China Nurse Jean Ewen: Embracing and Abandoning Communist Revolutionaries

Sonya J. Grypma

SCHOLARS OF NURSING HISTORY have long been aware of the significance of gender and class in defining the profession and its practitioners.[1] Nursing's long-standing subordination to medicine played out historically through the largely uncontested authority of physicians over nurses. One way of overcoming this gender and class subordination between nurses and physicians is by examining individual nurses who chose not to accept these constraints. Jean Ewen is one such example. As a Canadian nurse carving out a role for herself in rural China during the 1930s, Jean Ewen resisted gender and class norms, demanding collegial equality with the men she encountered—including the iconic Dr. Norman Bethune. As a case study, Jean Ewen exemplifies how the limited independence of nursing became a staging point for a woman like her to further resist her gendered subordination in other areas of her life.

In her 1981 book review of *China Nurse 1932–1939: A Young Canadian Witnesses History*, Margaret MacMillan criticized author Jean Ewen for being "maddeningly vague" in her account of the falling out with Dr. Norman Bethune that occurred when Ewen was working as his nurse and interpreter in China in 1938.[2] Almost thirty years after MacMillan expressed the wish that Jean Ewen had "tried to go a bit deeper into [Bethune's] character—and into her own as

Sonya J. Grypma, "China Nurse Jean Ewen: Embracing and Abandoning Communist Revolutionaries,'" *Journal of Historical Biography* 9 (Spring 2011): 37-68, www.ufv.ca/jhb.

well," little more is known about Ewen than what she provided (and withheld) about herself in *China Nurse*.[3] As part of a larger project aimed at studying Jean Ewen's nursing work in rural China, this essay draws on a range of published and unpublished English-language sources to critically examine the gendered interplay between the Ewen family's high-profile communism and Jean Ewen's ambiguous narratives of her nursing experiences in China recorded decades after Bethune's death. Highlighting contradictions, silences, and errors in the accounts, it confronts Ewen's lifetime struggle against being defined by the Communist cause, examining ways in which her complex relationships with three male Communist revolutionaries—her father Tom McEwen, husband John Kozar, and Dr. Norman Bethune—shaped her identity as a feisty and fiercely independent nurse in a profession that did not encourage such traits in women.

Born in Scotland and reared in poverty on the Canadian prairies in the early twentieth century, Jean Ewen is best known for her role as Norman Bethune's nurse in wartime China in 1938, a year before his death from an infected scalpel wound propelled his iconic status as a revolutionary Communist martyr. Less known is her work as a nurse in China before and after Bethune, and little attention has been paid to her post-China life in Canada, where she lived in relative obscurity until the publication of *China Nurse* in 1981. As a researcher of Canadian nurses in pre-communist China, I have long wondered why Jean Ewen has not received more widespread recognition in North America for her nursing work in China, given her well-known association with the famous Bethune.[4] While Ewen was not the first or only Canadian nurse to work in China during that era—there were an estimated hundred or so missionary nurses in China between 1888 and 1947—she was the first foreign nurse to be recognized by the People's Republic of China, and her remains are buried there. [5] She is also the only Canadian nurse to have worked with Mao Zedong's Eighth Route Army—and with Norman Bethune. Yet, while volumes have been written about Bethune,[6] I have only found one (popular) publication, besides *China Nurse*, that focuses expressly on Jean Ewen: a chapter in Ruth Wright Millar's *Saskatche-*

wan Heroes and Rogues.[7] Although Wright Millar suggests that history has ignored Jean Ewen because she was the daughter of a Communist, a more pragmatic explanation for the historiographical silence surrounding Ewen is the general lack of historic attention paid to women and nurses (a deficiency being steadily addressed in contemporary feminist and post-colonial scholarship) and the dearth of primary sources.

Unlike Canadian Presbyterian missionary nurses who went to China as part of a tight-knit community focused on collectively establishing hospitals and nursing schools in one province over a sixty-year period,[8] Jean Ewen's work in China was more independent and roving. In 1938, many of her belongings were destroyed during a bombing raid in China; few personal papers have survived. While the archives of the Franciscan Fathers of the Sacred Heart may well reveal important information about Ewen's missionary nursing work between 1933 and 1937, it is her more famous trek to China under the auspices of the New York-based Communist China Aid Council with Norman Bethune in 1938 that raises the most immediate questions, which leads to the sources used here. Particularly fascinating is Jean Ewen's uneasy relationship with Communism. Given her voiced rejection of Communist ideals (and Communist men) and her early work in China as a Catholic missionary nurse, it seems odd that Ewen would risk her life in Japanese-occupied China under Communist sponsorship to support a Communist cause. Her personal accounts of her experiences and relationship with the Communist revolutionaries (and others) in her life are vague and, at times, misleading. She became, I suggest, adept at masking personal and family humiliations, which is one reason for the vagueness and contradictions in her accounts. The story that emerges is one of a driven woman whose early experiences of loss and abandonment fuelled a lifelong anger towards her Communist father. Jean Ewen had a devil-may-care attitude towards those who might disapprove of her choices, an instinct for survival, and an early, if temporary, sense of responsibility to provide care to Chinese peasants whose loss, inequity, and pain outstripped her own.

"Jean Ewen Kovich has ended her Long March"

"She was not a Marxist," explained Laura Meyer in a televised news report on the eve of her trip to China in May 1988 with her mother Jean Ewen's remains. "One of her last wishes was for her ashes to be taken back to China. She left her heart there." [9] In Tangxian county, some five hundred nurses, doctors, soldiers, and local citizens met the twelve-car funeral cortege carrying Laura Meyer, her brother Tom Kozar, and two of Jean Ewen's grandchildren. At the memorial ceremony at which Jean Ewen's ashes were interred, near Norman Bethune's statue at the memorial for revolutionary martyrs at Shijiazhuang, she was praised for her "noble qualities of working hard and enduring hardships" and for her "lofty international spirit."[10] Despite Jean Ewen's insistence that she had no communist leanings, her work with Bethune secured her lifelong reputation among Canadian Communist Party members as an exemplary comrade in the struggle against exploitation of the working class by the ruling class and bourgeoisie.

Upon her death in Victoria, British Columbia, on 31 October 1987, the Canadian Communist newspaper *The Pacific Tribune* carried an obituary of Jean Ewen Kovich, stating that her "Long March" had come to an end. This reference to Mao Zedong and the Red Army's gruelling 12,000-kilometre retreat from the Kuomintang in 1934 metaphorically linked Jean Ewen to the Communist struggle and eventual victory in China. *The Pacific Tribune* described Jean Ewen as a "waif of hard prairie life and the Great Depression," reporting that she had worked in China with "the Canadian Medical Mission from 1932 until 1937" before going back to China in January 1938 "as a medical assistant with Dr. Norman Bethune." According to the obituary, Jean Ewen served "for two years with the Fourth and Eighth Route Armies of the Chinese people against the Imperialist Japanese forces in the war of aggression waged during 1938-39."[11]

Jean Ewen had just returned to Canada after four years in China as a Catholic missionary nurse with the Chicago-based Fran-

ciscans of the Sacred Heart Province when she was asked to join Bethune in a mission proposed by the new China Aid Council in New York. Founded in 1937 by American businessman Philip J. Jaffe and other Communist supporters, the main purpose of the Council was to "provide medical aid to the refugees and victims of the war in China including the wounded of the Chinese armies and the guerrilla forces fighting in the Northwest region."[12] The China Aid Council "raised funds for the purchase of drugs, medicines, surgical supplies and equipment, and through the China Defence League, chaired by Madame Sun Yat-sen, it [eventually] channelled funds to the four International Peace Hospitals," including one in Shijiazhuang later named after Dr. Norman Bethune.[13] Jean Ewen was to join two physicians—Dr. Norman Bethune and Dr. Charles H. Parsons—in what became known as the Canadian-American (C-A) Mobile Medical Unit, Eighth Route Army.[14] Philip J. Jaffe and Corliss Lamont shared the cost of the project, which Jean Ewen understood to be a six-month volunteer position; only their travel expenses would be covered.[15] For reasons that will be seen, Jean Ewen came to view the unit's venture as disastrous.

Jean Ewen's obituary in *The Pacific Tribune* focuses on her work with Norman Bethune. It glosses over her work with the Catholic mission, and makes no mention of her husbands, who both died young. Indeed, Jean Ewen's life was punctuated by tragic loss, including the deaths of her mother, Isobel Taylor Ewen, in the early 1920s; of her husband, John Kozar, in 1942, eight days before the birth of her second child; of her sister, Isobel McEwen Argyros, in 1950; and of Mike Kovich, the father of Jean's third child, sometime in the late 1950s. Jean had married John Kozar, a friend of her brothers Jim and Bruce, after returning from China to Toronto in 1939. After John Kozar's death at sea, Jean Ewen moved her family to British Columbia, where she married Mike Kovich in 1946. It was, by all accounts, an unhappy marriage. Mike Kovich died after a long bout with tuberculosis.

In highlighting Jean Ewen's work with Bethune, her obituary in *The Pacific Tribune* leaves the impression that Ewen's six years in

China were spent under Communist sponsorship. In fact, Jean Ewen spent only three months in China with Dr. Bethune, from whom she abruptly parted in May 1938. She remained in China for over a year afterward, securing a series of nursing-related jobs with the Red Army, facing the same horrific wartime conditions alongside Chinese soldiers, peasants, and refugees that she had experienced alongside Bethune. That the *Pacific Tribune* would emphasize Jean Ewen's association with Communism is not surprising, given her family's connection to the paper: Tom McEwen was the editor for twenty-five years, and Tom Kozar was a contributor.[16] Yet while Jean Ewen would likely have approved of being remembered as having "served as an example to the working class and its ideals," she would have resisted the implication that she had lived out the ideals instilled in her by her Communist father.

"Raised in a fine Communist family"

It is not clear what Tom Ewen's name was at birth. He was born in Scotland to Agnes and Alex McEwen in 1891; both parents died before he reached the age of nine. After marrying Isobel Taylor in 1910, and fathering Jean in 1911, Tom immigrated to Canada, Jean and her mother following a year or so later. Living in Canada under the name Tom Ewen, he and Isobel had three more children—Isobel (her mother's namesake), Jim, and Bruce. After his wife's death in the early 1920s, Tom Ewen was introduced to Marxism, and his life took a revolutionary turn.

Sometime in the 1930s Tom Ewen started using the name McEwen. According to an unpublished memorial tribute written by his grandson in 1988, McEwen was not Tom's birth name, but a pen name and the "alias given to him by the Supreme Court of Canada, at one of the trials he faced during the 1930s because he was a Communist."[17] Given that his parents were named "McEwen," it is more likely that prior to being required to use his legal name in court, Tom preferred the name Ewen as a way to avoid Anglo-Canadian discrimination against Scots. Whatever the reason, his use of the name Tom McEwen would coincide with Tom's growing Marxist persona

after the 1930s, and provide his children with the opportunity to distance themselves from a new Marxist identity—as Jean Ewen did—or to embrace it, along with a new narrative of their childhood, like Isobel McEwen. The 1950 obituary of Isobel McEwen Argyros claims that the Ewen children were "raised in a fine Communist family [and] followed the magnificent example of their father Tom, who in Saskatoon, Winnipeg, Toronto and Vancouver led great workers struggles, for which he was imprisoned in 1931 … and again during the war when he fought the appeasers of fascism."[18] Later described by the Communist Party of Canada as a lifelong "revolutionary who was entirely devoted to the cause of the working class," Tom McEwen spent a total of seven years in four Canadian jails for his Communist activity between 1930 and 1945.[19] When Jean Ewen was approached by Communist Party organizer Samuel Carr to accompany Dr. Norman Bethune on his mission to China in 1938, Tom McEwen was finishing up a five-year sentence in the Kingston Penitentiary as one of the so-called Communist Eight convicted of sedition.

Later in her life, Jean Ewen denied any suggestions that Samuel Carr had asked her to go to China because of her father's Communist reputation, insisting that she was chosen solely because she had been in China and could speak the language.[20] She also denied having any desire to emulate her father. In *China Nurse*, Jean Ewen recounted an incident where an angry Norman Bethune called her "truculent, self-sufficient, overconfident and absolutely no use to me." When he added the intended insult, "and you are also a disgrace to your illustrious father," Jean Ewen reportedly countered, "I always tried to be a disgrace to my father." [21] Laura Meyer disagrees. While Jean Ewen was driven by anger toward her father, she also strove for his approval. Although (or because) Tom McEwen belittled Jean's ambitions and doubted her abilities, she made it her life's aim to prove him wrong. Despite her accomplishments, Jean Ewen never received the approval she longed for from the man whose love mattered most.[22]

In a 1984 interview with Peter Stursberg, Jean Ewen described her father as "a peculiar man [with] peculiar idiosyncra-

sies."[23] In her version of events, they had not liked each other since her earliest childhood: "He had a flaming red beard and a black head and this just about drove me up the wall. I used to scream every time he would come near me. I guess he figured I didn't like him. So he used to, I was never one of his favourites."[24] Indeed, it was Jean's younger sister, Isobel, who was her father's favourite. When Isobel McEwen Argyros died suddenly in 1950, Tom McEwen was crushed.

In a 1951 memorial article published in *The Pacific Tribune*, Tom described Isobel as a "fine and brave Communist" and "one of the noblest and best beloved of Canada's Communist women."[25] In a private letter to friends in 1956 Tom wrote, "A parent should never place one of his children above the other, but for all my family Touche [Isobel] was different.… For me Touche is an imperishable memory."[26] In his 1974 autobiography, Tom McEwen praised Isobel, crediting her devotion, courage, and love with helping him hold the family together after the death of his first wife, when Isobel was seven. [27] Jean, in contrast, is scarcely mentioned in his book.

When Tom McEwen did write about his daughter Jean—in the *Tribune*, for instance—it was mostly in reference to her work with Bethune. In his 1951 memorial article, for example, Tom noted that Jean had been "with the Canadian Medical Mission in China serving with the late Dr. Norman Bethune in the Eighth and Fourth Route Armies of the now victorious People's China."[28] While his public writings suggest his approval of Jean's most famous socialist endeavour, Tom McEwen's private letters hint at disappointment with her other life choices. Like Jean, Tom McEwen was circumspect about discussing sensitive family matters. Even in his private letters to friends, details surrounding delicate family situations were vague, and both Jean and Tom seemed committed to keeping potentially embarrassing accounts from the public record.

Scandal, illness and abuse

Of all the remarkable events that had an impact on Jean Ewen's life, the one she spoke least about was her 1939 pregnancy (in China) and subsequent marriage (in Canada) to a man who was not the child's

father. It is not surprising that Jean Ewen was loath to give much detail about these momentous events; it is difficult to overestimate the shame associated with unmarried pregnancy for women during this period of Canadian history. Thus, while it is clear that Jean Ewen left China after May 1939,[29] gave birth to her daughter Laura in Toronto in September 1939,[30] and met and married John Kozar sometime during the fall of 1939,[31] she never publically identified pregnancy (and the break-up of her relationship with the unidentified father) as a likely deciding factor for her departure from China. Given the social implications of such a breach of societal sexual norms at the time, it seems understandable that Jean Ewen remained vague about the circumstances surrounding her daughter's birth and her marriage to John Kozar. Jean and John Kozar's son Tommy was born fifteen months after Laura.

Significantly, the name John Kozar does not appear in either *China Nurse* or in Jean Ewen's interview with Peter Stursberg. Nor is he mentioned in her obituary. As an adult, Tom Kozar pieced together information about his father: John Kozar was an American veteran of the antifascist International Brigade of volunteer soldiers who "went to Spain to defend democracy and the Spanish Republic against the terror of fascism" in 1937. There he met Jim and Bruce Ewen, and, after the war, he came to Canada to join the Canadian merchant marine service. He married Jean Ewen in 1939. On 13 January 1942, eight days before Tommy Kozar's birth, John Kozar died at sea.[32] The unarmed ship *Friar Rock* was torpedoed 110 miles off the coast of Newfoundland. After his death, Jean Ewen rarely spoke of him again, even to her children.[33]

The years following John Kozar's death were marked by family upheaval. In January 1944, Jean Ewen and her two small children abruptly moved west to British Columbia. According to Laura Meyer, Jean had been living with her brother and brother-in-law in Toronto. When the two men "started to tell her what to do with her life, she packed her bags and left without notice."[34] Jean Ewen secured a job in the Kelowna hospital. In 1946, she married Mike Kovich, and moved to Penticton. That same year, Tommy contracted

tuberculosis, and was institutionalized in a sanatorium in Vancouver.[35] Tom McEwen, who lived in Vancouver, visited his namesake every Sunday for ten months, spending "an hour arranging his junk and helping him 'pop' baloons [sic]."[36] In 1948, Jean's third child, Michael Kovich, was born. Then, in 1950, Jean's sister died. According to her father, Jean was devastated by the loss of her sister. In a letter to long-time friends, Tom McEwen expressed sympathy for "rough and ready" Jean Ewen who had "lost a solid anchor" with her sister's death: "She could pour out a lot of her troubles to Touche, and Touche would give her a lot of hell about a lot of things, and somehow everyone felt better."[37]

Tom McEwen was troubled about the struggles Jean Ewen had with her husband Mike Kovich, who he described in a letter to friends as "irritable" and "pretty difficult to live with." [38] Laura Meyer described Kovich as emotionally abusive.[39] In December 1951, Jean Ewen "ran into domestic difficulties and took very sick at the same time" with tuberculosis. Tom McEwen travelled out to Penticton to oversee Jean's hospitalization and initial treatment there before bringing her and her children back to Vancouver where she was hospitalized for three months.[40] Three years later, Jean's husband was also infected with tuberculosis. Although it is not clear when he contracted the disease, by March 1954 Tom McEwen considered Kovich to be "a chronic [palliative] TB case now," adding that "his time is undoubtedly very limited." It bothered Tom that Kovich was not living in a tuberculosis sanatorium, because by staying at home he was liable to "infect all the rest of the family."[41] Kovich was eventually hospitalized in Vancouver, but, by July 1954, he had been released from hospital and was confined to bed at home.[42] It is not clear how or when Mike Kovich died.

Jean Ewen also suffered from tuberculosis which, in her case, affected her spine. In January 1957, Jean Ewen underwent an unspecified "major operation" (likely a spinal fusion) for which she would be required to spend a few months in bed."[43] Once again, her children stayed with their grandfather, Tom McEwen. "The big test," Tom wrote to friends, "will come in another month or so—whether

[Jean] will have the use of her legs again."[44] In 1975, Tom McEwen wrote to his friends that, "the rest of the family, with the exception of Jean, are normally well. She will soon be heading for the hospital for another major operation. She has had much more hardship than pleasure in life, and it is beginning to catch up with her."[45] While the surgery helped for a while, Jean was eventually confined to a wheelchair.[46]

Jean Ewen's complex relationship with her father foreshadowed her relationship with Dr. Norman Bethune, from whom she similarly sought approval, and against whom she similarly lashed out. While Ewen never divulged precise details about her abrupt departure from Bethune in May 1938—either on record or to her children—it was not unlike her to "pack up and leave without notice" as a response to conflict.[47] Neither is it unusual that Jean Ewen's account of her departure from Bethune contradicts his, as will be seen. Given her tendency to provide vague or contradictory information as a way to cover up embarrassing situations, the question of whether Jean Ewen's accounts can be taken at face value is an important one, and will be explored next.

"A young Canadian witnesses history": A reliable witness?

Jean Ewen was the only Canadian to accompany Dr. Norman Bethune on the treacherous six-week trek behind Japanese lines from Shanghai to the Chinese line in Yenan (Yan'an) in February and March 1938. By the time they arrived at the Eighth Route Army base in Yenan, Jean Ewen had spent ten weeks with Norman Bethune—long enough to develop strong opinions about his character, skills, and beliefs. And yet for almost forty years after Bethune's death on 12 November 1939 and his subsequent immortalization in a memorial tribute by Mao Zedong, Jean Ewen made virtually no public statements about him. Had she kept a diary or other written record while in China, it is possible that these were lost, along with her passport, camera, film, typewriter, and virtually all of her belongings, on 21 October 1938 when her ship was hit and sunk by Japanese bombers while anchored in Hangchow.[48] As a result, historians and

others fascinated by the life and death of the intriguing Bethune who have turned to Ewen as a potential source of information about him have had to be satisfied with her recollections, however vague, because few other sources exist.

As oral historians have argued, recollections may be problematic as a means of verifying facts, but they serve an important purpose by giving insight into the narrators themselves.[49] Given the various gaps, silences, errors, and embellishments in Jean Ewen's accounts, can we treat her as a reliable witness? What do her recollections tell us about Ewen herself?

It is uncontested that Jean Ewen was born on 24 December 1911 in Scotland to blacksmith Tom Ewen and his wife Isobel, immigrating with them to Manitoba before she was two years old. However, there is conflicting evidence about what age Jean Ewen was when they moved to rural Saskatchewan, what type of schooling she had, how old she was when her mother died, and whether, why, or for how long she lived with the St. Joseph sisters in Winnipeg before entering their nurses training program. There is likewise a lack of clarity about why she became a Catholic missionary nurse with the Franciscan Fathers in northern China in 1932, why she parted from Norman Bethune only three months into their China adventure, when she returned from China, and when she married John Kozar. What *is* clear is that the three most prominent men in Jean Ewen's life—Tom McEwen, Norman Bethune, and John Kozar—would be remembered for their socialist activism, as would her son Tom Kozar, who was described in his 2007 obituary as "Brother Kozar, the Bard of the labour movement" for his labour union leadership role in British Columbia.[50]

A vague childhood

Jean Ewen dedicated only two paragraphs to her childhood in *China Nurse*, one of which is a scathing description of her father's decision to join the Marxist socialist movement in 1924. According to Ewen, after her mother's death from the Spanish flu in 1919, her father moved his four children to a Saskatchewan ranch where he worked as

a hired hand. There, the rancher's wife introduced Tom Ewen to *Das Kapital*, and, in 1924, he left the ranch to pursue his growing interest in Marxism. "For the next few years," Jean Ewen wrote, "my brothers, my sister, and I were merely bystanders to the part he was playing in history, and we became, of necessity, independent, self-reliant brats."[51] In 1927, Tom Ewen "became a full-time functionary of the party," and moved his family to Winnipeg. By then, Jean Ewen had left school, and eventually found a job working first in the laundry, and later as a nursing student, at St. Joseph's Hospital in Winnipeg.[52]

Transcripts from Peter Stursberg's 1984 interview of Jean Ewen do not add much clarity to questions of her childhood. For example, when Stursberg asked whether she attended school as a child, Jean Ewen imprecisely responded, "I was too young to go to school, after we came back we settled down in Saskatoon and I started school in Saskatoon [after] my mother had died."[53] Of her schooling, she made no clarification, except to say that she spent her first year and a half in Saskatoon living in a convent. According to Ruth Wright Millar, Jean Ewen was reared in rural Saskatchewan and did not go to school until age ten, which would have been in the fall of 1922.[54] Wright Millar noted that, after her mother's death, Jean Ewen moved with her family to Saskatoon where she attended Westmount School and Bedford Road Collegiate. In the Stursberg interview, Jean Ewen asserted that she left school in order to work at age sixteen because she needed to support herself in the absence of her father.[55] According to these dates, Jean Ewen would have only completed five or six years of formal education before entering nurses' training in Winnipeg.

The details of her mother's death are also unclear. According to *China Nurse*, Jean Ewen's mother Isobel Ewen "died in the flu epidemic in 1919."[56] When Peter Stursberg directly asked Jean Ewen whether her mother died in 1919, she evaded the question, stating only that "my youngest brother [Bruce] was just two years old when my mother died." [57] Other evidence suggests that Jean's mother died two or three years later, and not from the Spanish flu. For example, Tom McEwen noted that his youngest daughter, born in 1914, was

seven years old when his wife died, which would set the date of her death at 1921 or 1922.[58] This date is consistent with Bruce Ewen's assertion that their mother died in the early 1920s, and he claimed to Wright Millar that he had the death certificate to prove it.[59]

Why the evasiveness, then, on Jean Ewen's part? One explanation is that by the time Stursberg interviewed her, her memory had dimmed with the passing of time. Another, more likely, explanation is that Ewen was covering up events that the family found shameful. According to Laura Meyer, Isobel Taylor Ewen spent her final years in a mental institution in Weyburn, Saskatchewan, having suffered bouts of depression "from being alone on the prairie with four children. It was a common ailment among prairie women."[60] In this version of events, Isobel Taylor Ewen became hospitalized after caring for victims of the Spanish flu in 1918 or 1919. Whether she contracted tuberculosis or became depressed (or both) is not clear. Harry Ewen, a nephew, confirmed that Isobel Taylor Ewen was institutionalized, stating that Tom Ewen never visited her during her illness.[61] Nor did Tom keep any photographs of his first wife. Given the stigma associated with mental illness, it seems quite likely that Jean Ewen was deliberately vague when it came to details about her mother's death.

In 1927, Jean Ewen, determining that she was "big enough to look after [herself]," left home to work in the laundry at St. Joseph's Hospital. The religious sisters, Ewen maintained, were so impressed by her intellect—demonstrated by her "reading all these fancy books on philosophy"—that they encouraged her to go into nurses' training.[62] While Jean's self-portrayal emphasized her independence and self-reliance as the impetus for her work at St. Joseph's, a newspaper article indicates that the sisters took her in as an act of charity, "car[ing] for her when her father was jailed for sedition."[63] She graduated in 1931.[64] Jean Ewen's exposure to Catholicism led to her first decision to go to China as a nurse. Although at least one account states that Ewen was not a Catholic,[65] Ewen told Stursberg that she was:

> I was a Catholic…. Most of my young life was spent in the shadow of Catholicism somewhere. And I … had a friend by the name of Father Edmison and he used to come out to the hospital to see how I was doing.… And so, he had heard that the Sacred Heart Province of Chicago were sending out three nurses to China. So he told us, that's for me, so my two friends Rose [Martin] and Agnes [Schaffer], she said that's for me and that's for me. So the three of us went to China on the 8th of March [1933].[66]

That decision would change the trajectory of Jean Ewen's life.

"The best man in the bunch"

In the foreword to *China Nurse*, Jean Ewen defiantly wrote, "I am sure there are some who will shout liar, prevaricator, Trotskyite, or whatever. Should you wish to verify the events, be my guest."[67] Reading her account of her four years working as an independent nurse and midwife in remote villages with the Catholic mission, her three months working with Bethune, and her seventeen months trailing the Red Army in the early stages of the Sino-Japanese war, one is struck by Jean Ewen's impudence on the one hand, and her resiliency on the other. But it is difficult to verify the details of what she has written, something Ewen herself recognized. Jean Ewen's recollections do contain some inaccuracies or inconsistencies. For example, she has said that she went to China in 1932, rather than 1933; that she and Bethune sailed on the *Empress of Japan*, rather than the *Empress of Asia*; and that the *Chicago Tribune*, rather than *The New York Times*, ran a story on 12 March 1938 about her and Bethune being lost and presumed dead. [68] Each of her assertions contains some element of truth, and most of her errors can be explained by a faulty memory. However, some claims are more questionable than others, as will be seen.

In *China Nurse*, Jean Ewen asserts that, after she parted with Bethune, she met up with journalist and Communist sympathizer Agnes Smedley in Anhwei, while working with the New Fourth Army; Smedley tried to encourage her to stay in China. Agnes Smed-

ley had a vested interest in the C-A Unit, having been involved in relaying messages to and from the United States regarding the Red Army's need for medical assistance in their fight against Japan. According to Jean Ewen, Agnes Smedley told her, "I feel that you are making a mistake [by quitting her work with the Fourth Army], that you will be leaving the Medical Service under a cloud. I have been in correspondence with your father and I think he would not be pleased with your stand." Ewen replied "I refused to be hit over the head by my fathers' image," and subsequently severed the friendship. [69]

While it is unlikely that Agnes Smedley was in contact with Tom McEwen, it is plausible that she was fond of Jean Ewen. Smedley could not bear either Dr. Bethune or Dr. Parsons, both of whom she tried to have recalled home. According to Philip Jaffe, Agnes Smedley "wrote me several letters asking over and over again why we sent this awful man [Bethune] to the 8th route army…. She wanted him recalled."[70] Smedley was not successful in her bid to get the extravagant and demanding Bethune removed from the project, but, at the behest of Bethune and Ewen, she helped to get the drunkard Charles H. Parsons recalled to America.[71] One observer noted that, in comparison with her two medical companions, Jean Ewen was "the best man in the bunch."[72]

Throughout *China Nurse*, Jean Ewen expressed defiance to those in authority, berating those who made mistakes, while expressing a strong confidence in her own medical abilities. Having treated patients independently—that is, without a physician— in rural China for years as a missionary nurse before working with Bethune, Jean Ewen became "hopping mad" when Norman Bethune cautioned her against diagnosing and treating patients. Bethune would have seen diagnosis and treatment of patients as a physician's domain, not a nurse's. On one occasion, Ewen refused to follow Bethune's orders to put dressings on a patient's hands and to give him vitamin pills, because she believed that the man had leprosy, and "vitamin pills had never, as far as I knew, cured the disease." Bethune became incensed; Canadian nurses were expected to obey doctors' orders. Jean recalled bristling at the expectation: "I will be pleased to leave this

bloody unit in Sian," she threatened.[73] While such insubordination would warrant immediate dismissal in a Canadian hospital, Ewen felt no compulsion to obey Canadian conventions. Bethune, she must have reasoned, would not dare to fire her.

Dr. Bethune was not the only physician who became exasperated by Jean Ewen's medical interloping. Jean Ewen recalled surprising a Dr. Wong when she delivered a child while working with the Fourth Army: "he was angry because he had never had a delivery and probably would not know what to do with a forceps." And, when she diagnosed a patient with a tetanus infection and suggested anti-tetanus serum, Dr. Wong "only laughed at me in his ignorance." [74] The patient died twelve hours later. According to Jean Ewen, in the months after she parted from Bethune, she instructed pharmacists on how to make proper pharmaceutical solutions, doctors on how to deliver babies, and dressers on how to change dressings, take out bullets, and set fractures. She removed a bomb fragment from a young man's leg using "only my fingers and a chop stick," and dug up graves to find bodies to teach autopsies.[75] While all are possible, none are verifiable.

Like Norman Bethune, Jean Ewen was quick-tempered, and perceived herself as rarely wrong. A hint of resentment plays around the edges of most of her stories. However, while her negative tone may reflect a contrary nature, it also reflects the depth of anger and sense of betrayal she felt towards those involved in her venture with Bethune as a volunteer in the C-A Medical Unit. In the letter she wrote to Edith O. Sawyer from Shanghai on 13 May 1939, Jean Ewen exhibited her rage at what she perceived as ineptitude on the part of her sponsors. She wrote, "It seems that the duties and work of this so-called unit is in just about as much fog to the people who sent it over here as it is to the unit itself." [76] Her assessment may not have been far off the mark. Philip J. Jaffe later admitted that the man who was assigned to "follow through with help and advice" after the initial set-up of the C-A Unit was "remiss in his duties and Dr. B[ethune] was fully justified in his complaints from Yenan."[77]

According to Jean Ewen, their original plan to take charge of a field hospital was untenable because "the unit was too small" after the recall of Dr. Parsons, and "its support and maintenance was not made fully clear to the people in Wuhan." The C-A Unit was therefore shunted over to the Army Medical Services in Shansi province. Unfortunately, the new destination was seized by the Japanese army just as Bethune and Ewen were en route; they found themselves in the middle of a war zone. Unable to get to Honan province, or through the Japanese lines, Bethune and Ewen were only ten miles in front of the advancing Japanese army. It was a frightening experience: "Lovely, they gave us some 15 bombs; try and imagine if you can," she wrote to Edith Sawyer, "out in an open prairie without protection of even a tree. Most of our animals were killed [and] some of our drivers and 60% of our stuff useless. That month is about the worst I have ever been through."[78]

Jean Ewen's difficulty did not end there. After parting from Bethune in May 1938, she was

> sent to the front medical service in Chin Chien [in] North Shensi, supposedly to teach nurses. The material that I had to work with was boys of 14 [to] 17 years of age whose knowledge of Chinese characters was far below my own. I stuck it out for about two months and they could not understand why I became impatient with their utter lack of interest and progress. The directors there told me that I was at fault, which I resented very much.

She was sent to an army division headquarters to "clean out the hospitals there. They are about the worst I had ever seen. I stayed up there for nearly three months, which is just so much time wasted." Finally, she travelled to Hangchow, only to be caught in the middle of an air raid, in which the ship she had been travelling on (she was then on shore) was bombed and sunk. "Not satisfied with that, [the Japanese] machine gunned everyone in sight who tried to escape," she wrote.[79] By May 1939 Jean Ewen was enraged with the China

Aid Council. She was stranded in Shanghai, with no belongings, no passport, and no income.

Jean Ewen's letter to Edith Sawyer concluded with an appeal for financial support. She noted that, although she came to China on the expectation that the members of the C-A Unit were volunteers, she had since discovered that the two doctors were to be paid $100.00 a month. While she did not "expect any salary," acknowledging that "I knew what I was doing when I came out," she did believe that the China Aid Council should at least "help me to get on my feet again." She had not yet replaced the belongings she lost through the air raid attack of her ship the previous October, and "I cannot live on buttons." Ever resourceful, Jean Ewen ended her letter by suggesting that she had an "exhibit" for sale (perhaps related to some photographs she also mentioned, which were possibly intended for publication as part of a story). This was "first offered to you," she wrote to Sawyer. "If you want it say so, also if you don't say so immediately. It happens to be my responsibility and as the Chinese say I will not allow it to be MahMah HooHoo which means 'any old way.' I have already have had other offers."[80]

Given her feelings of abandonment by the C-A organizers, perhaps it is little wonder that Jean Ewen had no desire to later participate in the "propaganda benefits" the story of Bethune's death held "for bringing international attention to the cause."[81] She had had enough of the cause.

The Englishman

Jean Ewen's 1939 letter to Edith O. Sawyer lends credence to some of the more colourful stories recounted in *China Nurse*. However, one of Ewen's more fantastic accounts calls into question the veracity of her recollections as a whole. During her 1984 interview with Peter Stursberg, Jean Ewen reported that she met up with Ho Lung, leader of one of the Red Army divisions, after departing Yenan in 1938. According to her account, one morning Ho Lung came to see her and said,

> "The Japanese are holding an Englishman in Taiwanfu and I was just wondering if we should rescue him." "Yes [Jean Ewen replied], I think you should, after all Japan is not at war with England yet." And I said, "It's not fair!" So I never knew who [the Englishman] was until I came back to Hangchow and the first thing I know, I get a phone call from the British Embassy. "You're requested to appear for lunch." And here I was in an old army uniform and straw sandals and my hair down to my ears in, you know, without a curl or anything in it. And I had to go to them for lunch. And I found out who the Englishman was. He was there. A big tall handsome chap, and you'll never believe it but it's true. You can verify it if you want from the foreign office, the man was King George VI. He got fed up with the palace and took a job with his uncle, Sir Archibald Carr. As a Military Attaché to the China Embassy, and that's all, and being in jail and everything. You can . . .
> *Peter Stursberg*: Really? King George VI?
> *Jean Ewen Kovich*: Yes.

According to Jean Ewen, King George was working with the British Embassy when he was captured by the Japanese and "by a fluke I told the Chinese [to] rescue him, and they did, and this is what happened."[82] By her own reckoning, Jean Ewen was claiming responsibility for the release of King George VI from Japanese captivity.

Her story became more fantastical with the telling. Jean Ewen told Peter Stursberg that she met up with King George again that same year when she was trying to leave the county from Hong Kong. She had lost her belongings when her ship was bombed in Hangchow, but she eventually made it to Hong Kong via French Indochina. There she met "the Englishman" again, and he asked her where she was staying. When she replied that she didn't know, he said he would put her up in the Peninsula Hotel. She continued,

> and I'm wearing an old army uniform, and I'm dirty, and I'm dusty, and I've got straw sandals on, and I've got an army cap on at a funny angle, and when [sic] the foyers filled with ladies and gentlemen and tuxedos…. Even the Englishman looked a little ragged. So he put me up in a

> room down the hall from him, and the next morning I wasn't out of bed when, brr-rr [telephone]—"this is Madame Sun [Yat-sen], come over and stay with me." So I went over there, the embassy car took me over there, and she said, "Haven't you any baggage?" "Where would I have baggage? I don't even have a passport." So this sweet little lady of four-foot-something came out, and she was very cordial, and what do you call it? He [King George] was known as, I knew him as Ron Spear. I didn't know him as George VI. It was a long time afterward that I knew who he was, actually, when I got to Shanghai.
>
> *Peter Stursberg*: You were talking about this Englishman that was with you?
>
> *Jean Ewen Kovich*: I'm talking about the King George VI. He was incognito.

Reflecting on Jean Ewen's claims, it is possible that her path crossed with Madame Sun Yat-sen's in 1938. Madame Sun was, after all, well-connected to American Communist sympathizer Agnes Smedley, as well as to Communist leader Chou En-lai, with whom Jean Ewen reportedly had a good rapport.[83] Moreover, in 1938 Madame Sun established the China Defence League, and moved to a small flat in Hong Kong (one with a telephone) where she lived until Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941.[84] It is possible then, that Madame Sun would have been aware of—and taken an interest in—Jean Ewen's arrival and plight in Hong Kong. The same cannot be said, however, of King George VI.

It is difficult to know what to make of Jean Ewen's story of espionage and intrigue with King George. Her daughter Laura Meyer, when asked about the story, stated she had never heard it.[85] When Jean Ewen was making her way to Hong Kong in 1938, King George VI was on a state visit to France; when she was making her way to Shanghai in 1939, he was on a Royal Tour to Canada.[86] At about the time Jean Ewen was returning to Canada, King George was

preparing for war; he addressed the nation by radio on 3 September 1939 when war was declared.[87] Given the absurdity of Ewen's claims about King George, it is tempting to dismiss them—or her—as crazy. Was she, at the time of Stursberg's interview in 1984, mentally unstable, her delusions about King George symptomatic of an underlying disorder? Alternatively, had she, by age 73, conflated her own wartime memories of encounters with historic figures with accounts by (and of) others? Neither explanation is satisfactory; there is no evidence that Ewen suffered from psychosis or dementia, even in her advancing years. Thus, the most plausible explanation—and the one most consistent with her character—is that the story Jean Ewen offered Stursberg was a deliberate invention. It seems reasonable to conclude that Ewen was baiting Peter Stursberg the way she baited Dr. Segal, a psychologist who interviewed her before she went with Bethune to China in 1938. Although Ewen presumed Segal was scrutinizing her motives for going on this mission, it is more likely that the China Aid Council was simply interested in her psychological fitness for the demanding work ahead: physical and psychological assessments were routine for missionaries and others heading to China during that period. "I felt it might be fun," Ewen recounted in *China Nurse*, "to confuse him a little more than he could confuse me."[88]

Parting with the "bloody missionary"

One of the great unresolved questions of Jean Ewen's relationship with Dr. Norman Bethune is exactly how and why they abruptly parted. As Margaret MacMillan noted, Jean Ewen was "maddeningly vague" on this point in her book *China Nurse*. According to Ewen, approximately one month after she and Norman Bethune finally arrived in Yenan after their treacherous journey through the Japanese war zone, the three foreign doctors met her at the cave where she was residing. Dr. Bethune, Dr. George Hatem ("Mah Hai teh"), and the newly arrived Dr. Richard Brown, asked her to travel to Sian, a trading centre, to buy whatever local medical supplies she could find there. Buying a few locally-available supplies was a stop-gap meas-

ure to tide them over while they awaited the arrival of a large shipment of the field hospital supplies that the C-A Unit had brought with them to China (these supplies were to be shipped separately from Hong Kong to Sian). Jean Ewen travelled to Sian but, finding that the C-A supplies had already arrived, and would shortly be transported to Yenan, she returned to Yenan empty-handed. After attending May Day celebrations at Yenan, she returned to her cave, only to discover that "the good doctors had stripped my cave of everything, including my foodstuffs," and had travelled on to the frontlines without her. In Ewen's account, Dr. Hatem ("Mah"), who was still in Yenan, informed her that she would be "continuing on with Captain Carlson."[89] Evans Fordyce Carlson—later Brigadier General of the United States Marine Corps—was in China serving as a military observer with the Chinese forces. Ewen left Yenan with Carlson two days later, on 3 May 1938. Jean Ewen never saw Bethune again.

In her account of the departure in *China Nurse,* Jean Ewen did not supply any further explanation, except to say that, within a few weeks, she received a letter from Dr. Bethune telling her that "he felt the life was too rough and I was too young to go on a mission such as this. He also wrote that I did not understand the gravity or seriousness of the cause I served. The bloody missionary!"[90] She returned briefly to Yenan in September 1938, where she met with Dr. Hatem, and was informed that "Bethune didn't want me around, that he wanted to do things by himself and do them dramatically."[91]

In Jean Ewen's version of events, she did not leave Norman Bethune; he left her. Peter Stursberg attempted to get Jean Ewen to describe her breaking point with Bethune in his 1984 interview. She evaded the topic, describing a few minor skirmishes, and then noting that she was not in Yenan at the time that Bethune left. When Bethune later notified Jean Ewen in a letter that she did not need to join him at the frontline, she "thought he was kidding."[92] To Stursberg, Jean Ewen suggested that Bethune felt that she was "not serious enough and all this kind of rot."[93] Directly or indirectly, the message from Jean Ewen was consistent: it was Bethune who initiated the

break. And this message is in direct conflict with the evidence left by Bethune himself.

In Norman Bethune's version of events, he and Dr. Richard Brown left Yenan for the frontlines on 2 May 1938. In a letter written on 3 May 1938, Bethune noted that

> before the [medical supplies from America] arrived in Yenan, we got word that it had come up to Sian so Jean Ewen was sent down to bring it up personally. The stuff arrived, but no Jean! I sent her two telegrams but received no reply—the last one saying that Brown and I were leaving for the front in 4 days time and to return. We left word in Yenan, that when she arrives she is to follow us.[94]

On 23 May 1938 Bethune wrote a letter to a Canadian friend where he again mentioned Ewen:

> I don't know what has happened to Jean. On the 20th of April she left for Sian to bring back our American equipment which had arrived there. I asked her to wire and to keep in touch with us and to return as soon as she could as both Dr. Brown and I were anxious to get around to the front. This she promised to do. She left in good spirits, leaving her personal belongings behind. Two days after all our supplies arrived, but no Jean. Hearing that she was staying at the Sian Guest House (in spite of the request of Dr. [Mah] Hai-teh not to do so, as it looked so bad not to stay in the 8th Army Barracks) I sent her 2 telegrams asking her to return immediately as we were leaving for the front. To these telegrams there was no reply, so that Dr. Brown and I decided to leave without her. This we did on May 2. We told Dr. [Mah] Hai-teh that when she returned she could take her choice as whether or not to follow us or our work in Sian. On our march, both Dr. Brown and I commented that she would not have been very happy walking up and down the mountains we crossed. Up to present she has not turned up here and as we have received no letters or telegrams since leaving, I don't know where she is.[95]

On 30 June 1938 Norman Bethune wrote a letter in which he reported:

> After the non-appearance of Jean Ewen from Sian, in spite of our telegrams asking her to return immediately, I would have been forced to go alone, except that Dr. Brown volunteered to go with me. …We have heard indirectly (she has written neither to Dr. Brown or to myself) that she eventually did come back from Sian to Yenan. I hope that she will find work there—she would be very useful giving instruction to nurses, for which there is a great need.[96]

Although Jean Ewen's recollections suggest that Norman Bethune intentionally abandoned her when he sent her needlessly to Sian for supplies, letters written by Bethune at the time contradict this, and support the argument that it was Ewen who abandoned the C-A Unit by not returning in time for their departure to the front. Whose version is accurate? Given that both Bethune and Ewen used Dr. Hatem (Mah) as their go-between, it is possible that Dr. Hatem chose not to pass along Bethune's message for Jean to join the two Canadian doctors on their way to the front. Dr. Hatem, a Lebanese-American doctor who had been working with journalist Edgar Snow and Mao Zedong since 1936, was instrumental in sending requests in 1937 to Madame Sun Yat-sen and journalist Agnes Smedley to organize foreign recruits to assist the Red Army in their fight against Japan. Did Dr. Hatem independently decide to give the message to Jean Ewen to leave Yenan after the doctors departed?

While the evidence does not provide a definitive answer to the question of the circumstances behind Ewen and Bethune's parting of ways in 1938, the explanation most consistent with Jean Ewen's character is that *she* chose to abandon Norman Bethune. This decision would have pushed against a number of prevailing social conventions; by virtue of his gender, professional title, and honoured rank with the Red Army, Bethune's position of power over "his" nurse Ewen would have been unquestioned—by all but Jean Ewen herself. As the evidence so clearly demonstrates, Jean Ewen was not

one to accept others' expectations of her. She relied on her own intelligence and wit to make her decisions, and was prepared to take responsibility for the consequences privately, even if it meant covering up her mistakes publicly. In China, where her Communist pedigree was an asset, Jean Ewen drew on it to survive—joining the ranks of the Red Army and pulling strings with Communist supporters Agnes Smedley, Edith Sawyer, and possibly even Madame Sun Yat-sen and Chou En lai when desperate for help. In Canada, however, being associated with Communists was a liability, and Ewen publicly distanced herself from the three Communist revolutionaries in her life, Tom McEwen, Norman Bethune, and John Kozar.

In her early adult years, it was not out of character for Ewen to abandon men she found arrogant and petulant; leaving abruptly and without notice was a way to exert her individuality and reclaim her self-respect. Parting from Bethune in 1938 gave Jean Ewen a sense that she held the upper hand over him, and kept her firmly in control of her own destiny. She was willing to trust her instinct for survival and live with the consequences. In 1939, she married a man she had just met, and was left, fifteen months later, as a widowed mother of two. In 1944, she left the security of life with her brother and brother-in-law in Toronto to start anew in British Columbia. Given such strong assertions of independence, it seems uncharacteristic, at first glance, that Jean Ewen chose not to abandon her abusive second husband. However, this, too, is reflective of Jean Ewen's strong instinct for survival; as a mother of three young children, who was living with tuberculosis, she could ill afford to live on her own. By the 1950s, Jean Ewen well understood the cost of independence.

Conclusion

Jean Ewen's life was marked by its close proximity to Communist activism. Regardless of her public disdain for Norman Bethune and Tom McEwen, her marriage to John Kozar suggested an admiration for those who would fight against fascism, and indirectly endorsed the revolutionary work of her brothers Bruce and Jim in Spain. It also set a path for their son, Tom Kozar, who was instrumental in the es-

tablishment of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion Monument in Victoria to help memorialize the work of his father and uncles with the International Brigade.[97] Tom McEwen, Jean Ewen, and Tom Kozar were, according to Laura Meyer, cut from the same bolt of cloth—"Scottish tartan, of course!"[98] They were "driven by their own personal demons to prove themselves," having each experienced early abandonment through the death, separation, or neglect of parents. By harnessing the fury fuelled by her father's neglect, Jean Ewen found the passion to forge a path in China quite distinct from that of other Canadian nurses there, especially after her departure from Bethune. While most Canadian nurses in China between 1932 and 1939 worked as part of a relatively large and protected group of well-established Protestant missionaries, Jean Ewen worked independently with the Chinese, negotiating her various roles with the Chinese Red Army. While other Canadian nurses were being ordered to evacuate regions of China being occupied by Japanese troops in 1938 and 1939,[99] Jean Ewen remained behind enemy lines, working alongside Chinese soldiers and peasants, and treating both.

Jean Ewen learned of Dr. Norman Bethune's death in November 1939 through reading about it in a newspaper.[100] While history has treated Jean Ewen as little more than a footnote to Bethune's iconic legacy, it is erroneous to conclude that accompanying the illustrious surgeon to the heart of war torn China was the most significant part of her story. Rather, the circumstances and character that brought her to China in the first place, and kept her working there after her departure from Bethune, deserve greater attention. It was, I suggest, her *abandonment* of Bethune that best characterizes Jean Ewen. Through choosing how, when, and whether, to be associated with the Communist revolutionary men in her life, Jean Ewen demonstrated a level of agency rarely achieved by Canadian nurses in the 1930s and 40s. In an era and a profession where women had difficulty defining themselves, Jean Ewen challenged prevailing assumptions regarding the submissive role of nurses, and the limitations placed on women's abilities. "Never say never," Jean Ewen would

later instruct her children. “Don’t cry. And don’t tell me you can’t do it.”[101]

Notes

[1] Kathryn McPherson and Meryn Stuart, "Writing nursing history in Canada: Issues and approaches," Canadian Bulletin of *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History – Bulletin canadien d'histoire de la médecine* 11 (1994): 3-22.

[2] Margaret MacMillan, "Nurse Dispels Bethune Myth," *Sunday Star*, 24 May 1981. Lily (Steinman), University of British Columbia Library Rare Books and Special Collections, Vancouver, British Columbia [hereafter UBCLRB], Greene fonds, Box 1: Clippings.

[3] Jean Ewen, *China Nurse, 1932-1939: A Young Canadian Witnesses History* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1981).

[4] Sonya Grypma, **"**Critical issues in the use of the biographic method in nursing history. *Nursing History Review* 13 (2005): 171- 187. See especially section on Jean Ewen. See also Sonya Grypma, *Healing Henan: Canadian Nurses at the North China Mission, 1888-1947* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2008).

[5] Sonya Grypma, *Healing Henan.*

[6] Most recently, Adrienne Clarkson, *Extraordinary Canadians: Norman Bethune* (Toronto: Penguin, 2009) and Roderick Stewart and Sharon Stewart, *Phoenix: The Life of Norman Bethune* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011).

[7] Ruth Wright Millar, *Saskatchewan Heroes and Rogues* (Regina: Coteau, 2004).

[8] Grypma, *Healing Henan.*

[9] Rod Mickelburgh, "Nurse Jean Ewen Dies, Sends Ashes to China," *CBC Digital Archives* [news broadcast] 17 May 1988. Available at http://archives.cbc.ca/health/medicine/clips/8075/

[10] *People's Daily*, 24 May 1988, cited in Ruth Wright Millar, "Jean Ewen" in *Saskatchewan Heroes and Rogues*, 105.

[11] "Jean Ewen Kovich" [Obituary], *Pacific Tribune*, 4 November 1987, UBCLRB, Greene fonds, Box 1.

[12] Guide to the United China Relief Records, 1928 to 1947, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library, available at http://www.nypl.org/research/manuscripts/mss/msschina.xml

[13] Letter from Philip J. Jaffe to Roderick Stewart, 8 October 1970. The Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University Special Collections [hereafter EUSC] Philip J. Jaffe fonds [hereafter Jaffe fonds], Box 4:6.

[14] It is also called the American-Canadian Unit. American surgeon Dr. Charles H. Parsons went out with Ewen and Bethune originally, but he was dismissed upon their arrival in China. Dr. Richard Brown, a Canadian missionary physician working in Henan, joined Bethune on a furlough, from May to July 1938.

[15] Letter from Jean Ewen to Edith Sawyer, 13 May 1939. Library and Archives Canada [hereafter LAC], Ted Allan fonds [hereafter Allan fonds], MG30D328,

Vol 16, File 10. Philip Jaffe and Corliss Lamont contributed $1000.00 each. EUSC, Jaffe fonds, 4:6

[16] Donna Waye, "Tom McEwen: An inventory to his fonds in the UBC Library Rare Books and Special Collections," 2004 UBCLRB.

[17] Kozar "Tom McEwen Memorial" 4 June 1988. UBCLRB, Greene fonds,

[18] "Isobel McEwen Argyros, Devoted Communist" [Obituary], n.d. UBCLRB, Greene fonds, 1: Clippings.

[19] Argyros obituary. He was jailed in the Don Jail, Kingston Penitentiary, Headingly Prison, and "a Concentration Camp in Hull, Quebec." Tom Kozar, "Tom McEwen Memorial." [Unpublished eulogy], 4 June 1988, UBCLRB, Greene fonds, 1: Clippings.

[20] Jean Ewen Kovich, interview by Peter Stursberg [transcripts], 23 October 1984, LAC, Peter Stursberg fonds. MG31D78, Vol. 44.

[21] Ewen, *China Nurse*, 71.

[22] Author's interview with Laura Meyer, 29 December 2010.

[23] Ewen, Stursberg interview, 44.

[24] Ewen, Stursberg interview, 45.

[25] McEwen, "In Memoriam"; Argyros Obituary.

[26] Letter from Tom McEwen to Greenes, 19 January 1956, UBCLRB, Greene fonds, 1:12.

[27] Tom McEwen, *The Forge Glows Red: From Blacksmith to Revolutionary* (Toronto: Progress Books, 1974).

[28] Tom McEwen, "As We See It: In Memoriam," *Pacific Tribune*, 17 April, 1951, 8. UBCLRB, Greene fonds, 1: Clippings.

[29] Ewen was still in China when she wrote a letter to Edith Sawyer in New York. Letter Ewen to Sawyer, 13 May 1939, Allan fonds. Norman Bethune Projects. File 10. MG 30, Series D 388 File 16-10. In *China Nurse* Jean Ewen wrote that she left Shanghai on "the last boat out, the *Empress of Japan*." This would have been in September 1939. Similarly, Ewen told Peter Stursberg in the 1984 interview that she departed China in September 1939. Ewen, *China Nurse*, p. 161; Ewen, Stursberg interview, 43.

[30] Laura Meyer interview with author

[31] Tom Kozar, "Paying Homage in Barcelona to a Father and Anti-Fascist," n.d. Newspaper clipping. UBCLRB, Greene Fonds, 1: Clippings.

[32] Tom Kozar, "Paying Homage in Barcelona to a Father and Anti-Fascist," n.d. Newspaper clipping. UBCLRB, Greene Fonds, 1: Clippings.

[33] Sean Griffin, "A son traces 'the unknown sailor,'" *Pacific Tribune*, 17 December 1986, 17. Tom Kozar later made it his life's work to recover the full story of his father.

[34] Laura Meyer interview with author.

[35] Letter from Tom McEwen to Greenes, 24 December 1946, 2 February 1947. UBCLRB, Greene fonds, 1:2.
[36] Letter from Tom McEwen to Greenes, 3 November 1946, UBCLRB, Greene fonds, 1:2.
[37] Letter from Tom McEwen to Greenes, 24 May 1950, UBCLRB, Greene fonds, 1:6,
[38] Letter from Tom McEwen to Greenes, 3 March 1954, UBCLRB, Greene fonds, 1:10.
[39] Laura Meyer interview with author.
[40] Letter from Tom McEwen to Greenes, 11 March 1952, UBCLRB, Greene fonds, 1:8.
[41] Letter from Tom McEwen to Greenes, 3 March 1954.
[42] Letter from Tom McEwen to Greenes, 1 July 1954, UBCLRB, Greene fonds, 1:10.
[43] Letter from Tom McEwen to Greenes, 10 January 1957, UBCLRB, Greene fonds, 1:13.
[44] Letter from Tom McEwen to Greenes, 11 March 1957, UBCLRB, Greene fonds, 1:13.
[45] Letter from Tom McEwen to Greenes, 25 June 1975, UBCLRB, Greene fonds, 1:31.
[46] Laura Meyer interview with author. In a photograph of her 1985 visit to China on display at the Bethune memorial in Shijiazhuang (viewed by the author in 2003), Ewen is in a wheelchair.
[47] Laura Meyer interview with author.
[48] Ewen, *China Nurse*, 123.
[49] For example, see Pamela Sugiman, "Life is sweet: Vulnerability and composure in the wartime narratives of Japanese Canadians," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 43:1 (2009): 186- 218; Geertje Boschma, Margaret Scaia, Nerrisa Bonifacio, and Erica Roberts, "Oral History Research," in *Capturing Nursing History: A Guide to Historical Methods in Research,* ed. Sandra B. Lewenson and Eleanor Krohn Herrmann (New York: Springer, 2008), 79-98.
[50] Kozar, Tom [Obituary]. *Vancouver Sun and/or Province* from 20 October 2007 to 21 October 2007. Available at http://newsarch.rootsweb.com/th/read/CAN-BC-OBITS/2007-10/1193204431
[51] Ewen, *China Nurse*, 10.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ewen, Stursberg interview, 2.
[54] Wright Millar, "Jean Ewen," 87.
[55] Ewen, Stursberg interview, 3.
[56] Ewen, *China Nurse*, 9.
[57] Ewen, Stursberg interview, 2.

[58] Argyros Obituary.
[59] Cited in Wright Millar, "Jean Ewen," 88.
[60] Laura Meyer interview with author.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ewen, Stursberg interview, 3.
[63] "Residents have Fond Memories of Late Dr. Bethune," *The Sault Daily Star*, 27 November 1972. UBCLRB, Greene fonds, 1: Clippings.
[64] Rose Martin and Agnes Shaeffer were also graduates of the class of 1931. Anne Crossin, Archivist, Nurses Alumni Winnipeg General Hospital/ Health Sciences Center Archives, personal communication 16 June 2010.
[65] Wright Millar, "Jean Ewen," 89. Wright Miller writes, "although not a Catholic…."
[66] Ewen, Stursberg interview, 5.
[67] Ewen, *China Nurse*, Foreword.
[68] "Canadian doctor missing in China: Norman Bethune of Montreal and nurse are believed to have been killed," *New York Times*, 12 March 1938. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *New York Times*.
[69] Ewen, *China Nurse*, 151.
[70] Letter Jaffe to Stewart, 8 October 1970, Jaffe fonds.
[71] According to a letter by Bethune, he and Ewen "demanded the recall of Parsons." Reprinted in Norman Bethune & Larry Hannant, *The Politics of Passion: Bethune's Writing and Art* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 248.
[72] Correspondent Jim Bertram in a February 1938 letter to Edgar Snow. Cited in Edgar Porter, *The People's Doctor: George Hatem and China's Revolution* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997), 117.
[73] Ewen, *China Nurse*, 70-71.
[74] Ibid., 103.
[75] Ibid., 128.
[76] Letter Ewen to Sawyer, 13 May 1939, Allan fonds. Norman Bethune Projects. File 10.MG 30, Series D 388 File 16-10.
[77] Letter Jaffe to Stewart, 8 October 1970, Jaffe fonds.
[78] Letter Ewen to Sawyer, 13 May 1939, Allan fonds.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Porter, *George Hatem*, 124.
[82] Ewen, Stursberg interview, 24, 25.
[83] Laura Meyer interview with author. Jean Ewen often spoke to her children of her strong relationship with Chou En-lai.
[84] Hanna Pakula, *The Last Empress: Madame Chiang Kai-shek and the Birth of Modern China* (New York, Simon & Schuster, 2009).

[85] Laura Meyer interview with author.
[86] King George VI and Queen Elizabeth made two foreign visits prior to the outbreak of war against Germany on 3 September 1939: France, in July 1938, and Canada, in May and June 1939.
[87] H.M. King George (VI). "King George VI Addresses the Nation." 3 September 1939. British Broadcasting Corporation Archive: WWII: Outbreak: Britain on the brink of World War II. Retrieved from: http://www.bbc.co.uk/archive/ww2outbreak/7918.shtml
[88] Ewen, *China Nurse*, 46.
[89] Ibid., 96.
[90] Ibid.,104.
[91] Ibid., 118.
[92] Ibid., 38.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Roderick Stewart, *The Mind of Norman Bethune* (Toronto: McGraw Hill, 1990), 91.
[95] Ibid., 99.
[96] Letter from Norman Bethune to Comrades, 30 June 1938, EUSC, Jaffe fonds, 4:5.
[97] Tom Kozar Memorial Fund http://www.bcgeu.ca/Tom_Kozar_Memorial_Service
[98] Laura Meyer interview with author.
[99] Sonya Grypma, "When we were (almost) Chinese: Identity and the internment of Canadian 'mish-kid' nurses in China, 1941-1945," *Histoire sociale/ Social History* 3: 86 (in press).
[100] Paul Loong, "Canadian nurse recalls wartime China," *Los Angeles Times*, 7 October 1984, 11. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.
[101] Laura Meyer interview with author.