

Martha Stewart's Image Makeover: How Prison Helped Her Change

SAVANNAH, GA, UNITED STATES, January 28, 2021 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Prior to 2001, Martha Stewart had been the do-it-yourself darling and domestic queen of homes and kitchens for decades, so it would seem out of character for her to do something that would cause her to be arrested, tried, and convicted. However, in December 2001, Stewart became involved in an insider trading scandal that led to her being sentenced to five months in prison. Interestingly enough, she was never convicted for the insider trading itself. So Georgia-based developer and hotelier, Charlton Claxton, is taking a look back at why she went to prison in the first place and how it ended up changing her public image for the better.

Where It Started

Martha Stewart's brand was soaring after the 1997 launch of her company, Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia. Stewart was the chairwoman, president, and CEO of the thriving company, which included television, print, and merchandising divisions.

Stewart then became the first female, self-made billionaire in 1999 when the company went public. The IPO was \$18 per share and by the end of trading reached an incredible \$38 per share. But Stewart's downfall came after she sold all 3,928 shares of her ImClone Systems stock in 2001 to save herself from a \$45,673 loss. She obtained information about the stock illegally from a former broker contact.

Where It Ended Up

After a six-week trial in 2004, Stewart was found guilty on felony charges of conspiracy, obstruction of an agency proceeding, and making false statements to federal investigators. She was sentenced to five months in federal prison and two years of electronic monitoring probation.

At trial, she came off as "Mean Martha" – rude, demanding, cheap, and petty. Stewart's polished yet chilly image had taken a beating in trial testimony. And the continuous daily news coverage of her entering the courthouse toting pricey handbags and wearing stylish heels didn't help.

Then, she went to prison and turned into "St. Martha" – humble, empathetic, and advocate for the oppressed. On her first day outside the lockup in March 2005, she waved graciously, chatted, and served hot cocoa to the press. So how did her transformation from Mean Martha to St. Martha happen in just under five months?

Prison Begins

The beginning of Martha Stewart's image overhaul actually began in 2004 when she called a news conference to announce she was reporting to prison early, despite a pending legal appeal. Wearing a white suit against a backdrop of color swatches (all thoughtfully chosen), Stewart projected a change in attitude that began the repair to her reputation and the kickstart to propel her company forward again.

In September 2004, Stewart asked the judge to start her sentence as soon as possible. She added personal and heartfelt details to her announcement: she would miss her dogs, horses, and cats, and wanted to be home in time to plant a spring garden.

Three weeks later, Stewart traveled to Alderson Federal Prison Camp in West Virginia for the prison intake process: fingerprinted, strip-searched, and assigned a bunk bed in a building with 60 inmates and two showers.

What could have been a terrifying experience for her was made easier by making friends. At Christmas, in an open letter published online, she asked her fans to think of her fellow inmates and seek sentencing reforms.

Release from Prison

Stewart left prison in March 2005 in a crocheted cape made by a fellow inmate, and she even paid for a flatbed truck that would give photographers a better view. Back at her estate in New York, Stewart barely waited for the sun to come up before delighting the encamped reporters and photographers by appearing outside with her dog and horses and taking time to discuss lemons and cappuccino. She even sent out paper cups of hot cocoa.

And going to prison gracefully and admitting her wrongs ended up being a very good thing – financially. Stock prices for Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia, which had lagged, quickly doubled. And as she worked off time in Alderson Federal Prison Camp, she found herself popular enough to be given starring roles in two television shows.

Where She's at Today

After finishing her prison and house arrest terms, Stewart refused to keep a low profile. She was soon back on the air with "The Martha Stewart Show" and signed deals with Home Depot, PetSmart, and Michaels.

Stewart's comeback has experienced some failures along with its successes. In 2015, Sequential Brands Group announced it would acquire Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia in a deal valued at \$353 million after the company posted losses 11 out of the previous 12 years.

However, in the last few years, Stewart has reemerged as a beloved and still shockingly relevant personality. She was a surprise hit at the 2015 Comedy Central roast of Justin Bieber. In 2016,

she launched a meal-kit line called "Martha & Marley Spoon." She even hosts a cooking show on VH1 with the rapper Snoop Dogg. And, her Twitter account is one of the best online.

But to Claxton, it makes sense. Stewart is constantly evolving, and she's determined to come out on top!

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