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Catherine Reynolds Hertz

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CATHERINE REYNOLDS HERTZ

ORAL HISTORY ABSTRACT

BORN: 1898 in Bushnell, Illinois.

EARLY LIFE: family background; education; corresponding with brother living in China; called by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission.

CHINA EXPERIENCES: social interaction in Fenchow between missionaries and Chinese; work in Fenchow's kindergarten; leaves China due to military disturbances of 1927.

INTERVIEWER: Jane Baker Koons

DATE: 7-7-80

PLACE: St. Cloud, Minnesota

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INTERVIEW

INTERVIEWER: May we begin with where and when you were born?

HERTZ: I was born in Bushnell, Illinois, in 1898.

I: Could you give us a little of your family background please?

HERTZ: My father was a college professor and my mother was a teacher before she married. We were growing up in Iowa Falls, Iowa, where my father was in college there. He was Sunday school superintendent and we were members of the Congregational Church. My mother was chairman of the women's missionary society. Dad had graduated from Wabash College and my brother had gone to college there, too. My brother then went to the seminary in Chicago. He became a minister and went to China. He was head of the mission work after Watts O. Pye in Fenchow, China, for the American Board. My brother, Paul Reynolds, had been doing special work and traveling around in this country to conventions and colleges and things of that sort. Then he went out to China right after he was married. I had a sister, too, but she was a few years younger than I. Paul was a few years older.

I: Mrs. Hertz, what was the college in Iowa Falls, Iowa, where your father was a professor?

HERTZ: Elsworth College.

I: Was this a church-related college?

HERTZ: No. It was an independent college. It had been financed by the Elsworth family and they lived there in Iowa Falls.

I: It sounds as though with your parents' involvement in the church activities, you had some interest there. Did you have specific connections with China and what was happening in the China mission field?

HERTZ: Not anything than just in missions in general until my brother went to China and then I became very interested.

I: Your brother and his wife made application right to the American Board and were assigned to Fenchow to work?

HERTZ: Yes. They went to China in 1921.

I: Had Watts Pye come on furlough when your brother went over to take his place?

HERTZ: No, but he had been in Fenchow for many years, and that's why my brother thought it would be a good chance for him to come to China and fill in when he left.

I hadn't planned on having specific kindergarten training. The year before my brother went out, he was living in Chicago and had an apartment there. He said, "Why

don't you come out and go to the University of Chicago?"
So I did and I graduated from the University.

I: You had some education courses, but did you have a primary major in something else?

HERTZ: No, not until after I taught a year in Iowa. Then I heard from my sister-in-law, Paul's wife, who had graduated from Oberlin College, that the kindergarten training school at Oberlin was very good. Why didn't I go there for a year before coming out to China? So I did that. I left my teaching in Iowa and went to Oberlin. They transferred credits that I had because I had graduated from the University of Chicago. I took the courses there on kindergarten and then the American Board sent me out. My brother and sister-in-law hadn't been there long before I was sent over; but they had been there long enough to get into things. That would be the year I was at Oberlin.

I: Do you recall some of the things that your brother and his wife wrote to you and your family before you went?

HERTZ: They were very impressed with the friendliness of the Chinese people and the fact that there were so many of them that had some Christian background. They could see this developing and felt there was a great possibility for the future of the young people.

I: Did they recount to you any difficulties or initial adjustments?

HERTZ: One: They had a home and one day Paul was out sweeping the sidewalks. One of the Chinese servants came out and said, "Oh, I'll do that." Paul said, "Oh, I can do it." And the servant said, "Oh, no. People who don't know you will see you doing that and think you are something else because no gentleman would be out sweeping the sidewalk." We all thought that was a joke; but there was the idea that there was a difference between the workers and the educated.

I: How long had the Reynolds been out there when they wrote to you suggesting that you come out and get into kindergarten work?

HERTZ: I think they had been there for four years probably, something like that anyway. They were very impressed with the Chinese teachers, for, I believe, that many of them had been educated in this country and gone back to teach in their own country. It was interesting to see their reaction. Of course, Charlotte, my sister-in-law, was always sending things--handwork that was done by the Chinese women. It was the most beautiful work and there were always the little gifts that she would send. Then my mother decided that she would have a gift shop for some of the things that she sent. So she started that and it was something that

she liked to do.

I: How successful was that?

HERTZ: Very successful. Everybody was interested--and to see such beautiful things! Mother would give the money to the mission for them to see that they were fed and things of that sort.

I: Do you have any idea why people in the Midwest had such great interest in China?

HERTZ: I think it's because they have been inland so much of their lives, that anything outside from different countries is interesting. If they know somebody that has been there, that's added to it, you see. If you know somebody that has been there and had the experience.... I was reading in the Ladies Home Journal that Ted Kennedy and his wife had gone to China and their experiences, and I thought it was interesting reading about the present day, as lots has happened since we were there.

I: How did your parents respond when you decided to go to China along with your brother?

HERTZ: My mother said, "How can I take it, if two of my children are so far away?" My dad said that it was a chance of a lifetime--"Go!"

I: How long did you expect to stay in China once you got there?

HERTZ: I didn't have any idea. I thought maybe a couple of years, but as long as it was necessary.

I: But you didn't originally go out with a lifetime commitment?

HERTZ: I didn't really know. I was going out to see what was there and what I could offer, because I didn't know if there was anything I could offer to them there. But it was a chance, as my dad said; it was an experience. If you could help in any way, that was good.

I: Before you left, did the American Board provide you with any kind of training or instructions?

HERTZ: No. My brother had written about the fact that they needed somebody to help with the kindergarten. It helped financially, too, to have the American Board person responsible for the money that would be coming from this country to support that part of the mission program.

I: Would you describe your journey en route to China?

HERTZ: I started out with a friend that I had known in college, I think. She was just traveling up to Canada. My brother met me in Shanghai. Then we took the train to

Peking. I stayed in Peking because I had to go to the language school, as I didn't know any Chinese.

I: How long were you in Peking then?

HERTZ: Most of the year of 1923. I remember in the language class somebody, a missionary, was talking. Somebody else spoke up and said, "Will you tell us how long it will take us to learn the Chinese language?" The missionary laughed and said, "I'll tell you: I've been here 40 years and I still don't know much of it. But I can speak some."

I: What were your initial impressions of Peking? Were they different than what you had anticipated?

HERTZ: Well, of course, it was very different--the buildings and everything you saw. They were interested in having you see as much as you could. One of the girls from the girls' school in Peking and I went to a park and I said, "Why don't we go sit on the bench over there?" She said, "I can't go in there." I said "What?" And she said, "No, the British regulate things here and the Chinese aren't allowed to go in. They don't allow foreigners in there." That was the funniest thing I had ever heard, to think that you couldn't go into the park.

I: When you were studying the language, who was in your class?

HERTZ: Oh, they were people that were going to be in different parts of China, working with or teaching the Chinese. Most people wanted to be teachers in a mission school, but they weren't all from the American Board Mission.

I: Who else was being prepared to work in Shansi and in Fenchow?

HERTZ: There was a nurse, Marjorie Joslyn, who had gone out. She had a brother in Peking with the United States Consulate. She was a very good person in the hospital in Fenchow.

I: What contacts did you have, if any, with foreigners outside of the mission people in Peking?

HERTZ: We met Madame Chiang Kai-shek, who was a Soong, and her sister.

I: How did you get to meet the Soong sisters?

HERTZ: Well, that was through the college at Yenching. It was through these college people that we met them.

I: When did you leave for Fenchow?

HERTZ: In the summer of 1924.

I: What differences did you find between Peking and Fenchow?

HERTZ: Fenchow wasn't the center of Chinese history that Peking was. It was more like a smaller city, more in the country. Country people were living there. There were schools; but a lot of the people had never been away, not even to other parts of China. It was very different.

I: When you were in Peking, did you have a chance to observe any kindergarten work that was going on there?

HERTZ: No. I didn't have any connection. The college was for older girls that I knew. The thing that I noticed in Peking was how many children there were on the streets who would be begging. There seemed to be a great many poor people. That always kind of distressed me--"Why should this be?"

I: How did that compare with the streets of Fenchow?

HERTZ: No, there wasn't as much. You'd see someone once in awhile but not as much.

I: When you got to Fenchow, how was your sister-in-law involved in the work?

HERTZ: It was in meeting with women. It was not in teaching, but in meeting with the Chinese. She had contact with children--her children and others--but she wasn't teaching. She had helped with games and things of that sort in the girls' grade school.

I: Did she feel any tension between her responsibilities to her own family and responsibilities to the work as a whole?

HERTZ: No, because she had more direct contacts with the work. She knew what was going on and she was doing it on her own--free-lance. She wanted to help, but she wasn't running everything.

I: Would she have the women come to her home?

HERTZ: Not very often because many of them wouldn't want to come into a foreign person's home.

I: Why do you think that some of the women found it difficult to come into a foreign home?

HERTZ: They just didn't know whether they should or not. I don't know why; but it was evident that they did not wish to push their way in. If they could meet some other way, they would be glad to come. Yet, the teachers in the girls' school, in the village, and in church-work with them, they were always coming in. But most of the village people were uneducated and weren't able to take the chance. They would be embarrassed by the foreigners, by what the foreigners would expect of them. I could understand that. I felt strange sometimes.

I: When did you begin your actual kindergarten work?

HERTZ: I was supposedly the one in charge of the teachers, not of the children. I observed mostly the first month or so. Then, if I thought something should be changed, or if I had some questions, I would ask whether that could be done. Mrs. Pye had been there a number of years, so she knew why certain things were as they were. The children were very quiet and enjoyed it because they played little games and things of that sort.

I: As you observed the kindergarten classes, what differences did you notice between the Chinese kindergarten and an American kindergarten?

HERTZ: The language mostly. The directions that were given, I wouldn't understand all of them. It was that same feeling of doing things to help the children learn how to do things, both in games and in things they would do in blocks. They would build and be given suggestions. More than anything else I thought it was helping them to express themselves--being able to come into the kindergarten and do what they liked doing.

I: After you had been there for awhile, did you find that there were some recommendations to the teachers that you wanted to make?

HERTZ: There were questions I would ask. I didn't think there was much that they needed to change. They had just developed the program as best they could simply because they had only so much money and they couldn't expand it at all. I questioned sometimes. In the end, they would usually have the answer. It was my learning as much as helping, I think.

When I first came, my brother introduced me as his small sister and they said, "That's your sister?" He asked why they were questioning him, and they said, "She has black hair, too, and she is small like we are. All foreigners have blue eyes and are larger." They couldn't quite accept it, but he said, "Oh yes, she looks very much like our mother." I was surprised at that because I hadn't thought about it. The missionaries said that is one of the first things they notice about foreigners. So many of them are larger. They were really very nice people. I noticed when we came back and I spoke to a mission group, one asked, "Well, weren't you afraid all the time?" I said, "Afraid? No, no, they are very nice people."

I remembered that my mother had said to me before I left, "Remember that people are people no matter where you go." It isn't something you think about. They are just people. Of course, they live differently, and their food is different, but they are people.

I: Did people in the missionary society have some stereotypes of the Chinese that they thought they would do you bodily harm or something like that?

HERTZ: No. I don't think so, but it was a question. One of the men at the language school in Peking said, "Now there is one thing to remember. The Chinese people are very honest; you will find this. It wasn't until outsiders began coming in from various places that stealing and things of that sort began." That isn't the instinct of the Chinese. I think that was true.

We learned, too, that our Chinese servants could shop better than we could. A foreigner in a store had a distinct disadvantage. You wouldn't know how much they were charging, over what they ordinarily would, but the servant could go in and save money. Foreigners couldn't do their grocery shopping at all. You had somebody helping you with whatever you were doing. We had a cook who did the cooking and shopping. Sometimes we would suggest something different and he would try it.

I: Would you describe some of the kindergarten teachers you worked with? Did you know their family backgrounds?

HERTZ: Two of the teachers were wives of schoolteachers in the boys' middle school. Their husbands had been well-educated, but they hadn't been. The husbands had been in

France or the United States, to college. The wives hadn't, but they had learned many things because of their husbands' experience. Of the two of them, one was younger and she was very pleasant. The older one was a little resentful, I think, of my being there, because I was probably her age or a little younger. She had been in charge, so she never said so, but every once in awhile it would come out. The other one never was like that at all. She was always very pleasant and helpful to me. I was supposed to be helping her, but it was she who was doing the helping. There was a third one who was just learning and she was very nice, too. But they were, as far as I knew, Christians and began getting the children interested in the Bible stories and things of that type within their work. They were also very interested in life in this country.

I: What were some of the ideas they had?

HERTZ: They had heard that women didn't have a right to education in this country. That men and boys were educated but not women. They wondered, too, about the grandmothers, because in China the older person was the head of the family. I would say, "Well, we love her, she comes to visit us; but my life is very different. We are friendly toward her, but she can't say we couldn't do things. We have our own ideas. In the early days there was probably

more responsibility, but the women are more educated and are teaching and working." They could see that.

I: How were kindergartens being received at this time? Were they quite widespread?

HERTZ: There were on mission compounds, but not in the public schools.

I: Were kindergartens the first institutions to teach the basic hygiene and health care?

HERTZ: We were. I remember so often the children would all wash their hands when they came in. I said, "Do you have just some of them wash their hands?" She said, "No, we don't differentiate that way. Everybody comes in and that is one of the first things we teach them--washing. Basic health is one of the best things to learn." I helped with teaching in the girls' schools, teaching games to the younger grades. There wasn't anybody doing that sort of thing. They felt that I could help because these students were just out of kindergarten. So I would be able to help them. So I did that sometimes.

I: Where did the kindergarten students, on the whole, come from?

HERTZ: From the close villages, because they couldn't

stay overnight.

I: What was the socio-economic backgrounds of most of the families who had children in the kindergarten?

HERTZ: Quite poor from the villages. There were a few teachers who had their children in the class.

I: How about little girls in the kindergarten class? Was there still hesitation of little girls beginning school?

HERTZ: Oh yes. In the mission school, where they had learned and where they had been established there for several years, there wasn't that feeling quite so much. We were trying to get out to different villages to get different children to come.

I: Were you given any other responsibilities besides the kindergarten and teaching games to some of the younger girl students?

HERTZ: I don't think so. Everybody wanted to ask questions and you answered them and talked about it, but not other responsibilities. You were there to help and advise. You knew you were being watched all the time. I always felt that that was one of the greatest responsibilities, of being sure your life was an example of a Christian because that was why we were there.

I: How many times did people ask you why you were there?

HERTZ: Not very often. My brother went out to different villages, but not in Fenchow. They may have thought, but to ask about it they didn't.

I: How often did you get out of Fenchow out to the surrounding areas?

HERTZ: In the summer we went out in the valley, Peitahoe, up into the mountains and the hills. We lived up there in the summer because it was much cooler than down in the city; but out into the surrounding areas, not unless you were going on a special trip with a group.

I: When you had your mission meetings, what were the major issues that were being discussed, and what were the major decisions you had to make?

HERTZ: The question always was: Was the outreach enough? It really was a question, I think. I don't know if the Chinese were very anxious to have foreigners there helping as that meant they couldn't do it alone, but I don't know.

I: What was the American Board's outlook toward indigenous leadership?

HERTZ: The question was whether they were ready to take over. I know the husband of one of the teachers was a very fine man who was in charge of the boys' school. In the hospital, of course, there weren't enough Chinese doc-

tors to be in charge entirely. But we were glad when the Chinese could take over some of it, but not the management.

I: Was there any feeling among the missionaries that they weren't needed as they had been in the past?

HERTZ: I don't think so in that early period. I don't think there was.

I: Were there any discussions about the lifestyles of the missionaries at that time, that perhaps they were too separated from the Chinese?

HERTZ: I don't know that there was.

I: How much did you know of the political situation in China at that time? What about the situation with the warlords?

HERTZ: Not very much. We knew that in our province there was a Chinese man who governed all of that province, but he was really kind of "head man" and he didn't pay much attention to the others. We knew what was going on there, but very little about other parts of China.

I: What did you hear, if anything, about Chiang Kai-shek at this time?

HERTZ: Chiang Kai-shek was noted for his ability. We felt he was a leader and was influential, but that was about all. Of course, we respected him.

I: With the development of nationalism, did you experience any anti-foreign sentiment in Fenchow?

HERTZ: I don't think so. Of course, there was always that you were a foreigner and there would be some that would question it, but not too much. Not among the ones we were with. I don't remember any.

I: You didn't have anything like strikes in the schools, anti-foreign marches and singing and things of that nature?

HERTZ: Not in those old days.

I: How was it that you came to leave China when you did?

HERTZ: The Communists were coming. They were coming north and we had a child who was six-months-old. The Chinese were inviting the foreigners to leave because they were friendly with the foreigners. The easiest thing was for us to leave, so we came home and didn't write to our Chinese friends.

I: Will you describe your leaving Fenchow and China?

HERTZ: When we were boarding the ship, a man was looking at our passports. He said, "Were you married in China?" "Yes." He looked at me and looked at our daughter and thought she was Chinese. We were married by my brother and we were missionaries. But it was funny for a few minutes, wondering if we could go.

I: You were married in China?

HERTZ: Yes. We were married and lived there a few years after we were married before we came home.

I: From Fenchow, did you go north to Peking before you got transportation to the U.S.?

HERTZ: We went to Japan for a period.

I: When you got home, did you anticipate returning to China?

HERTZ: We were very interested in it, but with a small child it was advised against it as there was so much going on. We knew some of the people who had been there longer were staying and they were prisoners in their homes. They had no freedom. Foreigners were not welcome at that time because the troops from the South were marching North.

I: When China did open up in '29 and '30, did you consider going back at that time? Did the Boards ask you if you

would be willing to go back?

HERTZ: No, they weren't sure about what was going to develop at that time and it's still a question. We thought we might, but Erwin got interested in teaching in this country.

I: How have you maintained your interests through these years in China concerns?

HERTZ: We have been very interested in current magazine articles and books on China. We can only interpret them in the light of our own experiences.

I: Mrs. Hertz, our time is up, but thank you for being willing to participate in this project.