

The next chapter: Turning the page

by [Martin E. Marty](#) in the [September 18, 2007](#) issue

Readers often ask, “Whence issue these columns?” Here’s the current answer. Last winter we traded our suburban home of 43 years for high-rise housing in downtown Chicago. We can see three states looking south from our condo, and from my study, looking north, I see the lakeshore and the glow of Wisconsin cities. “Doesn’t the beauty of that view distract you when you write?” Answer: “Yes, and the distraction probably is sometimes evident in some of the writing.”

We live 6.5 miles from the White Sox’s U.S. Cellular Field and 4.4 miles from the Cubs’ Wrigley Field, but have been to neither ballpark in decades. We can see the scoreboard in Soldier Field and look down on the Ferris wheel and fireworks at Navy Pier. In the distance is the University of Chicago, my teaching site for 35 years, but I don’t keep a study in its “Martin Marty Center” (marty-center.uchicago.edu). The Century offices are within walking distance, and I swoop by there to scoop up typo-filled church bulletins as grist for this column. But I write from home.

St. Luke Lutheran in Chicago is our new church home, and we have offering envelopes to prove it. If our high-rise windows opened, we could toss origami doves and hit St. James Episcopal Cathedral, Holy Name Cathedral, St. John Chrysostom Church and Sinai Temple. We often visit nearby Fourth Presbyterian Church to hear great music and sermons, the latter by Pastor John Buchanan.

Harriet Marty, who presents programs featuring award-winning young women musicians, had been commuting downtown almost daily in recent years. Now she walks or takes the bus. We both like the city and its bustle, its “greening” mayor, the cultural and tourist attractions, and the events that have made Chicago a world city.

Why the move? After having earlier dropped a few vague hints, our family asked: “Why do you two never talk about how you are going to spend your 80s?” “We never talk about it because I don’t think we ever think about it.” You *should*, we heard, followed by testimony that they all know or know of a friend’s parent who has broken a hip or had a heart attack or died, leaving the family or other heirs marooned. So “the kids” named senior homes they knew that we would not

consider, then added a location, a Chicago high-rise, that welcomes seniors and children and everybody else. A month later, we bought and sold properties.

Our Minnesota offspring drove away with a 26-foot truck full of stuff, while the Theological Book Network accepted thousands of books to be forwarded to overseas theological institutions. (Be assured, there are enough volumes left in my study to assist in researching books and M.E.M.O columns.)

Standard questions include: How are you adjusting to downtown and high-rise life? "Well." Don't you miss your wonderful old home and community and friends? "Yes, but we'd long been hearing from classmates who left us in retirement to live in the distant Sunbelt, and life did go on for them and theirs. We stayed closer, but having become auto-less, we find going to the suburbs almost as inconvenient as tripping to Seattle or San Diego."

On occasion I've written of life as a book that includes discrete chapters but follows a sustained plot. Whenever one chapter ends, you turn the page and greet a new chapter. Each is amazingly grace filled and at the same time open to disappointments, frustrations and suffering. Along the way we'll try to delight in or make sense of each day.