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Museum News

Scuffin' her way to success



Photo: e-Bay

"Never underestimate the power of a woman." We have heard that platitude from childhood, along with "Behind every successful man is a woman." Hubert Humphrey's take on that adage was "Behind every successful man is a proud wife and a surprised mother-in-law." Sometimes, though, a woman doesn't have to have a man standing in front of her...she is the success and her

man has nothing to do with it.

That's the way it was with Madye Kersey Bailey. She was "just" a rancher's wife, living on a ranch near Sanderson. She had spent most of her married life living with her husband at Ozona on the family ranch, raising their two children and doing the thousand things a hardworking ranch wife has to do. They had leased a place near San-

derson, but in the early 1940s "drouthy" times set in, all a precursor to the drought that dried up most of the '50s.

One Christmas, Madye decided to make gifts for family and friends instead of buying them. Like most of the other ranchers in the area, their extra money was going to the ever-

increasing ranch expenses, and what with feeding and all, she didn't have much cash, or much choice.

But, what she did have in abundance was a great talent for sewing and a great big bag of cloth scraps. There must be something she could do with those scraps, she thought. What could she possibly make with those little remnants of cloth? She thought about how cold her floors were that winter and how it would be nice to have a pair of warm house shoes. At once she realized, here are my Christmas gifts! They wouldn't take much material and she could decorate them and make them look nice.

As she thought about the design, she realized that she didn't know her friend's foot sizes, but she came up with a solution...she would make them large and backless so they could just slip them onto their feet and take off.

Quickly the ideas flowed from her mind and soon she had made a pattern for the parts, using her own feet as an example, cut the material and sewed them together. Then, she took a piece



Photo: e-Bay

of sheer material and bunched it together into the shape of a big, poofy flower and sewed it to the top of each shoe. Now, she thought, that's a cute pair of shoes, if I do say so myself. As she flexed her toes against the material she thought, and they are warm and comfortable, too.

Soon she had enough shoes to send to all her kinfolks and friends, and it didn't take that long to do it. She boxed them up, made a trip to town to the post office, and soon the gifts were on their way. I hope they like them, she thought.

After Christmas, the letters began to pour in. Her little slippers, which she decided to call "scuffs," were a huge success. Almost everyone wanted more scuffs, both to wear and to give as gifts, and they were willing to pay for them. They had never seen anything like this before, nor had they ever had anything so comfortable and easy to wear. And, they were cute, to boot! And, if they needed to go somewhere in a hurry, they only had to "jump" into their scuffs and take off. Very handy for the

busy housewife!

As the year progressed, Madye began to take more and more orders, and it didn't take long to realize that she had a goldmine.

In 1948, they still weren't doing well on the ranch, so they let the lease go and moved back to Ozona. In those few, short years, her sideline had grown by leaps and bounds, and she was verging on making as much as her husband made with the ranch.

About 1950, they decided that they needed to be in a bigger place to properly market her scuffs, so they moved to San Angelo. The business had to become more than just a sideline, so they decided to take a name, the Bailey Shoe Company.

By 1952, they were doing so well that they took the next step and incorporated, doing business as Madye's Inc., and using Madye's name as a fancy, registered trademark. They were



in the big time, now, but sales were still not what they should be, since they only sold locally.

The big break came when their daughter, Madye Jo, by chance visited with a Fort Worth buyer, who was looking for something new. She described her mother's product in great detail, with bubbling enthusiasm. After examining a pair of scuffs, he was impressed enough to order 200 pairs for a customer. This gave Madye the expo-

sure she needed. Her scuffs took off and ran away with the competition.

As Madye's scuffs gained fame in local and Texas markets, they caught the eye of the fashion experts at the Tobe Report, savants in the fashion industry whose "well-informed understanding and opinions on the direction of fashion and consumer shifts made (their) company's services the most highly sought-after in the (fashion) industry." Tobe wrote the book on high fashion design.

As a result of being included in the Tobe Report of 1955 and receiving glowing remarks for Madye's design savvy, fashion buyers from around the world fell at her feet. Pretty good for a West Texas rancher's wife!

Life was good as Madye and her husband rode on the crest of international success. They grew their company and expanded, time and again, into new markets and new products.

But, by 1967, Madye and her man were well past retirement age and were growing weary. Her husband had returned to the ranch at Ozona and





Photo: e-Bay

Madye was ready to follow. After successful negotiations with the huge RG Barry Company of Columbus, Ohio, makers of Dearfoam shoes and products, Madye signed over the company for a tidy profit and went home to the ranch to celebrate her retirement. RG Barry kept the Madye's trademark as a branch of their operation, mainly for its established name recognition.

Though no longer in production, Madye's products are eagerly sought after in the collector market, through e-Bay, Etsy's and other organizations.

And, as for Madye? Well, it was just all in a day's work for this very talented, hardworking ranch lady and shrewd businesswoman.

Madye Kersey Bailey passed in 1974 and her husband in 1978. They left



Photo: e-Bay

behind a son and daughter, four grandchildren, two great grandchildren and, a lot of satisfied customers!



References

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