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Mary Madden, 2011

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Anne Rhynes: On behalf of Crossroads to Freedom, I wanna thank you for taking part in this interview and taking time with us to share your story today. My name is Anne, and I'm a sophomore here at Rhodes College.

Matt Strauser: And I'm Matt Strauser, and I'm a freshman at Princeton University. And today's date is June 23rd, 2011.

Anne Rhynes: Okay? And I'm honored to meet you and learn from your inspirational story. Today's interview will be archived online at the Crossroads to Freedom website. Okay.

And first, we're gonna ask you some background questions. What is your name?

Mary Madden: Mary Madden.

Anne Rhynes: Okay. And when were you born?

Mary Madden: May the 2nd, 1959.

Anne Rhynes: Okay. Where were you born and raised?

Mary Madden: Memphis, Tennessee.

Anne Rhynes: Okay. What is your occupation?

Mary Madden: I'm a computer assistant at the IRS.

Anne Rhynes: And who are your parents and what were their occupations?

Mary Madden: My mother, **Lena Prather**, she was a maid.

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My father, he's deceased, **Robert Tuggle**, and she married again to **William Prather**. And he died and he worked in the hospital.

Anne Rhynes: Okay. Can you tell me a little about what they were like?

Mary Madden: Oh, both my mom and my dad loved people. She did so much ministry work, helping people if they needed a place to stay, young people if they were rock bottom or parents didn't take care of 'em in the community. She spent a lot of time just reaching out and

showing love and causing those people to really end up going to college or school. She pushed that a whole lot with 'em. So even though for what my family, was 13 of us, she actually had 20-some kids because she always was taking others in.

Anne Rhynes: Wonderful.

Matt Strauser: All right. So we're gonna talk about your experiences growing up. Could you tell us about –

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neighborhood you grew up in?

Mary Madden: Well, we moved around a lot due to the fact that my father and my mom struggled at different times with jobs, keeping a job or losing a job, so we just sort of bounced around from that one neighborhood to the other, but we ended up in Orange Mound, which became **our set roof** and family life.

Matt Strauser: And what was life like with such a big family?

Mary Madden: With 13 of us. But we were very close. We had a lot of good times. My brothers and sisters were really my best friends. Because of our struggle, it just brought us together. Matter of fact, as I got older, people actually thought my brother was my boyfriend. So I had to say, "It's time for y'all to go." [Laughs] But I mean, we was close. We always embraced and support each other. I even had a brother – my brother, **Nelson** Tuggle, he ended up at the 11th grade deciding he had to just let school –

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go in order to help support us. And he didn't want – because we had a large family and my father left, he just did not want my mom to have to separate **us to** foster homes or anything. So he gave up a lot of his life to make sure we was taken care of.

Matt Strauser: All right. And could you talk about activities that you did growing up that you really enjoyed and got a lot out of?

Mary Madden: Singing. Singing, writing. I always would write and put together poems, lyrics, plays. And I would put them on at different churches and go from here to there. We sung all the time. And one of the groups we actually had was the T&G Gospel Singers, which is Tuggle and **Glovers**. And we had a person – I mean, we

Rev. Glover could play the piano and make it talk to you. You could hear it miles away. But we – our family and everything, it was –

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that was a part of us. Singing just relieved you. It was a way of encouraging people. Writing poetry was a way of expressing what you saw and what you felt was the solution to the problems that you was facing or dealing with. So I think those were my greatest strengths.

Matt Strauser: And can you talk about how those forms of expression has affected you now later in life?

Mary Madden: Yes, because now my daughter is the singer, and she do a lotta traveling from church to church and she do writing as much as I do. But I find that it gave me an opportunity to see that the world was more than just here in Memphis, Tennessee. I got a chance to travel doing plays, going different places. So it was like coming out of a box, and all of a sudden you see that the world is much bigger. There are places you've never been, culture, people, personalities, and I loved it.

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And it caused me to say, "Okay. I wanna go to college. I wanna do better for me. And I wanna encourage my daughter to do better."

Matt Strauser: Could you tell us some of those places where you did get to travel outside of Memphis?

Mary Madden: Yes. Kansas City. We went to Florida, went to Mississippi. I went to Arkansas. I took some trips to New York, just different places as people required or just where they say, "Look, can you come here?" "Okay, I'll come. If you paying for it, I'll come."

Matt Strauser: Do you have a favorite place out of any of those?

Mary Madden: I think my favorite place when I went to Mississippi, and that's because it was an experience I had never been introduced to. I always – I'm used to light. I'm used to even when I go to bed, there's a light on. And I went to Mississippi and I had to do a concert for the weekend. And they cut out all the lights when it's time to go to bed.

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1st cut at 6:00

I couldn't see nothing. I literally fell out of bed about two or three times. It was like, "Okay. It's so dark here." And so the lady was like, "It'll go be okay." I said, "Do you have a light? Need a light on. I need to know that I could see something, where I'm walking, or whatever." So for me, that was a really great experience because that was the first that time I ever experienced just seeing pitch-black dark.

Matt Strauser: Yeah. So now we're gonna talk about your educational experiences and background. So where did you go to elementary school?

Mary Madden: I went to Chicago Park Elementary. That's in North Memphis.

Matt Strauser: Okay. And what about middle and high school?

Mary Madden: Messick High School.

Matt Strauser: And then from there?

Mary Madden: And from there, I got an associate degree in Jerome's College. It was a junior college. Then I went to Christian Brothers University. I didn't finish, but I went there for about a year. And now I'm pursuing at Liberty University and doing that online –

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to finish my degree.

Matt Strauser: And what kind of role has education played in your life? What are some of the experiences that you've had from your educational background that have really affected you and shaped you?

Mary Madden: Well, I think the fact that so many people, because they had given their lives for us to have a golden opportunity to actually get an education, to me that was so important to go further. It was like somebody has given a lot up for me. So in getting the education, you are more equipped to deal with everyday tasks.

Reading, math, that's so important. I mean, you could get history to know where you come from, to have a background and have a foundation of who you are. It makes a difference in where you can

go. And you don't have to have limitations. And so education give you a golden opportunity to obtain knowledge without having any limitations on where you go –

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from there. To star is the limit. And that's what I love about it.

Matt Strauser:

And with that being said, with that love and compassion you have for education, what role did segregation and the integration of schools in your childhood have on your educational experience?

Mary Madden:

When I first was introduced to it, I was at **Manassas**. I was going there for a while. And there was fights. We dealt with Black Mondays, Black Fridays. And people would fight for this person if you hung out with this white person. And I found myself having to make a decision, do I allow this to change me or do I embrace it and grow from it. So I ended up embracing it and I had a friend that was white that I enjoyed being around, hanging out with.

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I learned a lot from her. And I think, also, she learned a lot from me.

Matt Strauser:

Awesome, awesome. And so now we're gonna talk about religion and the role that played in your life. You said you enjoyed singing Gospel music. So what church did you belong to growing up?

Mary Madden:

I started out belonging to a Baptist Church. Then we went – my mom ended up as I got older, went to a Church of God and Christ. And that's where I've set my foundation at. I never allowed religion to handicap me or block me to think that I as the only or ours were the only group. I believe that people all over the world have come to experience and accept Christ. And that's what make a difference. And it's not who's got the most in it. You learn and you grow as you begin to get in the Bible.

Matt Strauser:

And so now, before you said you were very involved in –

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the COGIC church now. Can you talk about that and can you talk about your family? You mentioned your daughter. So just kind of where are you at this point in your life.

Mary Madden: Well, my husband, he's a minister, I'm an evangelist. My daughter sings as well. And we all work together building the Kingdom of Christ 'cause I think one of our drives, my husband love young people. He love – I mean, he can go anyplace and all of a sudden, you look up and you got 20 young people right there. And they gravitated to him.

He went to the park just to take my daughter when she was young. And all of a sudden, there was like 20-25 young people, and he started witnessing to 'em. And 20 of 'em gave their lives to Christ. Think when you can see a person life change, we get involved with things from abused women, women that's going through hardship, or just individuals that may just need a second time –

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or a second chance to have a – maybe they made a mistake. And sometimes society is so hard on people that make mistakes. But you can grow and you can learn. I'm not saying that's for everyone, but I'm saying that there are some that would love to have that golden opportunity to turn things around in their life. And I think that's what my husband, my daughter, and myself, we try to do, give people an opportunity to grow and make the mistakes, but learn from 'em. And that makes a difference.

Matt Strauser: All right. And so now we're gonna go back, again, and we're gonna look at the '50s through the '70s, kinda what's been branded as the Civil Rights Era. Is there anything in particular you wanna share before we get started? Anything that comes to mind?

Mary Madden: Oh, I remember that time because we dealt with light skinned, dark skin. I think a lot of the, "I'm black and I'm proud," moments came out.

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The struggle if you was light, people felt like you got a little more advantage than a person that was dark-skinned. And within my family, we experienced that because I had one sister that was darker-skinned. The rest of us are a little more lighter toned. She had problem throughout of her school year for that time because she struggled with trying to feel like she was equal. And my mother and father was always trying to convince her that, "Look, the color of your skin don't make you. It's what's in you, the character, the person." And I think that made a difference for us.

We watched a lot of chaos going on, the Black Mondays, the march, the people going through struggles of survival, addictions, people reaching out to drugs and other things. And we somewhere that all around us because –

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we lived in a neighborhood from being a very poor neighborhood to a middle class neighborhood. So we got a chance to experience both sides of it, and the struggle of people, how they was reaching and crying out for help, but not receiving it, or not knowing how to get it.

Matt Strauser: And you talked about Black Mondays. Could you explain maybe for us a little more what that is?

Mary Madden: Black Mondays was when they told us, “Don’t go to school.” But it was a time when people was protesting rights. And because of that, even with the schoolteachers and all, they would say, “It’s best not to go to school.” I remember one Black Monday, they said we not supposed to go to school. You had people in their protest with the Civil Rights and everything, they would actually throw stuff in the windows and everything –

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or kids would get hurt and everything. I remember my brother being in the school, and we were out. And it was like, “I don’t care if it’s Black Thursday. I’m going in there and getting my brother.” And we would just literally sneak in there and they’d be like, “You can’t do this. If you come in, you gotta stay.” We got my brother and we got outta there. But it was a time where anger – people had bitterness and they was protesting all what they were feeling.

They were protesting what they felt wasn’t right, whether it was the school system, whether it was being put into whites and blacks together, whether it was – they was protesting all of that. And so Black Monday sort of established – it was set where people was saying, “You do not cross this line. If you cross this line, go here.” Then you’re gonna have trouble.

Matt Strauser: Interesting, interesting. So were there any other experiences and things that you were involved in –

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with Civil Rights, whether at home in your neighborhood, through your church, just any sorts of those things that really had an emphasis on Civil Rights?

Mary Madden:

I always helped with campaigns if I could. I'd always supported it. But, also I got a chance to just be in a march. Maxine Smith, and then Jesse Jackson came, and it was after Martin Luther King's death and everything. So I got the opportunity to be in a march. And for the people that was in it, everybody was like, "Things could be better. It doesn't have to be like this. Salaries can be better." Whether it's janitorial, whether it's teachers, it didn't matter. Things could be better for our life. And in that march, I saw such unity. The T&G Gospel Singers actually was right in the front.

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And we would start off songs like, "We Shall Overcome One Day," or they'll just start saying, "Okay. Sing a song," and we'll try to sing something that would encourage people that you don't have to fight to protest. You can stand strong and just say, "This is what we represent. This is what we won't tolerate anymore. This is what we're accepting," and make a difference. And that was the march that - 'cause I remember being afraid while we were marching, saying, "Now if somebody throws something, I'm gonna run this way," I told my brother, "Y'all get out the way." But it wasn't bad.

It wasn't the policemen or anything trying to stop a fight or anything. It was just a good march downtown. And we marched all the way where Martin Luther King died and everything. And it just made a difference. But there was a lotta love. People was embracing you of other races, and they were supporting it. And it wasn't just blacks.

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Matt Strauser:

Would you say that it was just you and your family doing this, or was it your whole family involved, or was your whole school involved? Who in your peer group was involved in these marches and these campaigns?

Mary Madden: For me, it was just the T&G Gospel Singers. At the time, my mother worked too much to even be able to be a part of it and everything. But she always encouraged me that you had a voice and use it and it'll make a difference in other people.

Matt Strauser: It certainly did. You mentioned campaigns. Are you talking about political campaigns or Civil Rights campaigns and maybe if you could give us maybe a story or something that kinda really sticks in your mind.

Mary Madden: I remember with Civil Rights, we were dealing with the fact that even with the school system, there was problems there.

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And I just went there more to work and see what I could do. So the only thing I did was fliers and all. But it was a way of saying, "I'm contributing something here. I'm not just in the background doing nothing." And we would sit and talk about what's going on, but if we had to pass out food, there were times we actually fed people that was on the street, reached out to people that was homeless, opportunities to just make little changes by helping somebody.

Matt Strauser: And you talked about Dr. King's death. Can you kinda talk about the feeling that created maybe in your neighborhood and with you personally, but especially the neighborhood affect that that had, the aftermath of his death?

Mary Madden: Anger. Lot of people were angry. They were angry at the fact that –

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this man was really bringing about a change. Can you imagine having someone that's giving not just one race, but people, hope that it won't be like this. Prejudice, it doesn't matter if it's black or white, you got just as many blacks that have prejudice as there are whites. So Martin Luther King's death was like now he's not here. Who's going to carry this torch now? Who's gonna move forward? So you had people in the neighborhood angry, people wanting to tear up stores, break in places. And this was a part of showing their anger, showing that they resented what had happened to him, and feeling that, "Okay, a white person did this." Again, this is a problem.

And for me, and my family, it was the hurt.

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It was the hurt that, “Okay. Now what’s going to happen? We want change. We want betterment. We want blacks to have an opportunity.” And in that day, that’s what it really was about, opportunities for betterment, opportunities for change, being able to get the same job and get the same pay.

Matt Strauser:

Would you say that Dr. King then was the most important influence on your thoughts about Civil Rights, or was it somebody closer to home, or who really shaped your thinking on Civil Rights?

Mary Madden:

Dr. King, listening to him talk. Then Jesse Jackson would say different things afterwards. And I would find myself going, “we could accomplish so much if we just come together. But if we say divided, we’ll never see real change take place because change is not –

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just momentary. It’s something that it starts from the inside of you. And education helps that. It helps you to become aware of being versatile, being able to embrace other races, other people, other nationalities, and not being afraid to, not being able to accept that what somebody had said to you, whether they was taught it or prejudice or anything, that you didn’t have to accept that.

Matt Strauser:

And so now let’s kind of flash forward again to today, and how would you compare Memphis now and then? How have we progressed as far as race relations in the city?

Mary Madden:

I feel that we have made some changes. I still think there’s a lot of work to go. But I feel like through Martin Luther King and others, Jesse Jackson and other –

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political leaders, that we made some positive change. And I feel that within the future, we’re going to see more. We **have** a president, Obama, that’s black. And that says a lot. That says that change is happening now. And whether people want it or not, it’s

got to happen. It's gotta happen at some point. And now is a greater time than ever.

Matt Strauser: Exactly. And what things would you like to see changed? 'Cause like you said, it's not complete the changes aren't completely finished. So where would you like to see improvements in race relations in any aspect of society, I guess?

Mary Madden: I believe that all races can learn from each other. I believe there's no such thing as we just got our own section and group of people and –

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we're not gonna share. But I think knowledge is very important because as you be around others, you learn values and you learn little character and little things that brings about positive things about you, changes in you, causes you to grow, causes you to expand in your way of thinking, understanding. The more we understand each other, the more we're going to see all of us, all races, embrace each other, and not take it as something that we have to be afraid of.

Every black person won't kill you. They're not gonna rob you. No different than every white person is not a prejudice person looking to minimize who you are. I think when we come together and realize that, and realize we don't have to be afraid of each other, and even for the young people, not have to accept what our –

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parents have said that may have been negative, but learn for our self, not just accept because someone told you that a black person is this or they mettle and call them out of names, that you have to do the same thing, that you can stand and say, "That's not me." And you don't have to be ashamed of it, or you don't have to be afraid of it.

Matt Strauser: Is there any other advice building on that that you would give to young __people__ right now who are trying to bring about that change in Memphis who would like to see people of different races interact more?

Mary Madden: When I was at Smith & Nephew working as just a contractor there, a young lady actually did what they call "Blue Eyes/Brown Eyes," and it was a video. It changed my life because it allowed whites

that had brown eyes to distinguish from the blues eyes and brown eyes –

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in this video, they use it as a way of prejudice. If you had blue eyes, they would treat you like you was nobody. If you had brown eyes, they would treat you special and different. And this lady went through a whole lot of issues and problems from actually doing this in her classroom. But years later, all these young people that was a part of it, talked about how it changed their life because they had never experienced it.

It's easy to say, "I relate to you and I understand," but if you never went through any of it, you never went through the hard times or you never went through struggles or a **needing** or **being** in life, you really don't related to me. You may sympathize or empathize, but you really don't relate to it until it hits home for you. Then you can understand it a little better.

Matt Strauser:

And so I guess now is there anything you'd like to add before we wrap –

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this up? Any last final thoughts? Anything that we haven't covered?

Mary Madden:

I encourage people all over to take an opportunity to get their education, not to impress someone or prove something, but to get an education so that you can begin to grow. Knowledge is powerful, and those that are working, trying to push it, trying to encourage you to go to college, don't take it lightly. Utilize all the tools that you have, and thank God that they're available now.

Matt Strauser:

All right. Thank you. We really appreciate you giving your time to Crossroads today.

Mary Madden:

No problem.

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