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Evelyn M. Brown

I WAS BORN IN VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA, near the mountains and the sea. The mountains cleaving to the sky with their rugged peaks gave me a feeling of vast spiritual dimensions and a sense of eternity. The sea, stretching away into the illimitable distance, brought me intimations of an undiscovered world and filled me with wanderlust. I became a pilgrim of two worlds, the spiritual and the terrestrial. My thirst for truth brought me eventually into the Catholic Church and the wanderlust took me twice around the globe.



For the most part I acquired knowledge at school, but I got an education at home. Dad and mother both had taste for what was great in literature and both were good readers. Twice daily dad read aloud to us from the matchless King James version of the Bible. From this intimacy with the Scriptures I learned to love God and acquired a predilection for what was noble and beautiful and mystical.

I learned to read for myself at the age of four, and while I got through school fairly ingloriously, from my earliest years I knew the power and the glory of words. Two of the highlights of my schooling were my discovery at around seven years of age of Blake's "Piping Down the Valleys Wild," and my reading in high school of Tennyson's "Ulysses," which seemed to voice my own passionate thirst for travel. It was with a presage of adventure that I read:

"For my purpose holds
To sail beyond the sunset and the
baths

Of all the western stars until I
die."

When I went home and announced to mother: "One day my feet will stand in Egypt," she put it down to wishful thinking, but to me it was a certain prophecy.

Like most people, however, I had to begin by earning a living. I chose teaching and was ready for it at the age of eighteen. Gradually I

overcame my timidity, and contacts with young hearts like mine became more and more a joy as I learned that the secret of success in my profession was love. Some of the richest and happiest years of my life were spent in teaching in British Columbia and in a British Government school in far off Africa.

Dad had always said that he would not allow me to travel abroad before I was twenty-one. While he often told me that "God looks after babes and fools," he was not prepared to trust Him too soon. At nineteen I was offered a teaching position in Athens. Dad's page of cons weighed heavily against my own of pros. The following year, however, my older brother, who had to spend four months in Paris, inveigled dad into letting me go with him.

In Paris, I attended the Alliance Francaise, but made no attempt to do homework and often cut classes to go on an excursion of my own planning. I would go off on my own and fossick about in old streets, museums and art galleries. In spite of the fantastic prejudices sown in my heart in childhood against the Catholic faith, my footsteps often led me into the old Catholic churches. I learned to speak French fluently, little dreaming that all my instruction in the Catholic faith would be in that language and that as a Catholic I should one day live and work among the French Canadians of Quebec.

Africa was my next adventure of discovery. How can I convey that first thrilling contact with the "beloved country" or its secret extravagances of beauty. I was very young when I first went out to Kenya Colony, and intensely alive to every scent and sound of that untamed, exotic land. But there was more than the wild appeal to the senses. I learned about the great things of life in Africa, about loneliness and love and joy and grief.

I remained nearly five years in Africa the first time I went out. On my second trip to Kenya, war was declared while I was on the Mediterranean. After eight months in Nairobi, I was advised to return home on account of my health. Sick or well, war or peace, I had made up my mind to see the Orient. This time I returned to Vancouver by Japanese cargo boat via China and Japan. The experience of that voyage found their way later into an eight-chapter article entitled "Japanese Cargo," which I wrote at the University of Michigan where I studied creative writing.

The creative writing course was an attempt to turn a liability into an asset. I had been pronounced medically unfit to continue the work I was doing in a war plant, and had been advised to go home and rest. Instead, I looked around for some way to keep alive among the living. I had always wanted to write but so far had published only a few poems and articles. In the creative writing course I saw an opportunity to combine rest with a major interest. I did not know when I went to Ann Arbor that it was one of the great medical research centers in the United States and that God had in mind the discovery and cure of my illness. At the end of four months I had produced little work but I left without a tropical germ which had been sapping my strength, and with an immense reservoir of inspiration for future creative writing.

Three more months of complete rest were prescribed and once again I was expected to go home. But I decided to go to Quebec, a city I had never visited. I knew only one person in Quebec, a White Sister whom I had met on my first voyage back from Kenya. With her help I found a beautiful, quiet pension above the St. Lawrence River and

slowly I recovered my strength. After three months I went back home, but with a deep desire to return to Quebec one day to live and work among the French Canadians.

Three years later I returned, intending to proceed to East Africa. But I have been here ever since. It was here in Quebec that I was baptized in the Catholic Church in the tiny chapel of the convent of the White Sisters of Africa. Here I found my Catholic home and a position as secretary and translator in the Department of Education. And it is here that my two books, *Educating Eve* (Palm Press, Montreal, 1957) and *Kateri Tekakwitha, Mohawk Maid* (Vision Books, Farrar, 1958).

I made friends young and old all over the world through the writing of *Educating Eve*, a completely unacademic account of life in the famous Schools for Happiness where feminine education has reached its zenith of perfection. After finishing this work, I fell seriously ill with what the doctor called Reiter's disease, an appropriate illness for one who had just written a book. Though it crippled me from head to foot, it didn't cure me of the desire to write. I came back slowly to life with my second book, *Kateri Tekakwitha*. In the long weeks of immobility, with silence all around me, I did the research work, gradually reconstructing in my mind the crude and colorful background of the saintly little Iroquois girl whose life is a moving drama of the action of Divine love. The French translation, *Kateri Tekakwitha Vierge Mohawk*, by Maurice Hebert was published by Real D'Anjou of Edition Pelican, in 1960.

Will there be other books, other voyages of discovery? Only God holds the secret of what lies ahead. The realm of the spirit is vast and there is no end to the quest. The pilgrimage seems only just begun, for stretching out before me

"Gleams that untravelled world whose margin fades Forever and forever as I move."

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