

Here's

# Martha

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SHE'S BEEN referred to as "WOI's Christmas present to you with a red bow on top" or Women's Radio Editor or Mrs. Eleanor Wilkins. But she's best known as Martha Duncan, "that friendly-sounding woman" who's been chatting with her listeners about everything from apples to zebras since she started radio programs in 1938.

Martha's early programs were five minute affairs on which she read a menu for the day and squeezed in as many personal comments as time would permit. In contrast, today she does three programs: the *Homemakers' Half Hour* on which Martha interviews members of the staff of the Division of Home Economics; the *WOI Book Club*, 30 minutes for the actual reading of novels of yesterday and today; and the *Women's Forum* which presents a wide range of general interest material. She's presented rather informally on these programs with the announcer saying, "And now, here's Martha."

## On The Air

The physical appearance of the woman behind this ambitious radio schedule is often a surprise to her long time listeners who find her much "younger looking" than they expect. Martha has red hair (hence the "Christmas present with the red bow on top"), a pleasant smile, and is apt to be seen in lavender or at least with some accessories of that becoming color.

In tone with this appearance is a lively, outgoing personality. The fact that most of the guests on her programs sound relaxed and at ease can be traced directly to Martha's personality. As the guest is speaking, he can see Martha on the other side of the microphone smiling encouragement and nodding approval.

It's an unusual person who doesn't soon find himself speaking in a natural, conversational tone to Martha rather than in the stilted tones of the nervous novice speaking to the great radio audience.

Martha herself has a relaxed, homey way of talking on the air. In fact it sounds so easy that few people realize how difficult it actually is to talk in this way and still maintain a precise, clear presentation. Martha says, "I try to think of each word as a separate and important part of the thought. I can keep from running them together this way."

Undoubtedly, one cause for Martha's success is her ability to make her personality "felt" over the air. Most of her listeners write to her as they would to an old friend — usually beginning with simply "Dear Martha." Even letters requesting some type of bulletin are apt to include a page or two about the writer's family and ask about Martha's family. The letters ask Martha for advice on anything from an overweight child to the right accessories to wear with a new black outfit.

## At Home

As far as personal history goes, Martha is a native of New York state and is a graduate of Oregon State College with a degree in Home Economics. She taught Vocational Home Economics for two years in Arizona before she married F. Scott Wilkins and settled down in Ames to raise a son, Don, and a daughter, Joanne. Mr. Wilkins died in 1937 and Don died of polio in Korea in 1951.

Besides her regular radio programs, Martha finds time to visit with guests in her studio, (which is located on the top floor of Home Economics Hall), produce transcriptions of tips for homemakers that are used on radio stations throughout the state, attend various meetings and occasionally give speeches.

It all adds up to a rich and satisfying career for Martha. Maybe that is another one of the keys to her success — she enjoys her work and she sounds like it.