a frog?

Speaking of frogs, when I was taking Biology as a sophomore (1965) at LSJC, we had to dissect a rather large bullfrog and memorize the bones and muscles of this frog. By the end of that class so many years before, my frog had been out of formaldehyde for quite some time, and he was quite dried up. Nevertheless, after all these years, I still kept him out on the back porch, along with the sea shells we had collected at Sanibel Island over the past few years of family trips. Well, according to Mom's diary, one of my first dates with Martha was on May 2. After our date in Orlando, we came back to the house in Tavares, and for some reason the subject of sea shells came up. Since Martha was a third grade teacher, it suddenly became a great idea to show her our Sanibel shells, and in fact, to give her a few samples to take and show the students in her class. Of course, I enjoyed showing off the shells, and I'm sure I must have introduced Martha to my frog as well. Well, we fixed her up with a bag of shells to take home. When she wasn't looking, I slipped my bullfrog in the bag as well. Martha never had a clue that the frog was in the bag.

So Martha took the bag home and tossed it on her bed without giving it another thought. Now, Martha's mother noticed, and asked Martha, "What's in the bag?"

“Oh, just a few shells that Bob gave me to use in my class next week. Go ahead and take a look at them if you like,” Martha casually replied. Remember that Martha had NO IDEA what else was in this bag, except shells. You would have to know and understand Martha’s mother to fully appreciate what happened next. Martha’s mother didn’t look in the bag to see what was there! She reached into the bag and pulled out the first thing she grabbed!! You know what they say about “when Mama ain’t happy, . . .” I don’t think Martha’s mother was very happy with me that night. However, as chance would have it, it was almost Mother’s Day, and I was working part-time helping a florist friend with deliveries for Mother’s Day. So, I delivered flowers to Martha’s mother as an apology for the unfortunate incident. Good idea?? Well, it would have been a good idea, except that it seems that I had never sent flowers to Martha up to that time. And as for me, I never got my frog back. I wonder what ever happened to my old frog!! As to Martha’s mother, I think she accepted my apology. She went on about a year later to become my “mother-in-law” who always loved me as if I were her own son—even after the frog incident. I never had “in-laws” in the usual definitions of these words. Neither has Martha!

Sometime after that I was pursuing one of my favorite hobbies of those days, cutting and boiling cypress knees [which by the way was completely legal at that time] to make cypress knee lamps. It was June, and with help from Reverend Cutlip, Reverend Parson’s assistant minister, we took his boat out into Lake Harris to cut cypress knees at the water’s edge. I swear, I had never seen a snake in my many such excursions, but Martha saw TWO on this trip. Finally, we were approaching land of a good spot to stop, so I stepped off the bow of the boat to pull the boat to shore. I thought the water looked to be about two feet deep, so I just “stepped” out of the boat. My foot went down, and down, and down, There must have been a good 5 feet of water, and I just kept rotating face first into the water, Finally I came up for air, gasping for breath, to watch Rev. Cutlip at the back of the boat, completely hysterical. I was so embarrassed, but by now what I wanted to know was how embarrassed was the “lady” whom I was trying so hard to impress! How was she taking it? Poor Martha didn’t know whether to laugh or cry for me. Finally Rev. Cutlip won out, and we were all hysterical! I was so relieved to know that Martha did not seem embarrassed nor displeased as I thought she might be. We all swallowed our pride (and I a small amount of water!), and we had a good laugh about it. My second picture of Martha, she

was becoming more real to me, and she could laugh with me instead of being embarrassed at my foolishness.

The second picture of Martha continued to the rest of the weekend. After cutting the cypress knees, we had to boil them in a 55 gallon drum, in order to peel the bark from them. So, Martha spent the night with Janet, while we boiled cypress knees in the back yard all night long. The next day was Saturday, and that afternoon, we went back over to Martha's house for the afternoon. We had had a disagreement about a personal matter. I lost my temper, and was ready to drive off, when she insisted upon coming into the family room and sitting down to talk about it. I'll never forget, she was wearing shorts and a shirt, and her hair was NOT poofy. She was a real girl! She looked good, and I really enjoyed our talk. I'm SO glad she insisted that we have that talk! She made it clear to me that she really cared what I thought and felt! I think I was finally getting to know the real Martha Dawson. She really seemed to care about me, and she was special to me from that moment on. I REALLY liked her, and although I didn't realize it until August, this may well have been the day that I fell in love with Martha!

Maybe, maybe if I keep working on it, maybe someday I will grow up to be her prince . . .

The following "Pictures" are yet to be written:

Third Picture: "I love you!" 6 Aug 1970

Fourth Picture: "The sweetheart ring" December 22, 1970

Fifth Picture: "Our first Valentine's Day" February 14, 1971

Sixth Picture: "My princess for sure!" June 27, 1971

Seventh Picture: "My princess forever" The Rest of my Life