

“This little book explores the mosaic of relationships that make up Martin Sheen’s life and community. It is nourishing to the spirit to get glimpses of his struggles and hopes in challenging times. His faith and authentic caring shines throughout demonstrating that faith in action is at the heart of his commitment and his craft.”

—Simone Campbell, SSS
Executive Director, NETWORK
Washington, DC

“Sr. Rose, with her literary lens, has written a moving and insightful account of a most fascinating pilgrimage. In addition to the chronicling of a wonderful life, we get as a bonus a short history of social activism with a Catholic accent. I am left wondering what a sequel might reveal beyond Martin Sheen’s travels in *Badlands to The Way* including layovers in *Apocalypse Now* and *West Wing?*”

—Rev. Scott Young
Executive Director, University Religious Conference
University of California, Los Angeles

“Sr. Rose Pacatte’s biography of Martin Sheen is a page turner. Sheen’s spiritual journey is told against the background of family, acting career, social activism, and internal conflicts. Sr. Rose’s intimate detailed account is moving, touching, humorous and real. The reader gets to know Sheen, his struggles and triumphs, his low points in life and the high points. What we get is the story of a pilgrim still on ‘the way’ in his personal and spiritual life. But what a journey!”

—Ron Schmidt, SJ
Documentary producer, Hope Media Productions

“Rose Pacatte’s *Martin Sheen: Pilgrim on the Way* is easy to read and packed with new details that even longtime fans of Sheen are not likely to know. Her style is warm and her approach is personal. Sheen emerges as a passionate human being who never stops searching for his true self, which has led him into becoming a man for others.”

—Frank Frost
Director of *Bernardin* and other public television programs

“*Martin Sheen: Pilgrim on the Way* is a celebrity biography unlike any other, and for one simple reason: it has a soul. Sister Rose Pacatte captures more than Sheen’s well-known career trajectory; she also infuses his story with something akin to grace. More than an actor’s rise to fame, this is the story of a pilgrim’s progress—a stirring and inspiring glimpse into one man’s journey of faith that will resonate with seekers of all kinds.”

—Deacon Greg Kandra

Journalist and blogger, *The Deacon’s Bench*

“Without sentimentality, Rose Pacatte’s biography of Martin Sheen is insightful, intelligent, and funny—like the man whose story it narrates. The book opens with a story of Sheen’s First Communion—and in a very tangible way, this eucharistic theme continues to unfold throughout the book. Not only because of Martin’s love for the Mass and the Blessed Sacrament, but perhaps most telling, because of his keen understanding and certainty in God’s presence in the living Body of Christ—in humanity. The man who confesses he’s ‘still astonished at the gift of the Eucharist’ and admits that he ‘counts on the sacraments for joy,’ is also the award-winning Hollywood actor striving to live out his Catholic faith as a disciple of Jesus with deliberate intent, integrity and action. What an inspiring story!”

—María Ruiz Scaperlanda

Author and blogger at *Day by Day with Maria*

“Knowing Martin Sheen through his acting and his Catholic activism, it was a treat to read Rose Pacatte’s portrait and delve deeper into the life of this most remarkable man. Pacatte, who knows both the Hollywood and Catholic scenes, is the perfect person to write this book and she does so simply and cleanly. I came away from reading her portrait enriched and more hopeful about human possibilities, about virtue, and the way goodness can break through pain. A true spirit accomplishment.”

—Tom Fox

Publisher, *National Catholic Reporter*

Martin Sheen

Pilgrim on the Way

Rose Pacatte



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Acknowledgments

When I contacted Martin Sheen about writing this biography, he graciously agreed to a lengthy interview with the possibility of a follow-up. He then sent me a copy of Jim Hargrove's *Martin Sheen: Actor and Activist*, published in 1991 by Children's Press (an imprint now owned by Scholastic) for junior and high school students. Martin said that this was the most accurate and best researched account of his life to date. I have taken quotes from Hargrove's book and referred to it often. Thank you, Jim.

Along the Way: The Journey of a Father and a Son is another source I have consulted and quoted from for this biography. It is, by far, the most intimate and detailed account of Martin's life, from his perspective and that of his eldest son, Emilio.

But the most interesting—and entertaining—sources for this book are the interviews given me by Martin, his sister Carmen Estevez Phelan (whom I call the “memory keeper” of the family), and his brothers Frank, John, and Joe Estevez. I interviewed Martin at his home in Malibu, California, and his brothers Frank and John at the University of Dayton in a conference room that Sister Angela Ann Zukowski, MHSB, of the Center for Pastoral Initiatives graciously made available to us. Carmen, who lives in Spain, responded in depth by

email to my initial list of questions and then confirmed facts or provided new information in many subsequent emails we exchanged throughout the writing project. Everyone should have a generous sister like Carmen. I interviewed Joe, who lives in Southern California, by phone.

I want to thank the following people who gave their time and input through writing, by phone, or in person: Rev. John Dear, author and activist; Elizabeth McAlister, of Jonah House; Douglas Kmiec, retired US Ambassador to Malta; Rev. William F. Kerze, Pastor of Our Lady of Malibu Parish, Malibu, California; Msgr. Lloyd Torgerson, Pastor of St. Monica's Parish, Santa Monica, California; Matt Clark, actor; Michael R. Rhodes, director and producer; Rev. Frank Desiderio, CSP, former president of Paulist Productions; Paul Chavez, president of the Cesar Chavez Foundation; Arturo Rodriguez, president of the United Farm Workers; Roy Bourgeois, founder of School of the Americas Watch; Helena Buscema, singer and songwriter; Rev. Ron Schmidt, SJ, documentary producer, Hope Media Productions; Rev. Michael Kennedy, SJ, executive director of Jesuit Restorative Justice Initiative; Jeff Dietrich, author and Catholic Worker, Los Angeles and his wife Catherine Morris, also a Catholic Worker; Blase Bonpane and Theresa Bonpane, founders of the Office of the Americas; Gerry Straub of Serving the Poor through the Power of Film; Carla Ward, cast member of *The West Wing* and my friend screenwriter Brian Oppenheimer who got the ball rolling.

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Abbreviations

CBS	Columbia Broadcasting System
CCNV	Community for Creative Non-Violence
NBC	National Broadcasting Company
NCR	National Cash Register Company
OFM	Order of Friars Minor (Franciscans)
OOA	Office of the Americas
OSU	Order of St. Ursula
MM	Maryknoll or Catholic Foreign Mission Society of America or Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic
PBS	Public Broadcasting Service
SJ	Society of Jesus (Jesuits)
SOA	School of the Americas

Introduction

Saints are celebrities for Catholics, and Martin Sheen is a Catholic who is a celebrity. The challenge to a Catholic author writing a biography about a living Catholic is twofold: to avoid making it sound like a eulogy and to escape hagiography, that is, writing as if the person were already a saint. I hope I have avoided these tendencies here—though my admiration for Martin Sheen’s way of being Catholic is surely obvious.

That said, it is very difficult to find something negative to say about Martin Sheen as a person. This is, after all, a biography, not a tabloid scoop or a tell all. His past is well known. So here are all the ways Martin’s friends and family members think he needs to improve today: Matt Clark, his friend since 1959, thinks Martin should spend more time at home with his wife and family. Ambassador in retirement, Douglas W. Kmiec, and others think he really, really needs to use a computer and email so they can stay in touch better. Martin’s youngest brother, Joe, would like to be closer to his brother. Martin’s son Emilio found it very difficult to direct his father in *The Way* (2010) because he was so easily distracted by people who recognized him—and he was willing to shake hands and speak with each one! Martin admits to being an

2 *Martin Sheen*

intrepid storyteller (well, he says “blowhard”). Professionally, Martin admits that he acted in many films and television shows over the years, not because they were quality projects, but for the work, for a paycheck—he had a family to support. When I asked Martin about the ubiquitous commercial he narrated for Centrum Silver®, a multivitamin for adults 50+ now airing on television, he said, “But I only do commercials for products I believe in.”

As a Catholic writer I have taken care to protect the privacy of Martin’s family members, especially that of his children and grandchildren.

What makes Martin Sheen a solid candidate for a living biography is the arc of his life journey, his struggles and reversion to the practice of his faith in such meaningful ways. It is all part of his commitment to the pilgrim’s journey, the way he strives to live an integrated personal and public, active, Catholic life.

I have included extended quotes from Martin’s family and many of the activists who have marched with Martin, and his friends. Their warm and sometimes humorous memories tell stories that have not been yet heard.

Martin Sheen’s thoughts on social justice have not been collected and widely published, though his poignant memoir with son Emilio, *Along the Way: The Journey of a Father and Son*, is available, and I recommend it.¹ Interviews with Martin Sheen abound in print and online. One of the best ways to grasp his thought on Catholic social activism is to examine the forewords he has authored for books written by his friends and social justice colleagues, such as those referred to in this book.

Martin Sheen is beloved in Los Angeles, a fact that was reinforced when I visited Dr. Barbara Giesser, my neurologist at the University of California. I have relapsing-remitting MS

(multiple sclerosis), the same as the fictional President Josiah Bartlet, played by Martin Sheen on *The West Wing*. At my semiannual checkup, Dr. Giesser, who is the vice-chair of the Neurology Department at UCLA's Ronald Reagan Medical Center in Los Angeles, asked me what I had been doing lately. I told her I had just finished writing a biography of Martin Sheen. Imagine my surprise when she said very excitedly, "But I am his neurologist!" That is she consulted with him about his character, President Bartlet, who had MS on *The West Wing*. She spoke with him once by phone and twice consulted on the set at the Warner Bros. lot in Burbank. Dr. Giesser said, "He was very presidential when he was in character. He gave me a tour of the set and is one of the most considerate, courteous, and gracious individuals I have ever met. He went out of his busy way to make me feel comfortable and introduce me to his colleagues. I will never forget his kindness. I think there is an old saying about celebrities that goes something along the lines of 'the bigger they are, the nicer they are.' Mr. Sheen really epitomized that for me."

Martin's foreword to Jeff Dietrich's *Broken and Shared: Food, Dignity, and the Poor on Los Angeles' Skid Row* sums up Martin's core values well:

Even for the most conservative among us there is little doubt that we are all responsible for each other, and the world is exactly the way it is because consciously, or unconsciously, we have made it so. But as things decline more and more rapidly with the world's economy in shambles, very few are aware of just how devastating the residual effects are on the poor who are ground down and served up daily to the gods of our idolatry: perpetual war, corporate greed, and personal indifference.

Clearly the need to bring compassion, peace-making, and social justice into the fray has never been greater, but

4 *Martin Sheen*

when faced with such a reality, who can be blamed for turning away in despair or self-preservation? And yet the open invitation from the gospel still reached our heart after 2,000 years and we are left to wonder: Whatever you did to the least of mine you have done to me.

Simply stated, this is the story of Jeff Dietrich's lifelong effort to unite the will of the spirit with the work of the flesh . . .²

It is also Martin Sheen's lifelong quest, this search for God, for transcendence, and to unite the will of the spirit to the work of the flesh. His is an ongoing program of life that he strives to live and witness joyfully to faith, hope, and love in the world.

Why does Martin Sheen do what he does? "I do it because I can't seem to live with myself if I do not. I don't know any other way to be. It isn't something you can explain; it is just something that you do; it is something that you are."³

The best book about Martin Sheen is yet to be written, but with a community of Martin's family and friends, I have tried to make *Martin Sheen: Pilgrim on the Way* the best it can be.

CHAPTER ONE

The Pilgrimage Begins

If you ask actor Martin Sheen if he remembers his First Communion in the spring of 1948 he will answer with a resounding, “I sure do!” followed by laughter, tinged with mischief and maybe a little sadness.

He and his mother, Mary Ann, set out for Holy Trinity Parish in Dayton, Ohio, under a cloudy sky. He was dressed in white, and his mother was sporting a new hat for the occasion. After Mass he and his mother headed toward the church hall for the traditional breakfast when it began to sprinkle. She handed Martin her umbrella, and he ran off to be with his friends leaving his mother to fend for herself.

When Martin arrived home quite a while after Mary Ann did—and with no umbrella—his mother said, “Where did you go? I looked everywhere for you! You took the umbrella and now my new hat is ruined!”

Martin Sheen was born Ramon Gerard Estevez on August 3, 1940, in Dayton, Ohio. Martin Sheen is the name he took for himself when he began acting in New York in 1959. Antonio is his confirmation name, and his brother Mike was his sponsor. What he remembers most about his confirmation

is the preparation: “It was kind of militaristic, with all these heroic images of how our lives were to be and how we were to be like St. George slaying dragons to further the faith. I must have been twelve or thirteen when I was confirmed.”

In a 2003 *Inside the Actors Studio* interview, Martin talked in depth about changing his name to Martin Sheen, which is a combination of the names of the CBS casting director who gave him his first break (Robert Dale Martin) and a certain Catholic televangelist whom he considered “a magnificent actor” (Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen).

Whenever I would call for an appointment, whether it was a job or an apartment, and I would give my name, there was always that hesitation and when I'd get there, it was always gone. So I thought, I got enough problems trying to get an acting job, so I invented Martin Sheen. It's still Estevez officially. I never changed it officially. I never will. It's on my driver's license and passport and everything. I started using Sheen, I thought I'd give it a try, and before I knew it, I started making a living with it and then it was too late. In fact, one of my great regrets is that I didn't keep my name as it was given to me. I knew it bothered my dad.”¹

Martin Sheen's father was Francisco Estevez who was born on June 2, 1898, in the village of Parderrubias in the province of Galicia, Spain. He was the eldest of seven children and grew up very poor. Francisco's father and Martin's grandfather, Manuel Estevez, grew grapes for wine and other produce, and raised chickens for the family and to sell. His grandmother, Dolores Martinez, augmented the family income using her sewing machine. Francisco became the head of the family when his father died. The youngest brother, Matías, was an active anti-Fascist but was falsely accused of certain anti-Franco activities at the beginning of

the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) and spent several years in prison and designated a Communist. For years after his release he remained on a kind of probation as long as Franco was in power. Because of his political record he was never allowed to leave Spain.

Several of Francisco's brothers and relatives emigrated to the United States, South America, and Cuba in the early 1900s to work and raise their families. Francisco left Spain for Cuba with two of his cousins from the same village. After working for several years in the sugar cane fields he became a Cuban national. With his savings he went to the United States. Records show that he entered the country in 1919 through Philadelphia (or Miami, accounts differ) and made his way to Dayton, Ohio, where, he was told, many factory jobs were available. After working for a while as a janitor at the National Cash Register Company (NCR) he saved some money and went to Mexico City, planning to start a business as a street vendor. However, the bank in Dayton that was to transfer his savings to a Mexican bank failed to do so. Soon, Francisco was back in Dayton and was able to recover his savings. He again worked for NCR, a major employer in town, famous for making the first mechanical cash registers in 1884. He would spend the rest of his life working for NCR as a highly skilled machinist and quality control supervisor in Dayton and in other countries.

Mary Ann Phelan, Martin's mother, was born in Borriskane, County Tipperary, Ireland, on May 22, 1903. Her family owned a pub in the village. She completed school at age sixteen. Her brother Michael was active in the Irish Republican Army, and Mary Ann carried messages for the IRA in the tubes of her bicycle during the years leading up to the Irish War of Independence (1919–21). Michael also seems to have been an actor, though it is not clear to what extent.

After leaving school, Mary Ann went England to take a secretarial course and then headed to the United States, entering via Ellis Island on May 10, 1921, to live with relatives in Dayton, Ohio.

Both of Martin Sheen's parents left their countries of origin for opportunity; for Mary Ann especially, her family's political leanings made immigration a very good idea.

Mary Ann lived with relatives in Dayton's east end and earned her way, in part, by keeping house for them but they treated her like a servant. She soon found a job and took a room at a respectable boarding house, to the great disapproval of her uncle. Good Catholic girls did not do that. But Mary Ann knew who she was and was very independent. Francisco and Mary Ann met when taking citizenship classes. Francisco had little formal education, spoke little English, and was slight of stature, perhaps about five feet six. Mary Ann was a pretty, pleasingly plump Irish lass, about five feet two, who spoke English and Gaelic. They fell in love and married at St. Joseph's Church on Monday, September 5, 1927.

Francisco Estevez never missed a day of work in his life, according to his children. On the day he and Mary Ann were married at a 6:00 a.m. Mass, family lore says he was at work by 7:00 a.m.

Full House

Their first child, Dolores, named for Francisco's mother, was born on January 20, 1929, and only lived a day or two. A poignant family story tells of Francisco holding a tiny coffin on his lap in a taxi as he and Mary Ann made their way to arrange for her burial. Dolores is buried in Calvary Cemetery in Dayton.

Francisco and Mary Ann then moved to Colombia for NCR, living in both Bucaramanga and Bogota. After losing another son who was stillborn, they became pregnant again, and Mary Ann decided to return to Ireland for the birth of her child. She did not speak Spanish, and according to her daughter Carmen, Mary Ann wanted to give birth where she was more comfortable. In addition, she was worried about her own mother's health. She told Francisco that they would reunite when he found work in a more civilized place.

Mary Ann gave birth to Manuel Noel on December 14, 1929, in Borrisokane, County Tipperary, Ireland (d. August 28, 1968, Pasadena, CA).

Two years later NCR sent Francisco to Hamilton, Bermuda, and Mary Ann joined him there. Miguel "Mike" Jude was born on August 4, 1933 (d. July 12, 1981, Los Angeles, CA). He was followed by Conrad Joseph on March 26, 1935 (d. November 1998, Dayton, OH); Carlos Patrick on April 25, 1936 (d. May 25, 2010, Brownsville, TX); Francisco "Frank" Vincent on July 21, 1937; and Alfonso "Al" Navarre on May 8, 1939 (d. August 27, 2002, Dayton, OH).

By this time the Nazi threat was looming, and on September 3, 1939, Britain and France declared war on Germany following Germany's invasion of Poland. Also on that day the Germans sunk the British ship SS *Athenia* off the coast of Ireland. Germany only had fifty submarines at that time but had begun attacking British shipping. It was time for the Estevez family to return to Dayton.

Ramon Gerard, the future Martin Sheen, was born there on August 3, 1940. His left arm was crushed by the use of forceps during birth, leaving his arm about two inches shorter than the other, a challenge he deftly overcame so that even today it is hardly noticeable. It also did not prevent him from becoming a caddie at the age of nine and working

to help out his family and support himself once he left home to become an actor.

The family settled in at 751 Brown Street in the South Park neighborhood near downtown Dayton and not far from church, schools, the University of Dayton, and NCR. The Dayton Country Club golf course, on the line between Kettering and Oakwood, where all the boys would caddy, was either a really long walk when the boys didn't have bus fare or short bus ride from their home when they did. The Brown Street house was the Estevez family home until the city claimed it by eminent domain. A few days after the last born son, Joe, graduated from high school in 1964 and left home, the city demolished the house. Today it is an empty lot.

Nevertheless in 1940 it was indeed a full house and becoming fuller by the year.

Carmen was born on February 9, 1942, the first girl after seven sons in a row. Francisco, or "Pop" as the Estevez children still refer to their dad (and how I will refer to him throughout this book), got to work two hours late that day, surprising the large group of men he worked with at NCR, because Pop was never late. In fact, he got up early every morning to get to work and prepare for the day. The men had known Mary Ann and Francisco were expecting, and when they heard the couple now had a daughter they burst into a loud round of applause.

John Barry was born on May 9, 1943, followed by Joseph "Joe" Walter on February 13, 1946. John eventually became a DJ and radio broadcaster and went on to work in public television. Joe is the only one to become an actor like Martin.

Carmen Estevez Phelan, the surviving girl in the family, is a teacher in Spain and the "memory keeper" for much of the family history. Pop told Carmen that her mother was the one who chose the names for the children. While it may seem

Mary Ann chose a Spanish first name and an English middle name for many of the children to acknowledge their families of origin, her reasons were quite varied—though she liked Spanish names. Carmen recalls what Pop once explained to her about how the Estevez children got their names. It offers an affectionate look into a marriage:

Manuel was named after Pop's father, Manuel, according to the Spanish tradition. However, our mother wanted to call him Noel as that is Irish for Manuel: "God is with us." They could not come to an agreement, so Manuel became Manuel Noel. She gave the second son the name Michael, like her father and brother, but in Spanish it is Miguel. Mike's second name is Jude because he almost died at birth, and my mother had a great devotion to St. Jude, the patron saint of hopeless cases. Conrad was Conrad Joseph because my mother's favorite author when he was born was Joseph Conrad. Carlos is Carlos because she liked that name and his middle name is Patrick. Of course, she had to give that very Irish name to at least one of her children. Francisco is Francisco because this time Pop insisted that it was time for him to have a namesake. Frank's middle name is Vincent, not for anyone but because our mother liked that name. Alfonso is another name she liked, and Al's middle name is Navarre because our mother's favorite actor at that time was Ramon Navarro. Ramon, a.k.a. Martin, is Ramon because of my mother's favorite actor. Did this name have anything to do with him becoming an actor? Who knows? His was a difficult birth and a certain Sister Gerard was very helpful. My mother was grateful and she gave Ramon "Gerard" as a middle name to honor that nun. My name is Carmen because I am named after Pop's only sister, and I have no middle name because she did not have one either. John is John Barry after a famous naval hero. Joe is Joseph because I think both of our parents had a special devotion

to St. Joseph, and they were married in Dayton at St. Joseph's Church. His middle name, Walter, is after his godfather, but Joe says the name is not on his birth certificate. So Pop had some choices but most of the names are from an Irish lady who liked romantic, nice-sounding names.

School Days

The Estevez boys were a rowdy, disruptive lot and became more so as they grew older. Yet they were raised in a disciplined, thoroughly Catholic family, and all received an excellent Catholic education for twelve years. The boys were altar servers. And all the children of Francisco and Mary Ann would have trouble with alcohol.

In Bermuda the boys attended Mt. St. Agnes Academy, run by the Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent De Paul of Halifax, Nova Scotia. Later on, after retiring as a teacher and counselor, Frank would return to Mt. St. Agnes to teach. In Dayton the children attended Holy Trinity for grade school and the boys Chaminade High School, run by the Society of Mary or Marianists. Carmen graduated from Julianne High School, run by the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur.² Some of the Estevez children attended the University of Dayton as undergrads or for postgraduate courses or degrees. Today, at least two of Martin Sheen's nieces or great-nieces work at the university.

Frank is the only one to graduate from a public high school, however. After an altercation with a Chaminade basketball coach halfway through his senior year, he was expelled and finished up at the local public high school. Frank does not have fond memories of Chaminade nor the school's teaching methods as they applied to him.

Martin received his diploma in 1958 with his class, but it was blank. He had failed science and Pop "was furious."³

Getting an education and going to work in the factory was of paramount importance to Pop. A priest mentor and friend, Fr. Alfred Drapp, the associate pastor at Holy Trinity, convinced Martin to go to summer school and get his diploma. Drapp also encouraged Martin to take the entrance exams for the University of Dayton in order to please his father. Martin was close to Fr. Al and had served his Masses since Father first came to the parish when Martin was fourteen. So Martin listened, got his high school diploma, took the exam for the University of Dayton, and deliberately failed it. He wanted to be an actor and figured you didn't need an education to do it. He had a change of heart decades later, and in 2006 he studied for a term at the National University in Galway, Ireland, and seemed to enjoy it very much.⁴

Growing up in the Estevez household was a challenge. There was not a lot of space and there was little money. They had a radio but they did not have a television until much later. Frank recalls his mother sending him to the store and always reminding him “not to tarry” on the way home—and to bring her all the change, even if it was just a few pennies. Pop was a very strict disciplinarian and frequently reminded his kids that they were knuckleheads and hooligans, which by their own admission, they were. Both Frank and John attest to the two-family idea, which when children are born before a significant event or gap in years, sibling memories differ. For the Estevez children, Bermuda was the dividing line. The eldest from that time still living, Frank, remembers his family history, and even some shared events, differently than Martin, Carmen, John, and Joe who were born after the family returned to Dayton.

Frank emphasizes how poor the family was, and of this the siblings agree. At Christmas, Pop would bring home a scrappy tree that only cost seventy-five cents or was abandoned on the lot. Frank thinks there was even a year

when they had no tree. Carmen has fond memories, noting that even if there wasn't much money there was always a tree with a nativity set under it, and the family had fun decorating the tree. While their mother was alive she would buy small gifts or give money to the older boys to buy them. Then she would hide them around the house and, after the younger children would find and open them, she would rewrap them, hoping no one would notice. After Mary Ann's death, Pop would give the children money to buy Christmas gifts for everyone, mostly "socks, underwear, gloves, ties, pajamas, notebooks, school supplies, books, small toys, plastic cowboys and Indians, and board games." They would play the board games until all the pieces were lost. Carmen recalls her mother teaching them Christmas carols, especially her favorite, "Christmas Is Coming." When the kids still at home were teenagers they would go to Christmas midnight Mass. Carmen sang in the choir and remembers that the ushers would send people who were under the influence of alcohol to the choir loft during the Mass. Her brothers were often among them.

Martin remembers that the family was always on the verge of poverty and that one of the disadvantages to poverty is that "you develop a chip on your shoulder" and this means, "you don't give anyone else a break, especially wealthy people." Martin was a caddy from about the age of nine. "I really had it in for those rich people" at the country club. They pretended a caddy didn't exist and did not guard their speech. They were very stingy with tips so Martin started a caddy union and held a strike when he was turning fifteen in 1955. He admits he didn't know what he was doing but most of all he wanted to have "a voice" to unite the lads. The men and women they caddied for were wealthy, impossible to talk to, and used foul language, yet Martin saw

something very vulnerable about them. Still he calls them “loafers” who were vulgar and who drank a lot. The men, mostly all professionals, played on Saturdays and Wednesdays and on many days in between, but on Sundays, when they played with their wives, “butter would melt in their mouths.” To this day Martin does not play golf in private clubs unless it is for a charity tournament, as he has done for his parish in the Our Lady of Malibu Golf Classic, in Malibu, California. He doesn’t play on public courses because people recognize him and it becomes difficult to play. As for the strike, the caddie master convinced most of the lads to come back to work and catch a round of golf before the end of the day. Martin and his brothers Al and Joe were fired but they eventually returned to work. It was Martin’s first foray into social activism.

Martin’s father called him “Rrrramon!” and his brothers and sister still call him “Roman” probably based on the way their Irish mother pronounced his name, a cross between Raymond and Ramon. “Ray” was another nickname for him. He wore glasses and some of the kids, including his brothers, called him “Four Eyes” that turned into “Eyes.” Another moniker that his father, brothers, and fellow caddies used for Martin was “Isaac,” though his brother Joe and sister Carmen don’t agree on the origin of that nickname.

With such a large family, the money Martin and his brothers earned as caddies, especially over the hot and humid summer months, helped to pay their tuitions and to buy uniforms.

When a Mother Dies

Mary Ann Phelan Estevez died suddenly on August 1, 1951, of a cerebral hemorrhage. She was sitting in her rocking chair

in the bedroom and praying the rosary when the end came. She had grown stout in previous years and was not able to get around very well in the last two. She was only forty-eight years old. At the time of her death, Conrad was seventeen, Carlos was sixteen, Frank was fifteen, Al was thirteen, Martin was eleven, Carmen was nine, John was eight, and Joe was just five years old. Of all the surviving Estevez siblings, Joe remembers his mother the least.

Manuel, the eldest surviving child, had been drafted into the army but was classified 4F because he did not meet the physical standards for recruitment due to a heart murmur. After living in Mexico for some time to find work, he finally came home when Pop convinced Mary Ann to stop sending him money (Pop then sent him just enough to get to the US-Mexican border and then made his way home). Manuel was his mother's favorite, Carmen says, probably because he was her first child to survive. Manuel died of a massive coronary in 1968, leaving behind a wife and child born after his death. Mike had joined the Marines and was on his way to Korea when he got news of his mother's death.

According to all accounts, Mary Ann was a bit of a character. She was strong and loving and a great conversationalist with an excellent sense of humor. And like all the Estevez clan, she loved to tell stories and was known to break into a song if the moment was right. She taught her children to be fair and generous.

"But she was a very strict mother," says Carmen. "You never got away with anything and no matter how you tried to hide anything you had done, she always found out. On the other hand, she was the first to defend us all from anybody she thought was unfair or might hurt us. I have a very clear vision of her once in the back yard waving a carving knife in her hand warning somebody to never lay a hand

on any of her children again. She was the one to punish her children and no one else!”

To make some extra money she worked at a pub every now and then, leaving the children in the care of her best friend, Mrs. Magnus, across the street. After Mary Ann’s death Mrs. Magnus did what she could to help the family until she moved away.

Mary Ann was a woman of deep faith and led the family rosary every night, gathering the children around the dining room table. Sometimes during Lent they said three rosaries. As the boys got older they found reasons to be elsewhere when the rosary beads came out. For her entire life Mary Ann remained proud of her Irish roots.

One of Carmen’s fondest memories is of her mother “sitting in her rocker and me unbraiding her thick, long black and silver hair. I can still feel my fingers running through the waves the braids had left. Then I would brush it and brush it and brush it until she would say, ‘Okay, Carmen, that’s grand. That’s enough now.’ And she never missed an episode of the radio show *Our Girl Sunday*.”

Mary Ann’s death left Pop to care for eight children still at home, and he never waivered. Pop was a responsible man, and he expected his children to become responsible adults, though this was a long time coming for some of them. People were surprised that he didn’t send the children to an orphanage. Though, as the only girl he considered sending Carmen away to boarding school, believing that the nuns would know how to raise such a willful child. When she accused Pop of wanting to send her away because he did not love her, he gave in and kept her at home. Carmen couldn’t imagine being away from him and her brothers.

Pop was up early every morning to what Frank and John refer to as “Pop time,” that is, always earlier than anyone

else thought necessary. He would check the bulletin each week for the altar server schedule and then would wake up those who were scheduled to serve Mass and make sure they had breakfast. Then he would leave for work. The children took turns cooking dinner, and he gave them the money to buy the necessary groceries. He also made sure they got to doctor and dentist appointments. Frank recalls someone asking why Pop never remarried and his response: “Who would marry a man with ten kids?”

After Mary Ann died, an air of sadness and gloom dominated the house. Pop was probably depressed but they didn’t have the word for it back then. There was a lot of anger, and the kids fought as usual, but the fights seemed to last longer now that their mother was not there to mediate. School, homework, work, and chores continued, which created a sense of normalcy. They tried to keep in mind that their mother was looking down on them from heaven and this helped the children behave to a certain extent. “It took us all a long time to get used to being without a mother, and I think maybe we never really did. She was always with us even though she left us when she was very young,” according to Carmen.

In his son Emilio Estevez’s fictional 2010 film *The Way*, Martin Sheen plays a widower, Tom, who is making the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, carrying the ashes of his estranged son. Tom tells a story to a fellow pilgrim, Sarah (Deborah Kara Unger), about a lesson learned from his mother when he once hit his sister: only cowards hit women. It’s a true story. Martin had been chasing Carmen alongside the house one day intending to catch her and hit her when suddenly a window flew open and a mop landed on Martin’s head. He and Carmen looked up and saw their mother looking down at them and listened as she said the now famous words: “Only cowards hit women.” Martin never hit Carmen

again. In fact, Al and Martin defended the younger kids when the older boys picked on them.

Carmen remembers Martin as being his own person and also the heated arguments the kids would get into at the breakfast table after Pop left for work. One day Conrad was nagging Martin about his long hair and the way he dressed when the two brothers started circling the table. After giving Conrad a piece of his mind, Martin ran out the back door, “sailed over the porch railing, landed in Mrs. Monahan’s back yard, and kept running.”

As the years passed for the Estevez family after their mother died, the kids went to school; Pop continued work at NCR, pacing the floor and stirring his coffee when at home, two distinct habits the siblings recall about him. On Sunday afternoons the kids always went to the movies at the nearby Sigma Theater. After the movies they would act them out in the back yard or in the front room, using the sliding inner doors as a curtain. And they finally got a television set.

At one point Manuel was jailed after hitting several parked cars while driving drunk, and it was Martin who got the bail money together. Mike joined the marine corps, Carlos and Alfonso joined the navy, Conrad lived at home and worked at NCR, and Martin realized he wanted to be an actor more than anything else. It would not be easy.