



Martha Madden: Staying Vibrant

Entrepreneur, Speaker, Scholar, Artist, Guest of Johnny Carson ... so many phrases that can accurately describe one woman may not be that unusual in the city that is Washington DC, but Martha Madden takes each of those adjectives and embraces them, making them uniquely her own.

“My motivation, from the time I was a little girl, was to have fun,” Madden’s eyes twinkle as she regales me with tales of her very full life. Martha Madden hails from Louisiana where she was raised by strict,

loving and supportive parents. The loss of her brother when he was 15 left her an only child and she received the full attention of her parents. She was reading proficiently before she even went to school. No wonder given the fact that her grandmother received her college degree in 1894 and went on to serve as a school principal.

Education has always been at the forefront for Madden, “I’ve got a real passion to share,” drawls this firebrand in pink. She graduated from Southern Methodist University with a BS in Mathematics and continued her education at SMU with a Master’s Degree in Education, specializing in Counseling. Not one to sit on her laurels, Madden followed with Advanced Studies at Stanford University’s Graduate School of Education.

Her resume starts with her position as the Dean of Women at Northeast Louisiana University in the late 60’s through the 70s and includes a year as Secretary of the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality; time as the Special Assistant to the US Department of Energy, Office of Civilian Radioactive Waste Management and her time as the Dean of Semester At Sea. She currently serves as the president of mMadden Associates.

“While I was the Executive Director of the Louisiana Talent Bank of Women, I helped thousands of women gain appointments to boards and commissions.”

I’d heard she’d been a guest on the Late Night with Johnny Carson show, so I asked for some details. Martha laughed and was

delighted to share the story. “While I was serving as the Secretary of the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality, I was very much aware of our role as stewards of the land, and I created and implemented a three month summer program for school teachers to learn about our agency – this resulted in about three volumes of environmental educational material.” She adds, “We were awarded the National Wildlife Award in Louisiana for Educational Material for that work. Well, about this time there was a barge filled with garbage, mostly medical waste and mostly from New York and it was headed our way. When I heard about this I was determined to keep it from landing on Louisiana’s shores. I got a judgment that insisted that they had to go somewhere else. During this process, Johnny Carson was following the barge in his nightly routine and his people called to see if I would be on his show to talk about how I got this barge turned around. Well, I really had no idea that so many people stayed up that late and watched this show, but I had a job to do in Louisiana, and there was no way I could get to California to be on that show. His people insisted that they would do anything to get me on the show so we set up a phone connection and I was interviewed by Johnny Carson.” Martha leans forward and conspiratorially intones, “I got the last word though, I ended the interview by saying ‘Louisiana is not a dumping ground for garbage!’”

“After that show I was amazed at the amount of exposure! There were more than five thousand articles written and friends and family were calling from all over the country.” Martha is clearly delighted about the attention this episode drew to the issue of environmental quality and the legislation that came about as a result.

When she’s not stopping garbage barges, or lecturing and speaking to groups, Martha is active on the Board of Directors of Project Performance Corporation and identifies her volunteerism with this organization as a component of her commitment to give back to her community. “It’s exciting to be part of this organization and having the opportunity to work with Mike Nigro, the President of the Company. They’ve been recognized in the Washingtonian as a Great Place to Work, as well as being recognized as a Contractor of the Year finalist, and received the ‘Nice-Guys-Award’ for their commitment to Community Service. All of this recognition is a true indication of why I’m so happy to serve with them.”

Madden is a member of the Cosmos Club and recently had some of her photographs selected for a juried show at the Club. Her favorite photography subjects include nature and animals and that ties in nicely in with her love of adventure and travel. Along with her young girl’s wish to have fun, was her goal to “see the world.” It seems she’s been nearly everywhere in the world and she shares that one of her favorite destinations is Antarctica.

When I ask what her secret is, how is it that one person has combined so many large and small “successes” into their world, Martha shares, “One passion doesn’t have to mean you stay in a rut. Follow your excitement and stay vibrant and you’ll find your passage to where you want to be!”

I couldn’t agree with her more.

By Peggie Arvidson