

Life Sketch of

Madie Ray Rogers Amacker Gipson

Madie Ray Rogers was born in Queen City, Cass county, Texas on December 16, 1918 to Ellie Thompson and her husband Sylvester Rogers. Madie Ray was their third child and first daughter joining her brothers Larue (then age 5) and 2-year old Robert or "Bob" (later called Buster). Ellie and Syl farmed outside of Queen City, which is south of Texarkana. Madie Ray was named after her great Uncle David Thompson's wife Nannie Madie Ray. Her mother's mother Mary Ann Thompson (whom the children called Danacy), widowed about 9 years before when her husband Scott was killed by lightning, lived with Syl and Ellie's family.

Madie Ray's father had taken an oil field job in Arkansas when she was about 2. They moved to Aunt Ida and Uncle Will Rogers' house due east in Roan, Arkansas. Syl built a "shotgun" house with no interior walls making it just one large room. He added walls gradually partitioning the one big room into smaller rooms.

Syl quickly rose in the ranks of management and was soon providing an excellent living for his growing family. They lived at one time or another in big company houses in the Arkansas oil towns of Lou Ann, El Dorado, Snow Hill, and Northfield.

One of Madie Ray's earliest memories was the delight she felt when she spun around and around in a special skirt in the front yard. She had altered the skirt by tearing vertical strips in it so that as she spun, the skirt would lift up and out making the perfect spinning skirt.

Four-year old Madie Ray was upset when her twin brothers Howard and Hardy were born. When labor began, her daddy walked Larue, Buster, and Madie Ray across to the neighbor's house to stay that evening. Madie Ray recalled with a smile that as toddlers, Hardy could walk but not talk and that Howard would talk but not walk. She said that Howard was the boss and Hardy did all the work. A day after Madie Ray's sixth birthday, her sister Bessie Margaret was born. When she was eight, Betty Jo joined the family.

As a child, when Madie Ray arrived home on the school bus, she was often met with the wonderful smell of cinnamon rolls which her mother had baked for the children. She also made delicious fried apple and peach fritters, which had a crunch and taste she loved.

In 1927, Ellie's sister Ina Robinson died leaving six sons for Syl and Ellie to raise along with their own seven children at that time. As the family grew, Syl hired a maid who lived with them during the week. Her daddy would go buy groceries and come back with a whole stalk of bananas, which he hung up in a certain spot in the house. Madie Ray remembered the time that the young maid

asked if she could eat all she wanted. Syl replied that she could. Madie Ray remembered with a smile that she made herself sick eating her fill of bananas.

Syl gave Madie Ray special attention. He perceived that she was being neglected somewhat as the family added sons then later other daughters at regular intervals. She loved her daddy very much. She remembered that he taught her how to drive his 1927 pickup truck. As they prospered, she recalled that they had a fancy touring car with leather seats and side curtains. Once Syl bet Ellie \$5 she couldn't drive a car across a railroad crossing near their house. Madie Ray was able help her mother drive it and collect on that \$5 bet.

When she was 10, her final sibling was born. Annabelle came 2 months early while her beloved grandmother Danacy was visiting her relatives elsewhere. In Danacy's absence and as oldest daughter, the burden of cleaning and cooking, while her mother was convalescing after the birth, fell to Madie Ray. Being only 10 and her daddy's princess, she resented this new little competitor for her parents' attention. Ann weighed only 2 pounds at birth. She was so tiny that her head fit in a teacup. They kept her initially in a shoe box in the oven to keep her warm in lieu of an incubator as in modern NICU's. That baby got all her parents' attention. When she first saw preemie Ann, she told her mother, "Mama, if you was going to buy a baby, why didn't you buy a pretty one?"

Lucky for Madie Ray, her daddy had bought a square-shaped Maytag washing machine. She would wash the clothes then hang them on a clothes line that had been rigged to be low enough for her to reach. One of the boys would then elevate the line by propping it up with a pole.

When she was in high school, her basketball team won the Texas state championship with her playing shooting guard. Back in the 1920's and 1930's, Texas oil companies had a whole league of female basketball players who were paid by the oil companies. She quit school to play professional basketball. Brian remarked, "I don't know the name of team or the oil company who sponsored it. She used to kick my butt in Horse."

When she was almost 13, her world came crashing in when her beloved daddy died at the young age of 39. He had contracted pneumonia. Because the hospital in El Dorado was full, he was receiving care in a nearby hotel. The delivery boy at the pharmacy delivered the wrong medicine to the family. Instead of rubbing liniment into his father's chest, oldest son Larue (then 17 years old) applied a powerful acid to their father's chest. Syl died soon after leaving a wife and 8 children ranging in age from 17 to 2 as well as six nephews. Larue carried the physical (and probably emotional) scars of that event with him to his grave.

Madie Ray recalled how she learned of her beloved daddy's death two years later when she was only 12. She was standing in the kitchen with Danacy when Larue came in and said that Daddy had died. The next thing Madie Ray remembered is her waking up on the floor. She was devastated.

Her wonderful father, who had always put her on a pedestal, was gone. Madie Ray said, "Daddy was my life. Mama had those girls. And he was all I had. When he died, I just died."

Madie Ray recalled that not long afterwards, her aunt Eva Rogers (her father's youngest sibling) took her to cousin Homer Brinson's shivaree to cheer her up. An old fashioned Southern shivaree was "a noisy mock serenade performed by a group of people to celebrate a marriage." Witnessing the crazy spectacle, 12-year old Madie Ray thought they were all crazy. This was but a brief diversion from the family's new reality: no beloved father and bread winner. Her aunt's sons were older so they all soon left to seek their own fortunes.

The family then lived in Northfield near El Dorado. The company made a job for Larue so that he could support the family. While Larue was working in the oil patch, he met his future wife Millie English, whose family was from Oklahoma. Her father also worked in the oil field. During that same time, Madie Ray got to know a neighbor named Elmer Amacker, who also worked in the oil patch and lived with his sister and her husband. He had traveled from Pearl River county, Mississippi to live with his sister after their mother's death. They knew each other several years before they married in a Methodist preachers' house on March 8, 1935 in Norphlet, Union county, Arkansas. She was 16, and he was 23. Subsequent records said she was 18 at her first marriage. But she was clearly 16 when she married Elmer.

The couple moved to the of Dupont community near Poplarville, Mississippi. Their firstborn child Barbara Ann came along in 1936. About six months after Barbara was born, Larue along with friends and neighbors from Arkansas traveled to Columbia, Mississippi—about 40 miles from Poplarville. After visiting with Elmer and Madie Ray, Elmer and Larue hitchhiked back to Arkansas, thus making the fateful decision to return to the oil patch. Later, Madie Ray returned to Arkansas along with their friends.

Madie Ray said that she hardly ever saw Barbara after they arrived back in Arkansas. Her family members doted on her and took good care of Barbara. Being the first grandchild, she was the center of the family life. Madie Ray recalled how once little Barbara had walked outside holding a dish towel. And because she was barefooted, she got stickers in her feet and began to cry. Madie Ray remembered the pitiful image of poor little Barbara standing there holding her dish towel crying. This happy time with family came to an end when Elmer was transferred to Odessa, Texas. Soon after arriving in Odessa, Sandra Ray was born in 1939.

In July of 1940, Elmer was able to take Madie Ray, Barbara, and Sandra on a vacation back to Mississippi. After they got there, Elmer was called back to work. Madie Ray, who was expecting their third child, stayed a little longer at Elmer's sister's house. Madie Ray had everything packed and was planning on leaving that evening on the bus when Elmer's sister Mary Peters' husband Lee Peters got a call from the train station that Madie Ray had a telegram. Lee went and read the telegraph which advised her to return at once to Odessa because Elmer had been injured in an accident. Pregnant Madie Ray and her two little girls accompanied by Mary's daughter's husband

Austin Hendry left on a bus on Saturday evening. They got to Odessa on Monday. On Tuesday, they began their return trip to Poplarville with Elmer's body.

Can you imagine the strength that Madie Ray had to handle all this?! Imagine this pregnant 21-year old mother managing two very young daughters and worried about her husband's condition while taking the two-day, 878-mile trip then immediately taking a similar return journey with the body of her husband. Madie Ray's mother Ellie Rogers was a widow herself of just 8 years and mother to a large family. Her oldest sons worked in the oil field and lived in Penwell, Texas (in Ector county near Odessa) at the time of Elmer's death, which occurred on July 21, 1940.

After the funeral in Poplarville was over, Ellie stayed with Madie Ray then accompanied her and her girls back to Texas. Madie Ray then moved with Ellie to Turnertown, Texas which is situated between Tyler, Kilgore, and Henderson in central Texas. While there, Elmer, Jr. was born on January 23, 1941 in nearby Henderson, Texas. She and her three children lived 2 or 3 months in Henderson area before they moved to Poplarville. Madie Ray wanted her children to grow up around Elmer's family and not in the nomadic lifestyle of her mother's family following jobs in the oil field. Madie Ray wanted stability for her children.

When she moved to Poplarville, Madie Ray gave her house in Odessa to Ellie. Later that year when World War II began, Larue enlisted in Army Air Force. Madie Ray's brother Bob, who had changed his name to Buster, quit his job and got ready to go to war. About two years later in 1943, her fifteen-year old sister Betty was the first Rogers family member to join Madie Ray in Poplarville to help her with her children. Ellie sold the house in Odessa and moved her five youngest children to Poplarville at which time Madie Ray went to work outside of the home. Ellie and family lived in West Poplarville near Madie Ray's house. Madie Ray bought a car (which had to be hand-cranked to start) and worked in a factory making Army uniforms in Picayune during World War II. Her twin brothers Hardy and Howard were about 17 and worked at Camp Shelby for the Civilian Conservation Corps. Later, the twins were stationed in Florida for Naval training then on board a ship in California.

The war years were scary times. Madie Ray's mother Ellie had four flags in the window representing the four sons (Madie Ray's brothers), who went off to fight. Every house in Poplarville had blackout shades. When Ellie heard sirens, she pulled the shades and told everyone to be quiet. Even after she grew up, Sandra remembered the fear she felt during this period when she was a young child.

Also in 1943, Madie Ray's lawsuit against the oil company responsible for Elmer's death was finally successful when her suit was appealed to the Texas Supreme Court. Her settlement was the largest liability settlement up to that time against an oil company. Alvin Gipson returned to Poplarville after having just completed a job as structural steel supervisor in the building of the Pentagon in the Washington, DC area, a job which his first cousin once removed, the powerful Senator Theodore Bilbo was influential in getting for him. Later in 1943, Madie Ray married Alvin

in Tylertown. They moved to a house in West Poplarville. Alvin started a sawmill business in White Sands.

It would be enough for anyone to settle into the busy life of a housewife with four young children to raise: Alvin Ray, Barbara, Sandra, and Elmer. But Alvin and Madie Ray started a taxi service which mainly catered to servicemen needing to travel to destinations in the region such as Camp Shelby, Mobile, and New Orleans. During war times, gasoline and tires were rationed. Luckily, they were able to get sufficient ration cards to run their taxi business because of Senator Bilbo. Madie Ray worked behind the scenes but also drove as well. She said that tires were so bad during that era, that they would need four spares for a trip to Mobile. Luckily, the servicemen she carried would change the tires for her.

In 1947, Alvin sold his sawmill and built a lumber business on West Beers Street in Poplarville. At that time, they also moved into a house across from the store. Eventually a planing mill was built back behind the lumber store. A lumber warehouse was also completed down the hill next to the little branch. In 1948, the couple welcomed a new baby, Rogers Scott known as "Scotty."

The growing family had outgrown that little house so they along with Alvin's father started building their brick house in 1951 which still stands on West Beers Street in Poplarville. After 18 months of construction, they moved into it in 1953. About this time, Ellie with two of her daughters moved into a little rental house across the street from the beautiful, new, spacious brick house.

In 1954, Alvin and Madie Ray opened Magnolia Courts (a motel on US Highway 11 in Poplarville). During the 1950's, Madie Ray also ran a fine restaurant housed in Magnolia Courts. Madie Ray even employed her youngest sister Ann and her husband for a brief time in that restaurant. She worked very hard in her business endeavors. Sadly also in 1954, the lumber business situated near the brick house burned. Later, the planing mill was dismantled.

Four years later, Bryan Larue, was born. Finally, two years later, her seventh child Steven Neil was born when Madie Ray was 39, the same age that her father had died. Just a few years later, her oldest children married starting a new era in her life as grandmother. Her grandchildren called her "Mother Gipson," "Mama Gipson," "Mother," or just "Gip" Madie Ray was a stern disciplinarian at times. I have witnessed her with switch or belt in hand administer discipline to her children and grandchildren. She ran a tight ship. But I have heard her many times laugh and have fun. And when she and her sisters got together, there were always smiles and laughter. Alvin and she also socialized with others in the area and had many friends. She was politically involved and was among the first Lady Colonels in the State of Mississippi during Governor Ross Barnett's administration.

Many of her children, grandchildren, and nieces and nephews have some of their happiest childhood memories in that house and in the yard surrounding it. Children were forbidden to slide

down the bannister but did anyway. They also bumped down the stairs on their backsides. That same stairway was the backdrop for photos we took of my children and their cousins when they were little. Madie Ray was quick to smile and laugh her mischievous laugh.

After Alvin and she sold the Courts in 1972, she started working at the Movie Star lingerie factory in Poplarville, where so many of her kin people had worked at one time or another. Finally, in 1991 at the age of 72, she retired. She was able to travel more and visit with relatives in Texas striking up a special friendship with her cousin's wife Vera. In the 1990's, she had heart bypass surgery which gave her more than a quarter century more of life.

She and Alvin felt the horrible pain of losing children with the passing of sons Alvin Ray in 1993, son-in-law Bill Pace, and Elmer, Jr. in 2003. Alvin lost his own battle with cancer on April 8, 2004. Grandson Andy Amacker also succumbed to cancer in 2011. She lost her daughter-in-law Judi Amacker just last year.

Although her ancestors didn't live long lives, Madie Ray made it to her 100th birthday in December of 2018. Unfortunately, her quality of life suffered during her last few years. But on Sunday, April 7, 2019 at about 9:30 a.m., her spirit mercifully slipped the bonds of her old, suffering body and reunited with her loved ones who had gone before. She died just one day short of 15 years after Alvin's passing. Madie Ray was survived by daughters Barbara and Sandra and sons Scott, Bryan, and Neil and daughters-in-law Sandy, Eileen, and Sarah and son-in-law Larry Peters. She left a large posterity: 24 grandchildren, 45 great-grandchildren (with the another due in May), and 21 great-great-grandchildren.