

Book Reviews

A Quaker Family in Wartime Shanghai 1940–1946, by Marion Hope Lee with a Preface by Una Marion (Lee) Newlands and an introduction by Kenneth Alexander Lee, O.B.E. Published by Crundale Press, Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, Canada (2016).

A Quaker Family in Wartime Shanghai, 1940–1946 offers a refreshingly candid and highly readable memoir of Hope Lee's lived experiences as a young wife and new mother in wartime China. This redemptive memoir, written predominantly through Hope's voice, against a backdrop of dislocation, hardship, uncertainty, and danger, maintains a positive tone that is life affirming and hopeful. "In spite of all," she wrote, "I would not have been without it" (Prelude). It traces Hope and Kenneth's journey to China and her difficult acculturation to Shanghai while working with the American Friends Quaker Centre from June 1940 until December 1941. It then goes on to provide a first-hand account of her subsequent struggle to maintain some semblance of Quaker family life for their infant daughter, Marion, living under Japanese occupation and subsequently their two-and-a-half years in internment there. Initially placed under house arrest in the wake of Pearl Harbour, they were not called into the Yu Yuen civilian assembly centre until Easter 1943. Their final months of war were spent in the notorious Yangtze Poo camp in Shanghai. It concludes with the impact of their internment, liberation, and return to the United Kingdom.

Written in part to provide a retrospective on their life-changing experience, it was also intended as a gift to her daughter, Marion, to answer questions about their time in China. Marion's introductory remarks

capture its major themes and enduring legacy. Kenneth and Hope's adherence to Quaker values, particularly "helping" other internees to build a more positive experience in the camp situation," was the key to their survival during the internment experience, and "this attitude and approach" provided a moral compass for the rest of their lives (13). Their desire to create normalcy for their young daughter buffered their own fears, anxiety, and dislocation. They left China with a heightened awareness of the fragility of life.

Kenneth Lee's introduction contextualizes their decision in the first year of married life to work with the Religious Society of Friends Centre in Shanghai and outlines the administrative set-up of the civilian internment camps. Equally important, his introductory remarks speak to the way that gender, class, and personality would imbricate their acculturation to life and work in wartime Shanghai. As a birthright-Quaker, Hope likely shared many of Kenneth's pacifist and altruistic values that would have made service to relieve human suffering compelling. What becomes clear to the reader, however, is that the initial motivational drive to accept the centre's offer to work in Shanghai came from Kenneth. It "had come as a shock" to Hope Lee (16). In keeping with the gendered expectations of the time, she relinquished her well-established career as a physiotherapist in Canterbury to accompany her new husband to China. Moreover, unlike the second generation of "mish kids," who returned to China to continue the family legacy of missionary work on their own terms, she had not been acculturated during childhood to accept that deprivation, danger, and separation

were inherent in working and living in China.ⁱ

Kenneth's discussion of the class and cultural tensions "between the professional and educated class and the rest of the people" in the camp sets the stage for their very human story of displacement among people of different national, religious, and cultural backgrounds who did not share the sense of social consciousness or civility. Internment proved to be a great social leveller.

Lee Hope's reflective recollections poignantly record the tensions both she and Kenneth experienced as devout Quakers in reconciling her family's privileged life with the poverty, despair, and dislocation of ghetto life in wartime Shanghai, epitomized by the corpses regularly found lying against the threshold of the Friends Centre warehouse door. Initially viewing the city through Western eyes, Hope regarded Shanghai as the "most revolting place I had ever been" (33). But eventually she acclimatized, and as they travelled outside the city, she glimpsed the Chinese peoples' ability to survive unbelievable deprivation and the great change brewing that would restructure China's social and political fabric: the "young Chinese growing up, keen, eager to take responsibility and ready to follow the new order when it should come" (54).

Retelling the story provided a chance to contextualize ethical decisions that sparked heated debates within the Shanghai Quaker community. Initially the couple adopted the living conditions of ordinary Chinese people while working and lodging at the Quakers' receiving home for "stray" Chinese children. Later, however, they relocated to the relative luxury of a small house in the French Quarter of Shanghai and embraced the centre's work with Jewish

refugees who had swarmed into Shanghai, fleeing persecution. They offered English classes and opened their home for "endless tea parties." Both, they regarded, as small gestures offering civility and hope for those condemned to the demoralizing atmosphere of the slum conditions within the refugee camps. The search for civility and prioritizing children's needs would be recurring themes during their own internment. While some thought that they should live close to Chinese living standards, as they had at the Children's Receiving Home, they worked out their own compromise. "Kenneth and I felt that to work efficiently, we must have reasonable but simple standards" (53). Balancing self-care and duty to care remains a central ethical dilemma for humanitarian workers.

The act of writing a redemptive narrative that presents a positive portrait of internment allowed Hope Lee, like other interned missionaries, to construct a picture of someone "determined not only survive internment but find a way to survive."ⁱⁱ Her narrative shuns victimization by recasting internment as an opportunity to resist suffering. The Japanese had no policy for the treatment of enemy civilian internees. Faith and Kenneth were caught off-guard by the Japanese decision to intern civilians on very short notice and plan for their care afterwards. Amidst the narratives chronicling first the challenges of trying to carry on their humanitarian work in occupied China and then redefining their mission of service within the civilian internment camps, there was evidence of their quiet resistance, fortitude, and personal loyalty. Camp life, as depicted by Hope, was rife with tensions as people from different national, cultural, and religious backgrounds co-existed in overcrowded conditions. A divergent view on child rearing was one such issue. Hope was

amazed by parents who let their children run wild as long as they were not bothering them. The lack of privacy, bleak living conditions, and absence of personal security invited despair. Marion Hope Lee credits three factors for their survival: their faith, their dogged resolve to throw themselves into camp life, and the desire to provide a loving family to shield their young daughter. Championing children's kitchens and safe places to play and learn were ways they found to defy Japanese attempts to destroy their humanity, family life, and civility. When hunger, squalor, disease, and hard labour had eroded many residents' physical stamina, they came up with perhaps their most inspiration idea: mounting a Shakespearean production. The final move to Yangtze Poo Camp, however, destroyed the nascent fragile sense of internee community.

A Quaker Family in Shanghai should attract a diverse reading audience. How Hope Lee constructed a very human narrative of navigating the most extraordinary and emotionally wrenching experiences of her life to emerge a stronger woman makes this a riveting story for general readers. Memory has become an inescapable feature of the historical landscape. Scholars must display sensitivity to both the advantages and issues in using reflective memoirs.ⁱⁱⁱ They help, however, bring to life the voices and vastly different experiences seldom caught in official records. For historians of Quakers' global engagement, it provides a window to interrogate how Quakers perceived their social interaction in wartime China as being distinct from that of Christian missionaries who lived a more lavish lifestyle as segregated communities. Internment changed their lives while simultaneously confirming their staunch Quaker approach to life. Equally, Hope Lee's redemptive

memoir sheds light on how the praxis of Quaker faith imbricated Quakers' humanitarian action, particularly that love is a transforming power and that living in harmony with the soul's purpose provides a moral compass and source of strength. It augments areas that have received scant historical attention: the broader experience of Western civilians interned by the Japanese in mixed family camps and women's gendered role in war.

Dr. Susan Armstrong-Reid
Adjunct professor,
Department of History,
University of Guelph