

Open foundation Course '88.
Australian History.

Oral History.
3 term Assignment.

Manuscript of Oral History tape.

Interviewing: - Elizabeth Madden

By: Stephen Scrogings

Manuscript.

Stephen Scrogings.

Steve: This is Stephen Scrogings, doing open foundation course 1988, Australian history interviewing Elizabeth Madden currently aged 84, living in Hamilton.
You were born in 1904?

Liz: Yes.

Steve: Where was that?

Liz: In Gaspard near Gurrindindi.

Steve: In NSW.

Liz: In N.S.W.

Steve: You were the youngest child of?

Liz: five.

Steve: And your mother died when you were born?

Liz: Yes

Steve: That was a home birth?

Liz: Oh yes, yes.

Steve: That was common in those days.

Liz: Yes because we were on a little farm, there was no such thing as going to hospital. People had children practically year after year, and I expect this is why there were deaths. My brother was born 12 months before me. My mother had already had 3 other children in a very short space of time.

Steve: And your mother had a mid-wife to assist?

Liz: Yes they came and did everything they could, but they weren't medical men with hospital back up. It was just part of life then. People married and had their children as they came along, and quite often babies died.

Steve: So when your mother died, you went to live with her mother?

Liz: Yes.

Steve: It was uncommon for fathers to have children without a wife?

Liz Yes they had to work, and families always lived nearby there were Aunts and women who didn't ask questions, but just took on the responsibility of rearing children.

Steve You also had a 18 month old brother who died?

Liz Yes, one brother died. I think he was dead, when I was born.

Steve So you stayed with your grandmother until you were seven.

Liz I stayed with her until I went to work, I lived with them, they were very strict. My schooling was in Quirindi, from age seven, in Quirindi, were I lived with relations

Steve that was a boarding school?

Liz No just the local school.

I stayed with relations because I couldn't get to school from the farm.

Steve It was a co-ed school

Liz Yes in those days just the normal state school. I went to school until I was 14.

Steve What sort of things did they teach you at school.

Liz To read, to write, to add up.

Steve So you learnt the same things as the boys?

Yes, we went to school together, I was lucky towards the end I learnt to type, which was a big help later on.

Steve And this was about 1914.

So you got your first job at age 14.

Liz Yes, yes.

Steve As a clerical assistant?

Yes in the local men's clothing store in Quirindi, and I worked there about 7 years, until I was about 21. Then my father sold his farm, to open a business in Homebush Bay in Sydney.

Steve Can you remember what your wage was at the clothing store.

Liz I think 7 shillings + 6 pence.

Steve Which would of been?

Liz Its hard to tell, with inflation but that would of been at a good wage, then quite possibly to live on?

Steve
Liz Oh, yes

Steve And in 1925 you moved to Sydney with your father

Liz Yes.

Steve Where in Sydney

Liz Homebush, Bay. He went into a small goods bussiness.

Steve It was a successful bussiness?

Liz Yes he made a living from it.

Steve And you worked for your farther?

Liz No, no I got a job in Sydney at m^c Carthies it was a little department store for women, I think in George Street. Because I got a train from homebush to Central, and then a tram down to the city.

Steve It was exciting. to move to the city?

Liz Oh, yes.

Steve A lot happening?

Liz Oh yes after the country, very exciting

Steve What did you do for entertainment.

Liz Theatres, stage shows, It was so easy as now, with transport and those sort of things. But there were operas like "Rose-Marie", Open air picture theatres. and people in their homes made their own entertainment, piano and singing songs.

Steve So you worked at m^c Carthies till you met your husband?

Liz Yes

Steve And you were 26 and he was Wilfred Thomas Madden about 33 at the time.

Liz

Yes about thirty.

Steve

How long did you know Wilfred before you were married?

Liz

About six months.

Steve

Was that common then, it seems like a short period.

Liz

Well we met, or it was arranged we met by my elder sister and my husband's mother, that we meet at her place. Our families knew each other and it just rolled along.

Steve

And at that time he worked as a Barber?

Liz

Yes he was in charge of the mens hairdressing department in Marcus Clark's store in Sydney, and in those days men came in daily for ~~there~~ a shave. It was a good business.

Steve

And that was about 1927?

Liz

Yes.

Steve

So times were quite good then?

Liz

Yes, that was before the depression.

Steve

So you lived together in Sydney for a few months after you were married?

Liz

Yes and then he decided to try the hotel trade, and he went into a hotel called the Grand at Wagga Wagga.

Steve

Where did you get the capital from?

Liz

Tooths, who owned the hotels and you held the lease.

Steve

So it was a good business for a few years.

Liz

No because he went into it at the start of the depression. You see about 1930, it was just starting to hit.

Steve

It was a hard time?

Liz

A very hard time, but at least we had a roof over our heads.

Steve

You didn't lose the hotel?

Liz

No we managed to keep it, my husband was a very good business man, he managed to stimulate business by inviting football teams up to play the locals, and we worked hard and men will always seem to drink no matter

what the circumstances are.

Steve It was true men spend their relief money on alcohol?

Liz frequently, to get over their depression, very, very hard times

Steve Prostitution increased?

Liz Yes people had to live, apart from the dole which was strictly for food there were no social security as today

Steve And in this period you went from seven leaved down to one?

Liz Yes he was a bank manager.

Steve But by this time banks were closed?

Liz Yes.

Steve So he was a distraught man, did ~~suicide~~ ^{suicide} increase

Liz Yes, but it depended on character, and inner strenght.

Steve Can you remember the price of a meal back then?

Liz About 2 shillings for the dearest meal, which would have been a good three course meal.

Steve A lot of businesses went broke in Wagga Wagga in this period?

Liz A lot of businesses went broke everywhere. People just had to close down and leave, nobody had money.

Steve Did you find it hard, or was it a man's worry?

Liz Well we just worked, and hoped we could ride it out.

Steve Who was the Prime Minister at this time?

Liz I think Lyons, and Lang was the Premier.

Steve Do as things got better you sold out of the hotel?

Liz Yes it was a very cold place, we moved to Sydney.

Steve Housework was hard in these days?

Liz Yes we had no washing machines every thing was hand done. Washing was a full hard down a week here a week

Life for the housewife did not really become easier until after the Second World War. Then we moved to Parramatta where we managed a hotel on the river, it was a lovely old building.

Steve Things were starting to pick up?

Liz No it took years for things to return to normal, times were still hard. Some people made a lot of money from the depression, they were able to pick up a lot of things cheaply, others lost everything.

Steve So in October 1929, the Wall Street stock exchange crashed in America triggering off the start of the depression and reached its worst in 1932 when banks in Austria and Germany collapsed. And by this time at least 1/3 of Australian men were out of work.

Liz I would imagine at least 1/3, depending on your area, and that didn't include women. Oh no, everything crashed. Wool and wheat prices, just dropped.

Steve And English capital was withdrawn also.

Liz Well they were in trouble too.

Steve But you shouldn't have gone hungry in Australia if you had a bit of land.

Liz No, the ~~worst~~ worst poverty was in the cities.

Steve And from Parramatta you went to Granville for Toothy, and then to Hunters Hill?

Liz Yes but not to a hotel my husband started a real estate business and began to dabble in property.

Steve So he had made quite a bit of money by this time.

Liz I think so.

Steve Property would have been cheap then.

Liz Yes I think he was lucky with a few land sales, things like that. And then the WWII came.

Steve Did your husband have to go to war?

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Liz No he was too old, but he was called up for the 1st World War and did his training at Fort Scratchley, in Newcastle. But the war ended while he was there. But he did have to go to Barraba and takeover a hotel there, as the owner had been enlisted.

Steve They were hard years?

Liz They were in that we had rationing of butter, clothing and petrol, we did odd right as farmers where essential workers and not sent off to war.

Steve So did you panic when you heard the Japanese had bombed the Northern Territory.

Liz Not really in those days Northern Australia seemed like another country, but we did panic when Japanese submarines were found in Sydney harbour.

Steve And what about Hiroshima how did that affect you?

Liz Well we were very innocent in those days it was just something that ended the war, a bomb. There wasn't the media coverage of the world, as there is today you weren't told as much, you just thought great, peace, the war is over. We didn't realize what a horrific thing had been done.

Steve And then you came into the post war era. You had five children.

Liz Yes, that lived, I lost one.

Steve Was that a normal size family for those days?

Liz Yes.

Steve And then you moved back to Hunters Hill

Liz Yes in a rented place, it was very hard to borrow money in those days there were government restrictions. We could not move back into our own house in Hunters Hill as the person we rented it to worked in an essential field so we were stopped by the gov't from asking him

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to leave. The war had not quite ended and we could not get our home back. We had to go and find another house.

Steve

Then you and your husband semi-retired and moved to Beecroft, and just played the stock exchange

Liz

Yes he had properties and shares, but he never got over the depression, he had to have money in the bank he was always worried about losing everything again

Steve

He trusted the bank?

Liz

Yes.

Steve

You did without alot until he died, didn't you? as he was obsessed with saving for the next depression.

Liz

That is true, he was always frightened. And then from Beecroft you moved to Pennant Hills, until your husband died.

Steve

Liz

Yes he was quite old then.

Steve

And your husband died in what year.

Liz

1974

Steve

And then you moved up to Newcastle

Liz

Yes in 1987 to live with my daughter and family.

Steve

And you like Newcastle?

Liz

Yes, but I miss Sydney.

Steve

And what do you think of Sydney now. Have they ruined it.

Liz

Yes, yes, to many big buildings.

Steve

Ok. I think we will leave it there.

Liz

Thanks alot Elizabeth.

My pleasure Steven.

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OPEN FOUNDATION COURSE

1988

I, Elizabeth Madden give my
permission to Newcastle University

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these if required) and for copies to be lodged in
the library of the University of
Newcastle

for the use of other bona fide researchers.

Signed E. Madden

Date 28/8/88

Interviewer J. Arps

Open Foundation '88.
Australian History

Oral History Summary

Stephen Scrogings.
Tuesday 1-3 pm.

Oral History Summary

Steven Scrogings. ✓

Madden.

Elizabeth Scalon was born the youngest of five children in Gashford, near Quirindi N.S.W., in 1904. Her mother died while giving birth. So she was raised by her grandparents until the age of seven, when she went to live in Quirindi with relations, so she could attend school.

She attended the local co-ed public school, and in the final years of her schooling learnt typing. This enabled her to obtain her first job at the age of fourteen, as a clerical assistant at the local men's clothing store. She worked here for several years until she was twenty one years old.

Then her father sold his farm and took the family to Sydney to start a small goods business at Homebush Bay in the year 1925. In Sydney Elizabeth got a job in George Street, working in a women's department store called "Mc Carthies" where she worked for about five years until her marriage to Wilfred Thomas Madden who was six years Elizabeth's senior, who was now twenty six years old.

Their meeting was arranged by their families, who had known each other for a number of years. After a courtship of approximately six months, they were married.

At this time Wilfred Madden managed the Barber's shop in Marcus Clarke's department store, in Sydney. Deciding he would like to try his luck in the hotel trade, he took his new wife to Wagga Wagga,

and bought a local hotel, called the Grand. It was a good business for a few years, until the depression hit, and although Wilfred did not lose his hotel he lost most of his capital, and it was only through his shrewd business sense that he kept the hotel from bankruptcy. These lean years were to be an experience he would never forget, and he always lived with the fear that one day there would be another depression.

Wilfred and Elizabeth were to sell the hotel in Wagga Wagga and went on to build up successful hotels in Parramatta and Granville, before opening a real estate business in Hunters Hill. By the time World War Two came Wilfred had build up quite a solid base with investments in property, and shares.

Although Wilfred owned quite a considerable ~~amount~~ amount of capital, Elizabeth and the children lived quite a basic existence as Wilfred was always afraid of another depression and the feeling of hunger. He was obsessed with saving in case of the return of hard times. It was not until his death in 1974 that the extent of his shrewd business sense was recognised.

Elizabeth lived in Mosman on Sydney's north shore for a few years before moving to Newcastle where at the age of eighty four she is currently a resident of Hamilton.