



Queensland Business Leaders Hall of Fame 2013 Inductee Paula Stafford OAM Digital Story

Interviewee: Paula Stafford OAM

Interviewer: Ray Weekes

Date: 2013

THE BIKINI MADE MY SURFERS PARADISE BUSINESS FAMOUS

MS STAFFORD: Actually it was the publicity the bikini gave me, really made my business, which was making clothes of every type for men, women and children. I think it was something new to Queensland. I mean the bikini had just received its name in Europe. And I think it was something new I was doing, and Queensland and the media became quite obsessed with it. And it grew very quickly.

PUBLICITY LED TO RAPID GROWTH

It started off in an attic room, where I employed one machinist. And it became so busy that I had more space downstairs, and I started to engage staff. It just grew enormously, because the press were very kind to Paula Stafford, and they put her on the map, for which I'm very grateful.

I was very excited about the measure of success we were receiving - or achieving, I should say. But it was a happy time. We actually, in the end had I think, 48 people in the business. And I think seven of them lived on the premises because we had an apartment block as well. So we had staff there all the time and lots of people prepared to do overtime.

I don't think I expected too much of people, nor did I expect too much of myself, but success was just thrust upon me, let me put it that way.

MY BUSINESS BUILT AROUND MY FAMILY

PAULA STAFFORD: I guess the confidence was given to me by the fact that I had, you know, lovely family around me. And I was very happy having four children in five years, and I was very happy, and I guess that contributed a lot to my success, my happiness.

As each of them left school, and sometimes they left school before they were supposed to, just to come into the business. One after the other, and they all wanted to come into the business. How could one be more fortunate than that?

MY HEADMISTRESS SUGGESTED I STUDY SOMETHING MORE FEMININE THAN ARCHITECTURE

PAULA STAFFORD: In my early youth, that was what I always wanted to do. I was drawing up plans for houses constantly, and units. And she thought I should study something more feminine, so I took her advice and studied dressmaking and how to manufacture clothes and

so on. As a result, it led me into the fashion business, I guess. So she is to blame, one could say.

PAULA STAFFORD – AN INTERNATIONAL BRAND

PAULA STAFFORD: I guess it was in some ways because I supplied shops all over Australia, in London, Selfridges, and Liberties of London. You know, so – and I supplied shops in Hawaii and in the United States mainland. So, you know, Paula Stafford became quite a name, and I enjoyed what I was doing. And the joy of it was having all my family come into the business with me.

I became well known worldwide, I suppose. And people would come from overseas to visit me in the shop itself. So I had a lot of overseas visitors, which was rather wonderful and which I enjoyed tremendously.

MY BUSINESS GREW AS GOLD COAST TOURISM GREW

PAULA STAFFORD: Well, I think it grew from the beginning, and it just grew and grew. But I grew with the way the tourism grew really. The more people would come, the more machinists I'd need because there were more people coming to Paula Stafford for their clothes. And it wasn't just women and children, it was men's clothing as well. We had a whole men's division. You know, so it was quite a big business in the end, if I might say so, with modesty.

BIKINI CONTROVERSY, GREAT FOR BUSINESS

PAULA STAFFORD: I guess, I got more attention because of what I was doing. It was considered offbeat. You know, it only added to my success and the popularity that the press gave me.

FABRICS, A KEY TO MY SUCCESS

PAULA STAFFORD: I had fabrics that nobody else in Australia could get or had. So it was really my fabrics that put me on the map. I used to design my own fabrics and have them specially printed. And people seemed to like the designs that were specially made for Paula Stafford fabrics, so, you know, that was a great success in the way it went on the market.

Living in Surfers Paradise, I really wanted to design fabrics that were really typical of the paradise that we lived in. And I had them made on the Coast as well, which was a great design factor for me.

You know, it was a very hard time to import fabrics myself, but once the opportunity came I did import. I bought from five or six overseas companies, mostly in Switzerland and Austria, but I loved being able to get my own fabrics from overseas. It was quite a joy.

PAULA STAFFORD A PROUD QUEENSLANDER

PAULA STAFFORD: I was very proud to become a Queenslander, because I originally was Victorian, but I became a true Queenslander and enjoyed such tremendously.

This transcript was prepared by external vendors. Transcription is exacting work and we acknowledge that occasional errors may occur. Please also consult the original recording when undertaking research using this material.

© The State of Queensland (State Library of Queensland) 2015



This transcript is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Australia Licence. You are free to copy, communicate and adapt this work, so long as you attribute the State Library of Queensland.