

Ethel Douglas McMurtry (1887- 1944)

Submitted by Doug McMurtry (son)

Ethel Douglas was born October 24, 1887, on her father and mother's farm near Uxbridge, Ontario. She lost her mother at only twelve years of age and at that early age became the housekeeper and care giver for her father and younger brother Lewis.

Our parents, the Reverend James McMurtry and Ethel Jane Douglas were married on July 10, 1918 while living in Mazenod, Saskatchewan, where James was the Methodist minister. They had met in Lashburn, Saskatchewan, where James served his first pastoral charge after his ordination and where Ethel worked as a nurse in the community hospital.



Ethel had written the first Registered Nurse exams offered in Manitoba in 1914. She graduated after three years training at the Portage La Prairie hospital.

Anticipating her marriage to a minister, Ethel went to the Methodist Training School in Toronto the year before their wedding. The Methodist Training School was a school for training deaconesses.

1918 was the year when a virulent form of influenza was widespread over the world, including Canada. Every small town was affected and there were many deaths. There was no hospital in Mazenod at that time so the community put together an emergency hospital. I do not know which building was used, but I do know that Ethel worked there as she was one of the only registered nurses in the area. Nursing then was mostly bed care and classic tender loving care. I expect our mother offered lots of that based on how she later looked after us six children. From what source I can't remember, but someone I met much later in life, spoke to me with much appreciation for our mother and the service she gave during the flu epidemic.

Years later, while living in Ogema, our family remembers, with much appreciation and admiration, of how one day during the difficult times known as the Dirty Thirties a parcel came in the mail addressed to our mother. When she opened it she couldn't believe her eyes. A beautiful Persian Lamb coat had been sent by some thoughtful member in a Toronto church, unknown to her, who had heard of how difficult things were for many women in the west at that time. Quietly and without any fanfare she carefully returned that coat to its package. When asked if she wasn't going to wear it, she replied, "not as long as there are people in this community who don't have so much as a cloth coat to put on their backs." Clearly, like so many women of her time, Ethel's life was a labour of love and understanding, kindness and compassion.

The last two years of her life Ethel was a bed patient nursed at home by her family. She died in Elstow, Saskatchewan on May 2, 1944 and was buried in Woodlawn Cemetery in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.