

## Museum of Hoaxes



### Martha Nasch—the woman who didn't need to eat or drink

---

In September 1934, Louis Nasch, a department store painter living in St. Paul, Minnesota, alerted the press to the fact that his wife, Martha, hadn't had anything to eat or drink in the last seven years. She hadn't slept either. And yet she was perfectly healthy.

Louis explained that he decided to go public with this information because "I do not want people to think I am starving my wife."



Louis and Martha Nasch

Upon being questioned by the press, Martha insisted it was true, though she conceded that she realized "the world will not believe me."

Fri Mar. 07, 2014

To back up her claim, her husband, their 12-year-old son Robert, and a girl who lived next door had all signed a statement swearing they hadn't seen her eat or drink anything for the last 7 years. Furthermore, Martha said she was willing to undergo scientific tests to prove she didn't need to eat.

But it doesn't seem like doctors ever took her up on the challenge. In fact, when reporters asked doctors in St. Paul if it could be true that she had lived without any nourishment, they "derided" the idea.

### Her 'Seven-Year Fast' Is Derided



Throw away your diet lists, girls, and take a lesson from Mrs. Martha Nasch, above, of St. Paul, Minn. Mrs. Nasch insists she has gone without food, without drink and without sleep for the last seven years, and feels fine at that. Of course, you may laugh, as do the doctors, but Mrs. Nasch, a son and a neighbor girl confirm her claim.

### Fasts Seven Years



**Mrs. Martha Nasch**

Claiming she has not slept or partaken of any food or water for seven years, Mrs. Martha Nasch, above, 44, of St. Paul, Minn., offered to prove her feat to anyone or undergo any tests. Her husband declared he has never seen her eat, and is one of the three witnesses who signed a statement affirming Mrs. Nasch's declaration.



Fri Mar. 07, 2014

Unfortunately, I have no idea what become of Mrs. Nasch. After the brief flurry of attention in 1934, there was never again a news story about her, as far as I can tell.

[According to census records](#), Martha, Louis, and Robert were all still living in St. Paul in 1940. But after that, nothing. Except that according to [Minnesota death records](#), Louis died in 1964. But I can't find any death records for Martha. Maybe she's still alive somewhere. After all, if she didn't need to eat or drink, it's possible she didn't need to die either.

## St. Paul Woman Claims She Hasn't Eaten, Drunk Anything For 7 Years

ST. PAUL, Minn.—A 44-year-old, bob-haired St. Paul housewife, who “knows the world will not believe me,” averred today she has taken neither food nor drink for seven years.

Strong enough to cook and do the housework for her husband and son, Mrs. Martha Nasch sat mending socks in the front room of her little home at 642 Hall avenue as she stolidly maintained, under questioning of a reporter, that she has not eaten or drunk since 1927.

Across the room sat her husband, Louis J. Nasch, 55-year-old department store painter, who says he has not seen his wife eat or drink since July 29. The husband notified newspaper men of his wife's condition because “I do not want people to think I am starving my wife.”

Twelve-year-old Robert Nasch, a student in Theodore Roosevelt junior high school, has, his parents said, smiling, “been telling every one that my mom doesn't eat or drink anything.”

Although unable to explain completely what she describes as “my supernatural condition,” Mrs. Nasch is willing to undergo a test under constant surveillance to prove her fasting claims.

“Place me under constant watch for any length of time,” she said, “and I can prove that I do not need

food or water. Let the test run six months if necessary.”

Mrs. Nasch contends that when she first observed a change in her life she consulted a St. Paul physician. The result was confinement in the State Insane hospital at St. Peter.

“Somehow the world was not the same,” she said. “My body felt and still feels as though it were petrified. I could not eat or drink. I did not want it, although I continued to get meals for my family.”

“The doctor told me I had a case of nerves,” she continued, “and because I refused to eat I was sent to St. Peter. There they tried to force feed me. They thought I was insane, yet they told me I was normal in every other way. I read books, wrote and drew pictures. I hid or threw away the food brought me.”

While in the hospital Mrs. Nasch sought through scientific books available to find some explanation of her condition.

“I found a plausible explanation in the Bible,” she maintained, “although I never had paid much attention to the Bible up to that time. In the Old Testament I found this: ‘They shall see food, but not eat. It shall be of wormwood. They shall see water, but not drink. It shall be as gall.’ That describes perfectly my condition, but I cannot understand why this curse should be visited on me.”

*La Crosse Tribune and Leader-Press - Sep 20, 1934*

## **St. Paul Woman Claims She Hasn't Eaten, Drunk Anything For 7 Years**

ST. PAUL, Minn.— A 44-year-old, bob-haired St. Paul housewife, who "knows the world will not believe me," averred today she has taken neither food nor drink for seven years.

Strong enough to cook and do the housework for her husband and son, Mrs. Martha Nasch sat mending socks in the front room of her little home at 642 Half avenue as she stolidly maintained, under questioning of a reporter, that she has not eaten or drunk since 1927.

Across the room sat her husband, Louis J. Nasch, 55-year-old department store painter, who says he has not seen his wife eat or drink since July 29. The husband notified newspaper men of his wife's condition because "I do not want people to think I am starving my wife."

Twelve-year-old Robert Nasch, a student in Theodore Roosevelt junior high school, has, his parents said, smiling, "been telling every one that my mom doesn't eat or drink anything."

Although unable to explain completely what she describes as "my supernatural condition," Mrs. Nasch is willing to undergo a test under constant surveillance to prove her fasting claims.

"Place me under constant watch for any length of time," she said, "and I can prove that I do not need food or water. Let the test run six months if necessary."

Mrs. Nasch contends that when she first observed a change in her life she consulted a St. Paul physician. The result was confinement in the State Insane hospital at St. Peter.

"Somehow the world was not the same," she said. "My body felt and still feels as though it were petrified. I could not eat or drink. I did not want it, although I continued to get meals for my family.

"The doctor told me I had a case of nerves," she continued, "and because I refused to eat I was sent to St. Peter. They thought I was insane, yet they told me I was normal in every other way. I read books, wrote and drew pictures. I hid or threw away the food brought me."

While in the hospital Mrs. Nasch sought through scientific books available to find some explanation of her condition.

Fri Mar. 07, 2014

"I found a plausible explanation in the Bible," she maintained, "although I never had paid much attention to the Bible up to that time. In the Old Testament I found this: 'They shall see food, but not eat. It shall be of wormwood. They shall see water, but not drink. It shall be as gall.' That describes perfectly my condition, but I cannot understand why this curse should be visited on me."

## Reader Comments

---

Martha's statement that she feels like her body is petrified reminds me of case studies that I've read about a condition called "Cotard Syndrome". It's a disorder in which people suffer from a delusion in which they believe that they are dead, or don't really exist. It is often accompanied by other delusions, such as that one's organs or blood are missing, or that one's own body is decomposing. It seems plausible that if Martha had Cotard Syndrome, she could have suffered from a delusion that she had not eaten in years.

Posted by Mike on Mon Mar 10, 2014 at 04:41 AM

Mike -- I agree with your diagnosis. Would have been interesting if there was a follow-up about her, but I couldn't find anything.

Posted by The Curator in San Diego on Tue Mar 11, 2014 at 07:15 PM

At last! It's the source for the Monty Python sketch (in their first German episode) of the Frenchman who had not been to the toilet for 5 years.

Posted by Baccar Wozat on Tue Mar 11, 2014 at 07:42 PM

Where did you find this information and how can I find more? I am researching my family and this crazy lady happens to be my great grandma. Thanks!

Posted by The great granddaughter on Fri Jun 06, 2014 at 10:21 PM

I know of somebody else just like this. 20 years no food or drink or sleep. (Also hasn't used the toilet)

She won't go public for the same reason.

Posted by sassyangelkiwi on Thu Jun 12, 2014 at 08:35 PM

This woman IS my paternal grandmother. (This is not a joke, we were randomly web searching info on her, and were greatly surprised when this website popped up!! Imagine how you'd feel seeing grandma on the world wide web!!) I don't want to post too many personal details here...unless there are some legitimate inquiries, vs. poking fun of her mental disorder or credibility...please respect our feelings. The entire story is TRUE. Whether she believed it (which, if you're mentally ill is quite credible) isn't so up for

Fri Mar. 07, 2014

speculation. Where the speculation comes in, is if my grandfather actually believed it...or had other suspect motives to exploit her mental illness. That may remain a mystery. However, the factual information in the article is accurate, except for misidentifying the name of my father incorrectly, who, by the way, at age 92, is still living, and verified the authenticity and veracity of these events. Clearly, the woman DID eat or drink, as she survived (vs. a modern day anorexia, etc.) But not having the benefit of a medical background, I have no clue whether it's a situation where you literally don't remember eating or drinking or sleeping (delusional, cognitive impairment, denial) in spite of competing medical evidence. I don't know how "woo hoo" the responders on this website are, but depending on your religious / philosophical framework, there could be an entirely alternative, "other worldly" explanation getting into areas of demonic possession, and I don't know that to be true, I'm simply throwing it out there. Signed, Martha's Grandaughter

Posted by Jodi on Fri Jun 13, 2014 at 09:53 AM

Jodi -- thanks for posting and sharing the info about your grandmother. She was definitely a character!

Was the name of your father Ralph, not Robert? The newspaper accounts from the 30s said 'Robert' but I see that 'Ralph' is listed in the later census info.

Posted by The Curator in San Diego on Sat Jun 14, 2014 at 05:46 PM

Here's an interesting side note: Martha's story is mentioned in the 1964 book "Empyrean Sea" by Hilton Hotema, along with about 30 other examples of people who reportedly did not eat for long periods of time. Hotema was an alternative health writer who believed that it was possible to derive sustenance from air and sunlight rather than from food. I don't buy his theory, but the case examples make interesting reading.

Posted by Mike on Sun Jun 22, 2014 at 06:17 AM

Thanks for the book reference, Mike. We also found that this book has several accounts from other women in St. Peters during the time Martha was there "Women of the Asylum: Voices from Behind the Walls, 1840-1945." What an adventure!

Posted by The great granddaughter on Sun Aug 31, 2014 at 06:29 PM

Thanks, Mike, for the book referral, I'll look for it. Find it interesting that so many people are familiar with this topic.

To Curator, yes, they misidentified Ralph as Robert. He has no memory of being interviewed, and he's mystified how the neighbor girl knew anything about this. He was only 6 when his mom was institutionalized. We did a records search for St. Peters and could only obtain an admittance and release



Fri Mar. 07, 2014

card for Martha, but no medical records. Exact diagnosis remains unclear and mystifying. It's possible that during that time, the medical records were kept all in one book. However, it indicates she tried to escape twice from St. Peters and was caught.

The "Women of Asylum" book is a very compelling insight into what those institutions and years were like....some better than others. Women, particularly, were often confined unwillingly, on simply a husband and dr.'s orders. Reasons cited were "hysteria," or religious disputes with your family (therefore you must be crazy). I suspect that "hysteria" may be closer to untreated menopause symptoms....and interestingly, Martha had some undisclosed surgery at age 38 and then was admitted to St. Peter's at the age of 39. Medical treatment at the hand of institutional doctors for women was harrowing during that time.

If anyone else runs across any other info, articles, resources, please share! Thanks.

By the way, Cotard Syndrome was featured on an episode of "Black Box," oddly enough.

Posted by Jodi on Mon Sep 01, 2014 at 07:38 AM

to Jodi in Glendale:

contrary to the knowledge we have been taught to accept and believe as factual it could be totally true that your grandmother had indeed went without food or drink for the time frame spoken of. why do ppl find it so hard to believe that life can be sustained without the aid of external input. what is alive inside each of us is more real, powerful and life sustaining than whats around you.

that's not even speaking from a religious stand point but a energy stand point. all things around you once existed within you. they are all a manifestation of thought. now we need those manifestations to survive?

no we don't i totally believe this to be possible. but i also believe in mind over matter though, so.... lol, i'm a different type of thinker.

Posted by sabae jackson on Thu Aug 20, 2015 at 10:14 AM

For more insights into this woman's mind and thoughts on her time in the asylum, see the playlist of poems on YouTube. Read word-for-word by a family member, along with

photos. [https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLkOwjvjgK\\_MNSs7VGX61hS\\_wZLn7oVWho](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLkOwjvjgK_MNSs7VGX61hS_wZLn7oVWho)

Posted by Janelle, the great-granddaughter. on Tue May 22, 2018 at 06:39 PM