

There was also a great deal of love and appreciation as part of the culture. That's another thing I'd have to mention. People were not uncritical if they felt things were being done the wrong way or the faith was being misrepresented—but they were very ready to get behind their leaders and back them up and let them feel that they were right there with them. People didn't mind bringing up their questions about various matters as these affected the Bible. There was the eternal questioning about evolution, about certain philosophical problems, questioning about the Trinity and so forth, but it was never the kind that would seem to lead people right out of the movement. There were always those who could give them sensible answers and the conversation would go on. It wasn't mainly a critical culture: elements of criticism were there, but the fellowship and the loving togetherness are the things which stand out in my mind. ✦

### ✦ MADGE THORNTON



*Madge Coogan became a Christian during her school years. At university, she studied science with a botany major. She was a member of EU between 1946 and 1949, serving for two years as the Women's Secretary. She married fellow EU member Syd Thornton in 1951.*

I was already a Christian when I got to university—my brother Clive was there and actually I went to an EU house party before I even came to university. Joining EU seemed the natural thing to do. I signed a card saying 'I declare my faith in Jesus Christ as my Lord, my Saviour and my God' and I thought that was the right sort of approach.

We were fortunate in being in the EU in the days after the war, in that we had all the ex-servicemen there. To name a few, Don Robinson, Dudley Foord, Wally Newmarch and Bill Andersen were all ex-servicemen and I think that's why the EU was so strong in our day. But I don't think post-war reconstruction was something we talked about. There was a lot of discussion at various stages as to whether one should dance, go to the pictures or drink alcohol—it's extraordinary how important these things were. Some people felt that one should be different and not do these things. Other people felt one should. It wasn't really divisive, but it was quite a topic of discussion. I thought that in moderation, we *should* be involved in these things—after all if you're going to meet people on their ground you've got to go to the things they go to, to expect them to come to the things you come to.

There was quite a group of us that used to go out together a lot—a group all from EU and we were very firm friends. When we went to the pictures or the theatre, we would take the tickets we bought, and the girls all got the even numbers and the boys got the uneven ones, and we shuffled them so you didn't know who you were going to sit next to. I can remember once I was late and Syd was standing in the foyer waiting for me. He said 'Allen Miller and I drew the tickets on either side of you and we tossed to see who'd wait for you and I lost'. Really chivalrous, he was, in those days!

The fellowship at EU was tremendous. We had prayer meeting in the mornings, before lectures, in the Philosophy Room. About 30 people would go. And that was a very strong

bond, the people you always prayed with. We prayed for things at the University, for the meetings we were having that week and that sort of thing, or for the house party that was coming up—in effect for EU’s activities.

I think the house parties were the most encouraging thing about EU, that whole week spent together. We had three a year, in the vacations. We’d have a speaker organised and the aim was to invite your friends. We had some hilarious times. Bells went off under beds and all sorts of jokes were played on people—the boys were good at organising things, mainly the engineers using their technical skills. And you used to talk to people—you’d sit by the fire and talk to them. I can remember one night at Mount Victoria, we were told the lights had to be off at ten o’clock and we were very naughty. We went along to the railway station because we knew it had a nice big fire in the waiting room, about six of us, and we had a lovely chat there. We got home about half past eleven. I didn’t always do the right things when I was in EU.

But I found EU wonderful—Paul White used to call it the eternal kindergarten, which was probably right as it was constantly teaching us things. We used to get marvellous speakers at our public meetings—people like T.C. Hammond, Principal Morling, Stuart Babbage. I thought the EU was important, and it certainly had a big impact on us as people. So many of the people who were keen in those days have remained Christians. And I think that is one of the factors—that they had a good grounding—and when you’ve got T.C Hammond talking from *In Understanding Be Men*, you get a very good grounding. In essence, the firm basis of my faith goes back to my EU days. ✨

## Responding to the wider world

A university is in some ways a microcosm of society, a place where the questions and controversies unsettling the nation are not only reflected, but exaggerated. Throughout the 75 years of the EU’s existence at Sydney, its campus context has been impacted and enlivened by issues of national—and international—importance. In the 1930s, these included the Great Depression, the peace movement and the eventual outbreak of war. In subsequent decades, they ranged from post-war reconstruction to the sexual revolution of the 1960s, Vietnam and the war in Iraq. Each of these issues stirred up the campus and transformed student culture. They also impacted the Evangelical Union, both by reshaping the cultural and intellectual landscape in which it pursued its aims and by challenging its beliefs and actions.

From the beginning of the 1930s, even as Depression gripped the country, the spectre of a second world war cast a shadow over the hopes of many Sydney University students. In 1933, several of the societies formed a peace coalition that campaigned for disarmament by passing anti-war resolutions and holding meetings on ‘The Causes of War’, ‘The Cure for War’ and ‘The Working Class Attitude to War’.<sup>1</sup> During the middle years of the decade, the world situation worsened. Japan’s expansion into Manchuria, Mussolini’s invasion of Abyssinia and the intervention of various European powers in the Spanish civil war indicated the increasing instability of the international community. In early 1935, reflecting growing student concerns for the situation, two more societies joined the peace coalition. Collectively renamed the Joint Committee for Peace, these groups convened various forums

1. Barcan, op. cit., 66. The ‘Anti-War’ campaign body was formed Trinity term 1933 by members of the Student Christian Movement, the Freethought Society, the League of Nations Union and the Labour Club.