



# Margaret M. Allemang Society for the History of Nursing

November 2009

## FEATURE ARTICLE

### **DOROTHY PERCY**

Catherine Joyce  
(Grandniece of Dorothy Percy)

Dorothy May Percy (1900-1992) was best known professionally as the First Chief Nursing Consultant in the Department of National Health and Welfare, a position she held from 1953 to 1967. Personally she was known as a woman of great kindness, innate wisdom and unfailing good humour.

The words of a tribute given upon her retirement in 1967 highlight this unique combination of professional acumen and human concern: "There is a quality of greatness about Dorothy Percy, which is difficult to define. She gives selflessly expecting nothing in return. To her everyone is important – every nurse she has known, the clerk, the messenger boy, the highest official. If there is a death in the family of the elevator operator, she personally shares his grief ... Dorothy Percy is an unusual mixture of ability and humility. Perhaps this is the secret of her greatness."

Where did it all begin? Dorothy would say it started on May 10, 1910 at the memorial service for King Edward VII on Parliament Hill. "I was just a little girl and I suppose I must have been standing there wide-eyed, when a fly flew into my eye. A lady nearby took out the whitest, stiffest handkerchief and deftly removed the insect. She was a nurse. Something about her kindness and her skill decided me then and there to become a nurse. I never wavered."



Born in Ottawa to a family that had recently hailed from Brigus, Newfoundland, Dorothy graduated from the Toronto General School of Nursing in 1924. She gave her first talk, “Qualifications of a Nurse” to group of young CGIT girls when she was Head Nurse at the Ottawa Civic Hospital in 1926. This speech reveals the clarity of thought and the poetic richness of language that would come to be the hallmarks of her remarkable communication gifts.

From 1927 to 1934 Dorothy became immersed in Public Health with the Victorian Order of Nurses, first as a staff nurse, then as a Superintendent at National Headquarters. Her growing interest in nursing education led her to join the faculty of the University of Toronto, School of Nursing (1934-41) where a scholarship would later be established in her name.

The war found Dorothy in the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps from 1941-45, serving as a military matron both overseas and at home in Camp Borden and Petawawa. While her war time service was distinguished by many awards – the Royal Red Cross 1<sup>st</sup> class, Jubilee and Coronation Medals, the Canadian Volunteer medal and the Defense of Britain Medal – a nursing colleague paints another picture of life with Dorothy. It was a warm July night and the two of them were out searching for a wandering St. Bernard, the current mascot at Camp Borden. In a fit of giggles at the sight of themselves by flashlight, they imagined the headline, “Matrons in Nightgowns Capture Duke”.

After the war Dorothy became the Chief Supervisor of Nursing Counsellors from 1947 to 1953, when she embarked upon a three month fellowship to study nursing practices in the USA, the UK, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark and Holland, in preparation for her position as Chief Nursing Consultant for Canada. It was in this later role that her supreme executive, personal and communication skills shone in articulating and interpreting policies for the improvement of nursing across the country.

In 1967, after 43 years of devoted service to her profession, Dorothy Percy was awarded the first Honorary Doctorate in Nursing bestowed by the University of Ottawa. And in 1981 she was given the highest international honour a nurse can receive, the Florence Nightingale Award.

After a lifetime of dedication, filled with inventive and infectious optimism in the good times and the bad, Dorothy Percy died peacefully in her sleep at the age of 92 – eloquent testimony to one of her favourite sayings:

“Consider, when your dreams are delayed,  
How long it is from seed to shade.”

## ALLEMANG SOCIETY OF NURSING WRITING PRIZE 2009

**Jezamine Edjoc** who has just graduated from the nursing program at the University of Ottawa wrote the 2009 prize story. Her paper entitled “**Medicine’s Role in the Growth of Nursing**” describes the long tradition of the influence of Medicine over the control of Nursing for many years. Fortunately now on the wane—although still existing in some areas. To illustrate her point she uses the example of the physician-nurse team of Dr. Norman Bethune and Jean Ewan. Ewan was a remarkable woman for her time, and we decided to highlight her. She wrote a chronicle of her experience in China with Bethune “*China Nurse*” (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1981). Here is her story:

### JEAN EWEN

By Jezamine Edjoc

Jean Ewen was born on December 24, 1911 in Scotland, the eldest of four children. Ewen’s mother died in 1919 tending to the sick in the Spanish flu epidemic. After her death, Ewen’s father moved his family to Saskatchewan where he worked on a farm as a blacksmith and was introduced to socialism. By 1924, her father had become firmly entrenched in socialism and spent all of his time and money on his future of being part of the next Canadian revolution.

Though Ewen only started school when she was 10, she eventually found herself at St. Joseph’s Hospital in North Winnipeg working as a nursing student until she graduated in 1931. Afterwards, she was hired by the Franciscan Fathers of the Sacred Heart Province to be sent to China.

In March 1933, Ewen boarded the White Empress which traveled to Shanghai. Ewen ended in Changtien where she stayed at a mission and studied the language for over two months. Since Ewen was quick to pick up the language, she was sent out on her own to various communities to tend to the poor and sick. At one point in her journeys, she was kidnapped by bandits who were raiding the community she was assigned to. She was brought to the leader’s sick and pregnant wife whom Ewen nursed until she gave birth. For her services, she demanded her safe return and the halt of the raids – which were granted.

In 1937, the Sino-Japanese war began and Ewen decided to go back to Canada. She returned to St. Joseph’s Hospital in Toronto. Ewen owed her next adventure to her father’s ties to the Communist Party and to her experience in China and fluency in the language. She was asked to accompany Dr. Norman Bethune to China. Bethune, a self-proclaimed communist, was a Canadian surgeon famous for his innovative lung surgeries and for his work during the Spanish Civil war. Ewen and Bethune criss-crossed through the country, running from the Japanese while providing medical care to all they came across. They eventually parted company due to their strong personalities and to frequent clashes in opinions.

Ewen stayed in China for several more years. She continued to treat the victims of the war, setting up medical facilities while also training locals to tend to the wounded. During these years, Ewen faced many atrocities and dangers including two Japanese bombings, which she survived unscathed.

Eventually the war-time life wore Ewen down. She headed home in 1939 where she married and had two children. Ewen published a book about her travels, which made her a minor celebrity. She relocated to Victoria, B.C., spending her last years among the Chinese population that she had grown so close to.

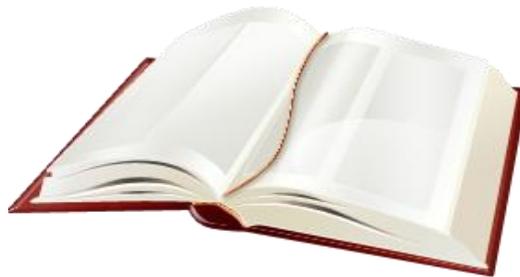
After her death, Ewen’s children carried her ashes back to China, where she was honoured by over 500 doctors, nurses, soldiers, and locals. Ewen was put to rest in the Jincheng Mausoleum of Martyrs in Shijizhuang.

## BOOK REVIEW

Bock, Dennis. **The Communist's Daughter** Harper Collins, September 1, 2006, 320 pages

For those interested in Dr. Norman Bethune, this fictional piece of history is a story of his life—medical innovator, social maverick, and anti-fascist Communist. The book explores his political and personal life through introspection in letters to his daughter, whose mother he met in war-torn Spain, and who he never knew (and historically never had).

Set against the tumult of the late 1930s, *The Communist's Daughter* is a remarkable portrayal of the moral ambiguities of war, political idealism and personal responsibility, a passionate novel that unfolds against a long sweep of history. Bethune went to Spain in 1936 to fight against the Fascists. In 1938 he went to China to provide medical relief for MaoTse-tung's army struggling against the Japanese. Bethune was a troubled soul, a moralist, an idealist. We encounter **Jean Ewen** in this book, as she works with him in China, although eventually the two strong characters collide and she leaves. Bock provides a different perspective of the chronicle of Bethune's life than other authors, and offers a psychological basis to his irascible character and political idealism. A very interesting read.



# NEWS ITEMS

## 1. ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING (AGM) SEPTEMBER 26, 2009

### PRESIDENT'S REPORT

We are in the final phase of finding permanent destinations for the Allemang collection of archival materials. Items that remain in our possession consist mainly of World War I and II uniforms and memorabilia collected by Margaret Allemang from nursing sisters. The War Museum in Ottawa has expressed interest in the collection and we are currently awaiting their decision regarding acquisition. We shall sustain our focus on archives by advising and assisting anyone requesting help with the disposition of their nursing archival materials. Several individuals have been advised in the past year including a relative of Dorothy Percy (first nursing advisor to the federal government).

Dorothy Wylie continues her able work as newsletter editor assisted by Jaime Lapeyre. Jaime's expertise on the computer has enabled the newsletter to be presented in an impressive new format and to make it available by email. The newsletter continues to represent us externally extremely well.

Our new website ([www.allemang.ca](http://www.allemang.ca)) continues to be an important source for information sharing and external representation of the association.

The Sudbury Group of the Allemang Society has completed their ambitious Oral History Project that was funded, in part, by the Society. Joyce McQueen will talk to us about the project next spring.

The History of Nursing Writing Prize was not awarded in 2008 but has recently been awarded, for 2009, to Jezamine Edjoc, undergraduate student, School of Nursing, University of Ottawa.

Planning is ongoing to carry out an oral history project with particular emphasis on interviewing senior and influential nurse leaders in the Toronto area. We hope to videotape interviews.

Membership has remained steady at 70.

Respectively submitted.

*Kathleen MacMillan, President*

### Annual General Meeting Presentation

Those present enjoyed an illustrated talk by **Christina Bates**, historian at the Canadian Museum of Civilization. She has published widely on social history, women's history, and the history of dress, and was chief curator of the 2005-6 exhibition "A Caring Profession: Centuries of Nursing in Canada". She also co-edited the book *Four Centuries of Canadian Nursing* (2005).

Her topic, "Starched White Bibs Moulding the Student Nurse's Body, Behaviour and Identity", generated much discussion among the participants as they reminisced about their student days, starched collars, bibs and caps. The presentation was enjoyed by all.

2. **REPORT OF THE STUDY COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC HEALTH (OTTAWA, CPHA, 1946)** – often referred to as “the Baillie—Creelman Report”—is now available online. This, thanks to Lee Ann Bryant, who had to arrange for an inter-library loan for this document for a major display at UBC on Lyle Creelman and her contributions to nursing. The Baillie-Creelman report was based on a major research study funded by CPHA and CNA in the mid-40’s – and was so valuable it was used as a text for PHN courses in Canada back then. (Email from Glennis Zilm).
3. **Bloomberg Faculty of Nursing, University of Toronto distinguished alumnae awards.** At the spring reunion 2009, the following people received Awards of Distinction:

**Irene Elliott** for her work as a nurse practitioner at the Hospital for Sick Children, caring for children and their families living with epilepsy. She has made an outstanding contribution through her participation in interprofessional education and clinical preceptorship.

**Mary Glavassevich** recognized by staff members for her role as leader, educator and mentor as a patient care manager. She has made an exceptional contribution through direct patient care, research and evidence based practice.

**Donna Tweedell** for clinical and research skills in various positions over the years, including on Faculty at Ryerson and McMaster universities. She was one of the first clinical nurse specialists in psychiatry and transplantation at Toronto General Hospital.

**Linda McGillis Hall**, Outstanding Achievement Award, as a recognized leader in nursing health services and systems research. She is currently professor and associate dean (research and external relations) at the Bloomberg Faculty of nursing, U of T.

**Bridgette Lord** received the Rising Star Award—Clinical or Community nursing, for her leadership role in the Rapid Diagnostic Breast Clinic at Princess Margaret Hospital, ensuring women are supported during the diagnostic process. She has acted as coordinator there.

**PAUSE, vol 2, #2, p.23.**

**MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL**

Remember to renew your membership for 2010. Your support is needed to carry out our mandate of information sharing to promote and preserve nursing history.

## HISTORY OF NURSING WRITING PRIZE

The Allemang Society is offering a nationwide prize of \$500 for the best essay in the history of nursing written by a student in the year September 2009 through August 2010.

### Criteria for submissions:

1. The paper may deal with any topic in the history of nursing in any period and in any country.
2. Papers should be a minimum of 8 pages, and a maximum of 25 pages in length including footnotes.
3. Both undergraduate and graduate students may submit.
4. The student must be enrolled in a university or community college anywhere in Canada. Students **from any faculty, including nursing, social science, humanities and science**, are invited to apply.

The deadline for submission is **August 30, 2010**. The prize will be awarded at the 2010 AGM.

Papers may be submitted either by email or in hard copy. Electronic copies should be in Microsoft Word and include academic affiliation, address, telephone and fax numbers. Students submitting in hard copy should send three copies. The first copy should have the name, academic affiliation, address, telephone, fax and email. The accompanying two copies should have no identification.

Please send papers to:

Lynn Kirkwood  
570 McCann Road  
Portland, ON K0S 1V0  
Email: Kirkwood@rideau.net

## CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

**Deadline January 8, 2010**

**2010 Annual Meeting, Winnipeg, June 18-20**

### **Continuities, Contingencies and Fault Lines: Nursing 100 Years After Nightingale**

CAHN Program Committee invites proposals for papers which explore the diversity of practitioners who have performed caring work and laid claim to the title “nurse”; the nature of their practices; and the ways in which ideas about nursing have been challenged, transformed, dissolved and reconstituted across space and time. Abstracts on other topics are also welcome. See [www.umanitoba.ca/nursing/CAHNconference2010](http://www.umanitoba.ca/nursing/CAHNconference2010) for more information.

Send abstracts by e-mail to: [CAHN2010@UMANITOBA.CA](mailto:CAHN2010@UMANITOBA.CA)

Or mail to: CAHN 2010, c/o Marion McKay  
Helen Glass Centre for Nursing  
Faculty of Nursing  
University of Manitoba  
Winnipeg, MB R3T 2N2

## OBITUARIES

**Muriel Down**, December 31, 1925-June 22, 2009. Muriel was born in North Bay, Ontario and graduated from Toronto East General Hospital School of Nursing in 1947. Following graduation she did private duty nursing in North Bay and later in Rochester NY. In 1950 she joined the RCAF, and said “My air force experience was the most inspirational experience of my single life as far as my career is concerned.” For the next two years Muriel was involved in para rescue. At that time there was severe epidemic of polio and she was asked to take charge of the evacuation of patients. The Rescue Station was at Sea Island, where she was stationed. Patients were transported by air using a portable respirator. She recalled transporting a VGH graduate from Vernon to the polio ward at VGH. Muriel married in 1952 and “was fired from her job”. She was a member of our group for several years, attended events, offering encouragement and support.

*For more information on Muriel’s air force experience, check the Oral History Tape: OH #145. (October 1990) Interviewer Nina Rummen. Tape available at CRNBC Library. (Excerpted from HoN BC History of Nursing Society News, vol.20,3, October 2009).*

**Fasken, Helen.** 1910-2009, died at St. Joseph’s Health Care, Guelph on September 22, 2009. Helen graduated from Hamilton General Hospital in 1935. She attended the International Congress of Nurse’s first meeting after WWII, in Atlantic City, as President and representative of the Hamilton Registered Nurses Association. Following graduation in 1942 from Public Health Nursing at the University of Western Ontario, she became a member of the Hamilton Health Department, in charge of the Tuberculosis Clinic from 1943 to 1948. She was then seconded to do post-graduate studies at University of Toronto to prepare for work in newly-emerging provincial health unit programs.

Helen held the position of Director of Public Health Nursing at the Wellington Dufferin Guelph Public Health Unit from its inception in 1949 to her retirement in 1975. Many programs were developed in the early days of Wellington County with Helen’s guidance.

Throughout her career as a nurse, she had many rewards including one accorded by RNAO in 1974 on the occasion of her 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary, in which Helen was chosen by her colleagues as one of twelve nurses in Ontario considered “The Most Caring Nurse” in the province. In 2004 she received the Florence Nightingale Award given by St. John’s Church, Elora and the Elora Festival to a nurse who has made an outstanding contribution in the community. Helen was an active member of professional and associated health organizations with some of her most active roles as President of the Ontario Public Health Association, Board Member of the first Board of what became the Waterloo Region Wellington Dufferin District Health Council, Life Member of the Victorian Order of Nurses and Member Emeritus of the RNAO. (Excerpted from The Globe and Mail. September 15, 2009).

**McGreal, June M. RN BScN Med**, born March



14, 1932, passed away at CVICU, Toronto General Hospital, Monday, July 13, 2009. June was a dedicated nurse and passionate pianist. She gave more than she took,

always putting others before herself. She was past President of the HSC Women’s Auxiliary, past President of the HSC Nurses Alumni, and Professor of Nursing at Ryerson. (Excerpted from The Globe and Mail, July 25, 2009).

**Murray, Judith Ann**, peacefully on Monday, July 20, 2009 at Sunnybrook Hospital, Toronto, of pneumonia following a year-long struggle with cancer of the brain. Judy acquired a Diploma in Nursing from Kingston General Hospital in 1963. She continued her education in nursing, graduating

in 1980 with a Bachelor of Nursing degree from Dalhousie University, and subsequently a Master of Nursing in 1987. In 1995 she graduated with an Acute Care Nurse Practitioner diploma from University of Toronto. Judy began her career at Joseph Brant Memorial Hospital in Burlington, followed by the emergency department, HSC from 1965-70. In the following years, she worked with the VON in Kincardine, ON and Halifax, NS. She served as a consultant with the RNANS, and was an instructor in the School of Nursing, Dalhousie. Judy returned to Toronto as a clinical nurse specialist, gerontology at North York General Hospital in 1991. Her career then took her to Providence Villa, Sunnybrook Hospital and Bridgepoint where she served as nurse practitioner in geriatric care. At the end of her career Judy was a clinical instructor at York and Ryerson Universities. Judy was dedicated to her career, always compassionate and promoting professionalism in nursing, both by example and teaching. (Excerpted from The Globe and Mail, July 23, 2009).

**Oakes, Frances Marion**, was born August 30<sup>th</sup>, 1906 at Fergus, Ontario. She passed away peacefully Wednesday, July 29<sup>th</sup>, 2009 at the Elliot Nursing Home, Guelph, Ontario. Frances was a retired RCAF Nursing Sister, who graduated from Kitchener-Waterloo Hospital School of Nursing in 1930. She enlisted in the RCAF medical services in 1940 and was one of the two Nursing Sisters first posted overseas in 1942. She was assigned to a Plastics Unit, East Grinstead, Sussex. There she worked with Dr. Ross Tilley (Toronto Plastic Surgeon). The original Burn Clinic at East Grinstead was the home of the infamous “Guinea Pig Club” formed by the earliest wartime patients who had suffered severe burns from flaming crashes. Post-war they formed branches in all of the Commonwealth countries and the USA. Frances often attended reunions of the Canadian Branch of the Guinea Pig Club.

Frances attained the rank of Squadron Leader. She returned to Canada in June 1944. In 1945, as Principal Matron, she was responsible for visiting and inspecting medical sites on the DEW line and

was involved in the integration of the three armed forces Medical Services (which occurred January 1, 1959). She retired in 1958, moving later to Guelph to be closer to her family. Until the end of her long life Frances remained very alert. She was frequently in contact with her many friends, especially the surviving RCAF Nursing Sisters she knew from the war years. Frances touched the lives of many people and will be dearly missed. A tree will be planted in her memory in the Wall-Custance Memorial Forest, University of Guelph Arboretum. (submitted by John Brailey, excerpted from the Guelph Mercury Daily, July 30, 2009).

**Ward, Hazel Alice**, born March 26, 1916, and died September 13, 2009. She was distinguished by her care and generous hospitality for the hurting and disadvantaged and her enthusiasm for gracious discourse around a tea table.



Hazel overcame the disadvantage of being drawn into her mother’s ladies wear shop during the depression. After cramming her missing high school years, she went on to become a registered nurse at St. Joseph’s Hospital, Toronto, later attaining her BScN at U of T, and an MA in nursing and children’s literature at Columbia in New York. She brought all of her training experience and standards of excellence to positions on the faculty of nursing at the University of Manitoba and at McMaster University.

A devoted member and Sunday School teacher at Forward Baptist Church, Hazel loved to golf, read, listen to good music, walk and have good conversation. Through sheer guts and determination she overcame obstacles of near blindness and deafness to live happily, almost to the end, on her own in the family home of about 70 years with her beloved cat, Jeffie. (Excerpted from the Toronto Star, September 16, 2009).

#### **Editor Newsletter**

**Jaime Lapeyre.** [jaime.lapeyre@utoronto.ca](mailto:jaime.lapeyre@utoronto.ca)

**Dorothy Wylie.** Please contact her regarding news items, short articles, announcements, etc.

All contributions are welcome.

223-602 Melita Crescent, Toronto, ON M6G 3Z5  
[wylieadm@aol.com](mailto:wylieadm@aol.com)