

Man's search for family reveals that his parents gave away 10 children

By George Garties
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LOS ANGELES — One man's search for his roots has unearthed a tragic Depression-era tale of a homeless couple who gave 10 of their 11 children away to strangers, hoping to find them a better life.

Now that Ed Maddox knows a little about his parents, he's hoping for a reunion with the brothers and sisters he hasn't seen in 58 years, and couldn't really remember.

Adopted at age 4 by an Oakland streetcar motorman and his wife, all Maddox knew of his natural parents was the name on his adoption certificate and his adoptive mother's hints that they'd had money trouble. Out of respect for her, he never pried further until after her death.

The curtain lifted a few weeks ago, as Maddox, a teacher and Christian missionary, reeled through microfilm copies of the Oakland Tribune and stopped at a front-page headline from Aug. 28, 1929, the day he was adopted.

"Father Who Gave Away 10 Children Gets 7 Back," it read.

"It said, 'Turn to Page 39,' and on Page 39, I was looking at myself," Maddox recalled. It was a picture of three smiling children, and the youngest matched an early portrait in Maddox's photo album.

"I don't know if you'd say shock or what, but it was quite an emotional moment to find out something about myself," he said.

Another edition of the paper provided his first look at his natural parents — Harry Bunan in a rumpled suit, and wife Agnes looking out from under a bucket-shaped hat.

The papers sketched in part of the story:

The Bunans had recently arrived in Alameda County with nothing to their names but a battered truck. They and their 11 children set up camp on the barren bank of a creek in Niles Canyon in what's now the city of Fremont.

Desperate after authorities refused to take responsibility for the children of transients, the Bunans gave 10 of their children away.

Within days, seven of the children had been returned by would-be parents.

But the county eventually relent-



Ed Maddox
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ed, taking custody and offering the children for adoption.

For Maddox, born Edmund Birdsel Bunan, the newspaper story lacks an end and a beginning.

There isn't any word of what happened to Harry and Agnes Bunan, itinerant laborers, no hometown listed. The papers give an age only for Agnes, 35.

The date — deep in the farm crisis of the '20s and two months before the stock market crash on Black Thursday — conjures up images Maddox can't confirm.

Now Maddox wants to see the siblings he didn't know he had. There were seven boys and four girls, and in 1929, their ages ranged from four months to 14 years. There were two sets of twins, one fraternal and one identical.

Maddox, who with his wife, Ruth, has taught school in the West and in Hawaii and spread the Gospel in six Asian countries, now lives on the grounds of a missionary-training organization in Lakeview Terrace, Youth With a Mission.

He wistfully recalls a few meetings with his identical twin sisters, Lucy and Edith, in 1943, before he went into the Navy. They sought him out, and he lost touch long ago, remembering only that they might once have lived in Fortuna.

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