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Week 31: WFL

Randy Robison and Sheila Walsh

Mary Marantz

SHEILA: Hi! Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm Sheila Walsh here with Randy Robison. I have to tell you, I'm very excited about our guest today. I first heard about Mary Marantz quite some time ago. She is with the same book company as I am but her first book that came out was called *Dirt* and it was powerful. But she has a brand-new one called *Slow Growth Equals Strong Roots*. Mary, it is such a joy to welcome you to the program.

MARY: Oh, my gosh! Sheila, Randy, both of you guys, thank you so much for having me. Sheila, I feel like we've been friends forever. It's just been a couple of years through Instagram. But thank you for having me.

SHEILA: Before we go into this beautiful devotional, honestly, it is one of the most beautiful books you will ever see. The artwork, the photography. But the very first book that you wrote, *Dirt*, can you give just kind of a synopsis of where you started in life?

MARY: So basically, the short version, the elevator pitch version, if it were, is I grew up in a single wide trailer. Born in 1980, in the '80s. So the trailer was purchased in 1978 and surprising to no one, single-wide trailers in the 1970s and 1980s were not built to last. But that is where I grew up from zero to 18. And so about halfway through the ceiling starts leaking, aided in no small part from eight-year-old Mary climbing onto the roof and sliding down it in the rain. So I take some responsibility. But it started to leak, and the water would pour through. And then the floor would start to cave in; we had mushrooms growing out of the floor at one point. I always say my people are the people who know what drywall ceiling looks like right before it gives away in a downpour. And

so elevator pitch is: grew up in a trailer and then went to Yale Law School. I feel like we've seen that movie. We read that book.

But it is the story that God gave me. And for me, to walk into a market where there are already a lot of stories like that, I just asked myself what does it look like for me to tell the truth in this situation? I felt like that story through the lens of grace was a different approach, a different voice. So yeah.

RANDY: Now this was in West Virginia?

MARY: That's right.

RANDY: What was, so we know what the trailer was like. So poverty in West Virginia, yes?

MARY: Mmh.

RANDY: What was the environment like?

MARY: Randy, that is an amazing question and a very smart question because one of the things I've learned through this process is that there are a lot of different kinds of poverty. So I think I probably had poverty of house, but I never had poverty of love. I have friends who had poverty, they weren't sure when the next meal was coming but they were in a nice double wide. So I feel like there are a lot of different angles to that and a lot of different sides to that. And so I had parents who loved me, and my grandma Goldie was right next door who is quite the character. So I feel like that story could have gone a lot differently but for our family's love.

SHEILA: What about your own faith journey? You talk about at quite an early age raising your face to God in the sky. What was your faith journey like as a young person?

MARY: Yeah, I feel like -- I can't explain it except to say that I feel like God started talking to me at a very young age. I don't remember at that age ever having been told this is how you talk to God. I was not yet going to Sunday School. I didn't know how to read scripture. I didn't know like the prayers you're supposed to pray. This was a conversation with a friend. I say in the book it felt like he grew close to you enough to leave fog marks on the glass. Later, he started meeting me in the daylight hours. And he was in the sun on your face when you close your eyes, and the birds stepping off the branch, the feel of dirt on your hands, how you can't shake it once you know what it feels like. He was color and freedom and fire and *Dirt*.

And so it was a very pure relationship. And then I went through a phase, when I was a teenager, thinking God is a distant God. God is a God who has favorites and we're not it. You have to earn your worth, your approval with God. And so it was like a journey far from him to only find my way back home, which is a lot of what *Dirt* is about.

RANDY: Is Yale Law School a long distance from West Virginia?

MARY: In a lot of ways. Yeah.

RANDY: How did you make that jump and why did you go in that direction?

MARY: Yeah. Gosh. Wow! That's such a great question because my dad was very insistent that I was going to get out and I was going to go to college. He went to work in the woods when he was 12 and he had a very hard life. He could see that we were on the same trajectory. We were growing up in the same yard, we went to the same Sunday School, and we went to the same elementary school. So he was like, "You're going to college."

But for him getting out was West Virginia University, which is where I did my undergrad and then stop. Go up to the boundaries, go up to the border. So there is this line in *Dirt* about the undulating, irregular heartbeat that is the border of West Virginia. I found out

and told him I was going to go do a year in England the week after 9/11 so he was not pleased. He was not pleased. So there was tension there. He did not want me to go to school outside of the state. He said to go to West Virginia University law school. If people keep leaving the state, how are we going to make that better?

But that transition to W.V.U. was what showed me the world. I was on the debate team. We were debating political issues the world. We were traveling for tournaments. And that was the first time my eyes were open to a life outside of the state. So yes, it is a world away, in a lot of ways. It's a lot of different backgrounds compared to mine.

Yale is the number one law school contrary to what Elwood's would have you believe. It is not Harvard, it is Yale. And in a lot of ways, I sort of felt like that fish out of water. Not because of anything anybody else did but you just walk in with that chip on your shoulder.

SHEILA: Now you have this great new devotional, *Slow Growth Equals Strong Roots*. What a fantastic title! "Finding grace, freedom, and purpose in an overachieving world."

One of the devotions struck me. Man, I remember when I was in college. I was 19 and I was dating the guy who was head of the tennis team. He was kind of the catch. And I always felt bad about my skin. I had bad skin when I was a teenager and I brought a book back to him one morning and he opened the door and the sun was on my face and he said to me, "Gosh, I must really love you because you look terrible right now." That picture stayed with me every time I met anybody else. I thought that's what they are thinking.

And you talk about that, about walking into a room and you have a picture that you think people are seeing.

MARY: Yes, 100 percent. I say in this book not many people can point to the exact moment you go from cute kid to the awkward ugly girl, but I have photographic evidence. And it was the 1980s so big, big hair perm, kinky, curly with like the Venus

flytrap bangs. And so one of the things I notice when I look at this picture is these muddy shoes because I feel like even though you're trying to do this thing where you chemically alter the lot in life you've been given in the form of your hair, there is still that *Dirt* and that mud with you. And you carry that with you.

And so I'm down in this pose that nobody asked me to pose in with like my elbows on my knees, holding up my chin -- probably because the hair was so big. [Laughing] That picture just became for me the epitome of you are the ugly girl. This is what --. It doesn't matter how far you go, how grown up you are, how much you straighten that hair, that's all people see. And it is so incredible how each of us has that version that we feel like is walking into the room and introducing us. And before we can sit down at a table, she's already been uninvited. Or maybe Randy can speak to this, he's already been uninvited and we just, we have no idea how other people see us or how God sees us until we start to lean into when I'm walking into a room what does it look like for him to be the one to introduce me?

RANDY: So what do you do with that picture? Do you embrace it, or do you run from it?

MARY: Well, it's been a lifetime running from it. I've done the field research so I can tell you it doesn't work. [Laughing] And now when I look at that girl, that's like the proof to me of how much change has happened because I have nothing like compassion for her and I think she is the coolest.

And I'll tell you one of the craziest things that happened is when I wrote *Dirt*, my husband and I were known for black and white photography and sophisticated Vanity Fair, moody kind of a look. And after I released *Dirt* into the world, I could not get enough color, like Punky Brewster, rainbow color. And I felt like little Mary was finally - - finally you're not going to run away from me.

In *Slow Growth*, one of the prayers, I talk about I had this just like mic drop, knock-the-wind-out-of-you moment with God where I was talking about these illusions and the

distance. These perfect, imaginary versions of yourself where you think if I could just catch up to her then I'll be happy -- then I'll be safe. She turns at you, looks down at you from her lofty positions on high, these illusions illuminated mountaintops in the distance -- looks you straight in the eye that is mere reflections of her own for only a minute, smiles a superior smile, and goes on without you. And the prayer is talking about this heartbreak of you are chasing somebody who keeps leaving you, and that person is you. And I realized in that moment, that I'd been doing the same thing to little Mary for my whole life. So now I kind of picture like all these different versions of me coming back together to sit together and they're at peace, they're playing.

SHEILA: I love that! I love that. The word on your cover that stuck out to me is the word *overachieve*. I mean we live in a world where it is like it's never enough, we're never enough. I have to tell you when I'm out spending time with women, I hear that over and over, "I'm not enough. I'll never be enough." Why is that so important to write about for you?

MARY: Oh, wow. Well, they say write the book -- you think you set out to write a book to help other people, but it is to help yourself.

SHEILA: Something you wish you could read.

MARY: Yes. So I very much identify with that as I have on my website, like Jessie Spano meets Elwood, like it's hard, A++ overachiever.

But one of the really interesting things for me in releasing this book and talking to women is we start off, it is so in the manuscript, I describe her as the most put-together woman in the room. But once I started having conversations, what I heard from women is that they are so relentlessly hard on themselves that they don't even feel qualified to call themselves overachievers. They don't even feel qualified to call themselves the most put-together, so we had to kind of pivot into the woman always performing. Because even if you couldn't say, oh yes, I'm an overachiever. You know what it is like to feel like you

always have to be on. So that's a really interesting twist. This book is for the woman who is so hard on herself that she can't even imagine calling herself an overachiever.

SHEILA: Performer is an interesting word though. I think I've spent so much of my early Christian life performing, trying to be good enough for God. And it was only when my life kind of fell apart that I discovered that it was safe to take the mask off in the presence of God. Has there been like a turning? Was there a point in your life where something just shifted?

MARY: Yeah. So the book, a really interesting thing about these two books, they are very much fraternal twin sisters. They do not look alike and that was on purpose. *Dirt* is a love letter to the girl in the trailer. This one is a love letter to the girl after the trailer who has put on this very beautiful life that you would never imagine that *Dirt* is on the inside. So the fascinating thing is that one of the last entries in *Dirt* talks about at a certain point you stop running, breathless, and at last exhausted you double over from a pain -- the pain of a lifetime spent proving. But no matter how hard you run you can't outrun you.

I thought that was the end of this journey of making peace with your past. And I turn that book in and we send it off and God is like cool! That's going to be the start of the second book. And so that passage in the book actually says, "This is the inciting incident, at last exhausted." And so the pivot, the turning point for me is I think every single person watching, you almost have to taste it for yourself. You almost have to try for yourself to achieve your way into worth. Check the box, check the box, one more box, ten more boxes, and reach that point where you're finally going, okay. So maybe no amount of more is ever going to make me stop feeling less than. So if you're starting to feel at last exhausted, if you're starting to feel like I'm ready to stop running from this story, then I think you're ready for this book. Yeah.

RANDY: I love the writing, by the way. The pictures, you draw, really help communicate what you're trying to communicate. There is one more that I would love to hear you relate to because you talk about the running. You talk about sometimes what

you're running from and the realization. Explain the wolf.

MARY: Yeah, the wolf -- oh the wolf! So in *Dirt*, it was very important to me, in *Dirt* and again in this book, to communicate to people how primal, visceral, survival, and achieving for your worth can be. Because if you have not had that experience, where there is something in your story that flips that switch in you, where achieving feels like oxygen, if you go too long you feel like you can't breathe, then it can look from the outside like okay, you grew up in a trailer but you went to Yale Law. So the only side effect was success. Like what are you complaining about?

But what I say is the side effects, the whole disease is not knowing how to stop. And so to kind of show that picture I talk about the girl in the red cape escaping her way out of the deep dark woods. The big bad wolf is ripping at her heels, these branches clawing at her clothes and her skin, leaving a trail of breadcrumbs behind her. At a certain point, breathless and wide eyed she looks back over her shoulder and she says, I say, "I am the girl in the red cape but I'm also the wolf." That voice in my head saying you have to keep running in order to be safe is my own.

So in *Slow Growth*, one of my favorite things is where we revisit that scene this time from the perspective of the wolf. And you find out that the wolf is not bad, the wolf is wounded, and there is a thorn in its paw. And at a certain point, we learned how to cage it and make it dance in our three-ring circus where we always get to be the high wire act. Because if it stops chasing us we might stop running, and if we stop running we might cease to exist or matter.

So we twist the thorn, we know the wounds, the pressure points to hit to send it back into fight or flight mode. But when it roars in pain our throats hurt. And when we twist the thorn, our once unscarred wide-open palms are the ones that bleed. So it is this piece of I had to become these different versions, this wild animal version of myself to survive. And when we can bring them all back together, that's when I think we start to have peace with the past and the story.

RANDY: And wholeness. I hear wholeness.

MARY: Wholeness, yes! There was this reintegration for sure.

SHEILA: I found it interesting reading that your dad didn't come to your graduation at Yale. He felt he would not fit in. And perhaps, one of the things that worried him throughout his life was he would have nothing, no legacy to leave you. But you talk about his hands, and you talk about your life being the legacy that he left you.

MARY: Oh, Sheila, I don't know if I can even talk about that. You're going to make me cry. Yeah, he is -- it's so easy for him to look -- 12 years old, goes to the woods, trailer. He's reaching a point quickly that he is not going to be able to log anymore and that's breaking his heart. So I think like he can start to feel like all I've done my whole life is cut things down and like mow things over. He like when I was younger, he gets asked by the governor to be the one to cut down these very long trees to build this -- rebuild this covered bridge that had burned down in West Virginia. He was like that's the only thing I can like point to when I'm gone. And the whole time I'm sitting before him like hello? Like hello! I'm right here. I don't think he can fully understand. So at the end of *Dirt* I talk about most people hear a story like a trailer to Yale Law and they get interested in the upward explosion and mobility, and for me, I got interested in the spark that came before, and like that's what sets off that explosion. Yeah.

RANDY: I know. We've barely gotten into this. There is so much more.

SHEILA: I know. Honestly, I would encourage you to get a hold of *Dirt*. It's a great book. But in this book, *Slow Growth Equals Strong Roots*, there is something here that will make a shift in every single one of us. I want to tell you how you can get a hold of your own copy. But first of all, Randy and I would love to ask you to help us with something that we care passionately about, and that is that some people are scratching through the *Dirt* even as we speak trying to find some access to something that would be

drinkable. It is a very futile search. But we have discovered that we can make a difference. Would you watch this and then I'll tell you how you can get a hold of Mary's brand-new book?

On the mission field

Announcer: One hundred hours. On average, that is how long the human body can survive without water. In the face of death by dehydration, water like this is the only choice for many. Recently, while in East Africa, we spoke with Fatina, a mother personally impacted by this crisis.

Open Captions

>> One year ago, my child had a problem of diarrhea. So I tried to help him. When we went to the clinic, they said it was because we drink unclean water. While we were there, my child died.

Announcer: Unclean water is a common hardship throughout the world. And when something is common it is easy to get used to. But should losing a child ever be something we get used to?

Contaminated water has already taken Fatina's son. In Cambodia, Sumnang lost his daughter to a waterborne illness.

Miriam Venegas from Central America stands by the grave of her five-month-old baby boy who died from drinking contaminated water. It came from this river, the only source Miriam has available to her. His death still haunts Miriam to this day knowing clean water could have prevented it.

For years you've helped *LIFE Outreach* provide clean water in thousands of areas across the globe. Right now mothers like Fatina also need clean water in their villages before

tragedy strikes again.

Open Captions

>> I am afraid that one day my remaining children will die because of the lack of safe water.

End of video

In the studio

SHEILA: It's almost inconceivable to me to think that in this day and age this is still happening, that children are dying simply because they have no access to clean water. Can you imagine what it is like to actually live beside your killer?

Water should be the source of life but for so many that Randy and I have had the privilege of sharing a little bit of a journey with them and hearing their stories, the thing that's hard to understand unless you go there is that so many of these moms like Fatina get up at 4:00 morning and they will walk and walk and walk until they come to the only thing that is available, either dirty, contaminated river or a hand-dug well, those go down about six feet, and neither is a source of healthy water.

And can you imagine what it is like as a mom to give your remaining children the very thing that took the life of your son? It's unthinkable! And that's why here we're determined as long as there is breath in our bodies, we're going to do something about it. And our commitment this year, Randy, is for 350 wells that will provide water in 20 nations. And if you will just join with us, we can do this.

RANDY: We absolutely can. And we know because we have done it in the past. Many of you have supported this and we thank you for that. Sheila, these people are doing the best they can. You see them in these desperate situations. Sometimes they don't know how bad the water is until it is too late. They're doing what they can. But you and I have both seen what happens when they get the fresh clean water well. When that well goes in, we

see how it transforms them.

SHEILA: I remember one day being in a village and walking with a mom to where she had buried her little one and she couldn't stand. She literally, she was just -- I held her and she was just sobbing. And the next day we drove for hours and hours to a place where we've already drilled a well and there the children were happily pumping this sparkling clean water and handing me a cup in their grubby little cup, but it was beautiful clean water.

RANDY: It is! It literally transforms a village when we go in and put a well in. Here's how it works. On average, an average well, when you look at the 350 wells, we're going to drill over 20 nations, the average well costs \$4800. If you can give a well, do it. You will transform typically, the lives of a thousand people. Fresh clean water for a thousand people for \$4800. It's that simple. Now many of you, maybe \$48 is what you can give and that will transform the lives of ten people, give them fresh clean water. \$144 today will help provide clean drinking water for 30 people for a lifetime.

I'm suggesting you go online or go to the phone right now and give the best gift you can, and let's turn it around for these people. We do it in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He said, "Whoever will give a cup of water in my name, it will not go unnoticed." Your gift today will not go unnoticed, it will go to good use. So join us as we give Water for LIFE. Go to the phone, go online, and give the best gift you can. Do it now.

Begin video clip

ANNOUNCER: Across the globe, hundreds of thousands of lives are lost each year to waterborne disease, and nearly half of those are children under the age of five. Through Mission: Water for LIFE, you can give mothers hope and children a future as we provide clean, life-giving water for thousands of children and their families before it is too late.

With your gift today, you can help drill and establish 350 water wells this year. Your gift

of \$24 will help provide clean water for five children. A gift of \$48 will help provide for ten. \$72 will provide for 15. And \$144 will help provide life-giving water for 30 people for a lifetime!

With your gift of any amount, we'll send you the *God's Daily Promise* devotional set. These four seasonal devotionals each contain a daily scripture, inspirational message, and room to journal your prayers and insights from God's Word.

With your gift of \$100 or more, please request the "Faith, Hope, and Love" coaster set. All four beautiful sandstone coasters come in an elegant natural wood holder and artistically display the words of First Corinthians 13:13.

Finally, please consider a gift of \$1200 to help provide water for 250 people or a gift of \$4800 to help sponsor a complete well. And you may request our inspiring bronze sculpture, "Let the Children Come."

Please call, write, or make your gift online.

End of video

In the studio

RANDY: Be a part of giving water and life today. Go online, go to the phones, and give the best gift you can. When you do today, with any gift you can request this wonderful book. By the way, Sheila, I took this little quiz. It's like 60 seconds, quick quiz, and they're supposed to, Mary thought she had me figured out. And I did it, and she nailed it - nailed it! I couldn't believe it!

SHEILA: Well, so let me tell you. Requests for any gift, you get a copy of this book. But then go online, it's AchieverQuiz.com. So if you had to guess, Mary, what would you say I was?

MARY: Well, my first guess was the performer because I'm also a performer. And so, with each of the types, there are five different types that you can get as a result, and it depends on how achieving goals makes you see yourself and how achieving goals makes other people see you. So for me, with my story, it was very important to hit the goals and have other people see how far I'd come. I feel like we're very similar so that would be my guess. But we were talking, and you said it was surprising. So there could be a masquerader, second one.

SHEILA: That's what I came out as -- a masquerader.

RANDY: Wow! She's good!

SHEILA: I know! Yes, she's very good. Okay. So take the test yourself and do let us know how it goes. Mary, thanks for being with us.

MARY: Thank you. Thanks for having me.

SHEILA: And we will see you next time on *Life Today*. Thank you. God bless you!