

Adventure Stories with a Difference

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Foreign Devils Had Light Eyes, Dora Sanders Carney. Illus. by Pamela and Josephine Patrick. Dorset, 1980. 256 pp. \$9.95 paper. ISBN 0-88893-024-0.

China Nurse, Jean Ewen. Photographs. McClelland and Stewart, 1981. 162 pp. \$16.95 hardcover. ISBN 0-7710-3092-4.

The Indomitable Lady Doctors, Carlotta Hacker. Photographs. Clarke, Irwin, 1974. 259 pp. \$6.97 hardcover. ISBN 0-7720-0723-3.

Wilfred Grenfell, Tom Moore. Photographs. Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1980. 62 pp. \$2.75 paper. ISBN 0-88902-677-7.

Marion Hilliard, Mary Carol Wilson. Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1977. Photographs. 62 pp. \$2.75 paper. ISBN 0-88902-215-1.

These five books are all stories of courageous people with a sense of adventure. Upon finishing any one of them, most readers will find their own lives tame and lacking in challenge. Four of the five are about doctors and nurses. Two are about young women living in China during the thirties although, once having read their accounts, one finds it hard to believe that they were in the same country during the same time. Only two of the five were written specifically for young people, yet four would appeal to some and would prove useful to many more in need of reference material. Only one seems completely inappropriate and, given special circumstances, even it might be of limited use.

The least well-written and useful book has the most intriguing title, *Foreign Devils Had Light Eyes*. The author, Dora Sanders Carney, relates in often tiresome detail her experiences in Shanghai from 1933 to 1939. She went out to break an engagement, was attracted to (and later married) a man met on board ship, sought and finally found a job in advertising, gave it up to have a family, and eventually was evacuated from the city while it was under attack by the Japanese, and somehow managed to take with her her two-year-old twins and her small baby. The first half of this book reads like a tourist's guide and seems tedious even to an interested adult. She was enthralled with

the idea of the International Settlement but her efforts to share this ideal world in miniature with her readers show us a gossipy, materialistic superficial assortment of people living it up away from home. No wonder these foreigners were resented by the Chinese in whose land they were paying guests.

Many comments and several anecdotes strike a naive but nevertheless objectionable note of racism. For instance, it seems unnecessary to repeat the following bit of conversation. Her husband is telling her about the Race Course and he finishes off:

. . . we have fifty-five nations living side by side in the Settlement, and you'll find them all enjoying the Race Course, except the Chinese"

"Because of the catarrh?"

"That and other things. Their approach to sanitation is different from ours." (p. 15)

Doubtless the author is making an honest effort to "tell it like it was", but there is scant evidence that she feels such attitudes indefensible. Students interested in what sorts of conditions foster revolution might find the first half of this book illuminating. The reader who perseveres will be rewarded when he reaches the second half of Dora Carney's story. Then the lengthy impressions of a culture not her own give way to a riveting tale of her personal experiences literally "under fire". Faced with danger, anxiety, grief, physical suffering, terrifying uncertainty and exile, this young woman comes of age and tells a dramatic story powerfully. Few and far between will be the young readers who will get this far. The book is printed attractively and decorated with appealing marginal illustrations and photographs. Unfortunately, there is no index to help make pertinent information accessible to students.

China Nurse by Jean Ewen crackles with suspense from beginning to end. The author first went out to China, under a mission board, to work as a nurse. While Dora Carney never seems to get to know any Chinese person well (with the possible exception of her children's nurse - and even that intimate relationship is conducted almost entirely in Pidgin English) Jean Ewen right at the start sets herself to learn Chinese and, for much of the book, works wholly with Chinese people, finding among them her patients, colleagues and personal friends. While the reader, throughout Dora Carney's book, is always aware of "they" and "we", she or he encounters the persons Jean

Ewen describes as distinct individuals whose nationality is incidental. She returned to Canada after her stint as a missionary nurse and then was asked by the Communist Party of Canada to go back to China to work with Dr. Norman Bethune. Her memories of this legendary man are refreshingly down-to-earth. She is careful to give him credit where credit was due, but she makes it abundantly clear that she personally found him impossible as a co-worker, however great a humanitarian he was. These glimpses of Norman Bethune, while fascinating, are not what makes this book memorable. It is the author herself who captivates us with her gutsy humour, her compassion, her heroic practicality, her interest in people and her ability to bring them vividly to life for us, and her indomitable, no-nonsense self. She makes no effort to expose the evils of Communism. She reveals instead the horrendous suffering war brings both to those who fight on opposing sides and those unwittingly caught in the middle. This is not a work of reference; it is a personal memoir of one woman who, not attempting to define causes, simply tells vividly and believably what she herself saw and felt. It is a good antidote to propaganda since the people Jean Ewen describes, be they Nationalists, Communists, missionaries, or poor farmers turned into refugees by a conflict they neither want nor understand, are all portrayed as the separate human beings they in fact are, rather than as representatives of an ideology. It is not a book for the squeamish, but it is definitely required reading for anybody who still believes woman to be a weak creature in need of pampering. High school students, whatever their sex, should find it enthralling. There is no index and the few photographs which illustrate the text do nothing to enhance it.

While the first two books are both personal memoirs, intended for leisure time reading for adults, the remaining three are biographical and have been so organized and indexed as to make them useful resources for students. *The Indomitable Lady Doctors* by Carlotta Hacker, though written with the general public in mind, is lively and should hold the interest of many teenagers. Commissioned by the Federation of Medical Women of Canada as their Golden Jubilee project, it tells of the struggle of Canadian women to be accepted as medical students, of the ill treatment many of them received even after they had won admittance to medical schools, and of their courageous vision, the sacrifices they made, and their eventual emancipation. It provides fairly extensive biographies of the first medical women in Canada and, in doing so, gives a clear picture of the status of women in general from the 1850s to the 1970s when Dr. Bette Stephenson was elected as President of the Canadian Medical Association. Dr. Emily Stowe would have found this gratifying news if she could have been persuaded to believe it. We in our turn may find it hard to credit that

Dr. Elizabeth Matheson actually went seventy-six miles, riding in a lumber wagon with her small baby who was still nursing, to make a house call during the winter. She was needed to set a broken leg. It took her two days to get there and three to get back since she met with a snowstorm on the return journey. That makes stirring reading! This book is invaluable for students interested either in the history of medicine in Canada or in women's liberation. It is also enjoyable for readers who simply want to experience heroism vicariously.

The short biography, *Marion Hilliard*, one of the series called "The Canadians," was primarily written for young people; yet it too makes a vivid and engrossing story. When the book ends, the reader feels a real sense of personal loss at the premature death of this able, ebullient, engaging person. The anecdotes which the author, Mary Carol Wilson, has selected bring Dr. Hilliard to life and, incidentally, furnish a welcome picture of a fulfilled and giving single woman, involved in and in love with life. This closer look at one "lady doctor" complements Carlotta Hacker's book, adding depth to the broader outlook presented therein. The photographs which illustrate Marion Hilliard's life story are also well chosen and the marginal comments and questions are stimulating.

Wilfred Grenfell by Tom Moore (author of *Good-bye Momma*) was also written with high school students in mind, although it could be used with youngsters as early as Grade Six. That Wilfred Grenfell was a complex and controversial figure is made clear from the beginning. He describes Grenfell's life and career from birth to death, showing first the athletic and strong-willed boy, next the student who cared more for sports than for lectures, then the young missionary faced with and horrified by poverty and its attendant ills, (particularly but certainly not solely the tragic lack of health care) and resolving to work to change such conditions and, finally, the grown man, dedicated, obstinate, energetic, persuasive and convinced of his mission, labouring to realize his dreams of a better world. Moore portrays him honestly and with verve. The reader meets a man with a fund of ideas, some appropriate and even inspired, others wrongheaded and quixotic. He meets challenges head-on and has scant respect for the Establishment. He has definitely the gift of gab and coaxes money out of people's pockets for his various projects to aid Newfoundland fisherman and their families all his life. Moore does not ignore nor dodge the questions raised by Grenfell's enemies; he makes it clear that there was some foundation for their charges, but he is wise enough to let Grenfell's over-all achievements speak the final word in the doctor's defense. This is no tract, whitewashing a sometimes difficult and intractable man into a saint, nor is it a book

aimed at debunking a legendary figure. Instead it shows how one man's vision, personal courage, tremendous vigour and compassion attacked and defeated some of the evils of his day. The photographs enliven the text. The index is brief but then so is the book.

One wonders how modern readers will respond to their first glimpse of Grenfell shooting a string of curlews out of the sky. Most contemporary children will be aware that hunters like this boy eventually made this bird extinct. However they feel about the exploit of the curlews, they will thrill to the story of the man adrift on an ice-pan, although it too has a grisly side.

Without exception, these five books are about fighters who, once the battle was joined and the challenge accepted, stayed in there to win. Dora Carney, when peril threatens her children, is transformed from a bright but seemingly superficial young woman into a strong and spunky individual who manages, through her own wit and tenacity to survive hair-raising experiences. Jean Ewen grows up a fighter and never steps aside when confronted with difficulty or discomfort or danger. She wins the reader's respect and enthralled interest before the end of the first chapter. Marion Hilliard and all the other indomitable lady doctors are quick to respond to challenge. They work hard and lovingly – and do battle when necessary – to serve the people who need them. Wilfred Grenfell, though a mere man, stands up well in comparison to these many doughty women. One is encouraged by each and every one of them not to give in to the apathy and helplessness that seem endemic in our time. None of the books preaches such a message overtly, but involvement and courage are implicit in the stories of how these five people lived their lives.

Are any of the books “literature”? Perhaps not. Each is readable, but none will be memorable in the way that *The Diary of Anne Frank* or Catherine Drinker Bowen's biographies are. Yet all five (excluding the first half of *Foreign Devils Had Light Eyes*) are worth reading once, and are useful adjuncts to further study. And it will be a long time before these reviewers will forget Jean Ewen's fascinating story!

Flora G. Little is a 'lady doctor' who served in Taiwan as a missionary and later practiced medicine in Guelph, Ontario, for thirty-three years. Jean Little, her daughter, is a professional writer who is now at work on her eleventh children's novel.