

# Etta Snow

1927 – 2016



Etta Snow was a force. A woman of courage and commitment, she accomplished many great things. She stood in solidarity with Angolans being oppressed at great personal risk. She challenged the power of patriarchy, sacrificing her own potential to better the way for other women. She was rarely shy about expressing an opinion, and could defend that opinion in the boisterous and colourful way which characterized her Newfoundland roots. She enjoyed a good laugh with friends. Etta believed in God with a substantial degree of passion and certitude and served the United Church for more than 60 years.

Etta died March 29, 2016.

This biography was largely written when Etta was 85, in 2012.

## The Early Years

Etta was born January 21, 1927 in Bay Roberts, Newfoundland, about 60 miles from St. John's, to Mae and Phillip Snow. Along with her twin brother, Philip, she is the youngest of 8 children. Her father, as a young man during the depression years, went with many others from Newfoundland to Boston where he worked with his brother-in-law in the construction business. But the lure of the sea called him back, and he became skipper of a schooner that took supplies and fishermen to Labrador each spring and fall. Her mother, while looking after the children, was very active in the Woman's Missionary Society (WMS), Ladies Aid, Choir and Sunday School, as well as community organizations. Family and friends gathered many Sunday nights around the organ for a sing-song. When Etta was about eleven she took organ lessons and eventually took her turn playing at morning worship services at school, as well as playing the church pipe organ in the summer when the regular organist was on holidays.

"The UCC [United Church of Canada] was always my home, Newfoundland Girls in Training (NGIT) materials on mission were a big influence in my upbringing. There was a time when I was young that I imagined myself being a missionary in Trinidad." But Etta's deep



*Etta with her twin brother Philip. Photo Joyce Myers Brown.*

childhood dream was that of being a teacher. As her life unfolded, she was able to follow that dream as well as the early nudging toward mission work. At age 16, in 1943, Etta equipped with a summer session of training at Carbonear, was ready to teach. But, she was too young to be appointed, so only after another summer of teacher training was she able to take a position at Stanhope, where she worked for a year.

Newfoundland was much more remote in the 1930s and 40s as Etta was growing up, than it is today. People travelled around the island but not often far from it. Etta was 11 before she even met her older sister who had moved to Boston for work, and stayed there where she had her own family. After her year of teaching, with some money in her pocket, Etta decided she would like to visit her sister and nephews, and, she would travel the modern way, by air. She purchased a one way ticket from St. John's and spent the summer. It was there she was introduced to baseball, a passion which continued all her life. IT was also where she saw gold fish for the first time and she was sure that the children back home would be as intrigued with them as she was. With no money left after her summer of vacation for flying, her sister paid for her train fare home: a five day train, and ferry crossing complete with a bowl of 5 gold fish. All arrived safely. This story provides a glimpse into Etta's determination, and characterizes how "if there is a will there is a way" could be a mantra for her life and work. Many years later, during her 23 years of service among the Angolan people, they named her "Ondembeki" or "the comforter" for her relentless work in some dangerous situations in pre-civil war Angola.

After her summer in Boston, Etta decided to obtain further teaching credentials and plans were made to attend Memorial College (not yet a University) for a year. She moved to St. John's and got a room in a United Church residence, where Rev. Dr. Curtis was the guardian. She attended Gower Street United Church, where Sunday observance was mandatory for the residents. Absences had to be explained to Dr. Curtis. It was at Gower Street that Etta, along with about 40 others, took confirmation classes and joined the United Church. There were significant theological differences between the congregation of Etta's childhood and that of Gower Street. At Bay Roberts membership in the Church was made through a testimonial witness. "I remember as a child, maybe about 6 or 7 years old, my brother and I holding our hands over our eyes when the people were giving their testimony. I was really uncomfortable with it all." Etta found the theology at Gower much more in line with her own sensibilities.

## **A Call to Church Work**

With more teaching credentials Etta resumed her teaching career in Bonavista. Church work filled much of her spare time. Etta explained, "It was expected that the teacher be involved in leadership. I did religious education in the classroom on Friday afternoons, Young Peoples' on Saturday, Mission Band, NGIT and so on, and the ladies groups too." Teaching at Shoal Harbour, Etta was reacquainted with United Church Deaconess Ruth Tillman. Etta had met Ruth in her first year of teaching and Ruth had recruited her to be the cook's helper (Ruth was the cook) at the Thwart Island NGIT Summer Camp. The following year Loon Bay was chosen as a campsite for the NGIT and Etta was again invited to share leadership with Ruth. In 1949, Ruth was the WMS Missionary at Large for Bonavista Presbytery and in

that capacity she was involved in girls' work. It gave Ruth a chance to further nurture the skills she saw in Etta and plant a seed for a future she envisioned for Etta.

This excerpt from Marion Pardy's 1983 article on Ruth Tillman describes Etta's view.

Etta was initially impressed by Ruth's vibrant personality, her encouragement, her wealth of ideas and her voice. As their relationship developed Etta also became aware of her depth, her insights in scripture, the world church, and her ability to tell Bible stories, especially those from the Old Testament. "We sat with our mouths opened," Etta recalls. For Ruth, faith was alive, vibrant and meant to be lived.

Ruth's gift to Etta was vision, enabling her to see the "more" in life. Ruth herself raised the question: "Have you ever considered 'full time' church work?" ... When Etta indicated interest, Ruth continued to provide support, encouraging her to apply to the United Church Training School [UCTS] as a full time student. While Etta attended ... Ruth continued to keep in touch through letters and personal visits.<sup>1</sup>

Etta was keen on the idea of a career in church work modeled after Ruth and another influential Deaconess, Nancy Edwards, who was doing similar work to Ruth in Twillingate Presbytery. There was no sense of a call to become a Deaconess, however. She was unaware that Nancy and Ruth were Deaconesses and Etta knew nothing about the Order. Her lack of academic standing concerned her as she read the requirements for admission to UCTS. Ruth encouraged Etta to take a few correspondence courses through Mount Allison University. Etta prayed about it and remembers thinking, "if it is God's will for me to go [to UCTS] there will be a way," again demonstrating her determined spirit and ability to get things done. She enjoyed those courses and did well with them. When she was admitted to the school, additional courses were required of her. Etta was nervous, but as she recalled, Ruth said, "You'll do okay!"



*Ruth Tillman and Nancy Edwards, two strong Deaconess models, shaping the future of many young women.*

1950 big city life in Toronto was a marked change from the small coast town of Bonavista, but Etta had been to Boston so it wasn't the shock that some UCTS students experienced. Etta is an extrovert, who enjoys being with people. She also enjoys a good laugh and the odd prank. At age 85 there is still more than a hint of a Newfoundland accent in her speech, and one could easily imagine her using a colourful

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<sup>1</sup> Marion Pardy, "The Influence of Ruth Tillman on Women in Ministry" in Shirley Davy and Nancy Hardy, *Women Work and Worship in The United Church of Canada*, The United Church of Canada, 1983, p 250-51.

vocabulary, if she hadn't been trained as a minister. Residence life wasn't new for her, and she settled in well with her classmates and new friends. It is also not hard to imagine her in the midst of a lively social setting, nor to see her stirring up some fun.



*Student life appealed to Etta's extroversion and sense of fun. Left: Etta at the piano in the residence lounge, 1951. Standing second from left is fellow Newfoundlander, Frances Lodge Steele. Right: A spring outing in 1951 to Harriet Christie's cottage (teaching staff) finds the women relaxed in pants.*

Left Photo courtesy of United Church Archives 1990\_115P283,  
Right Courtesy of Margarete Emminghaus, seated far left.

The school had two residences at the time, one on St. George Street and another on Bedford Road. Classes were held at Emmanuel College and Bloor St. United Church. Etta's first year, living at the Bedford Road house, Grace King (Race) was her "big sister". Upon her graduation Grace handed Etta the



*Etta lived at 214 St. George St. in her second year at UCTS, much to her chagrin.*

responsibility to take sugar cubes every day to feed the milk wagon horses while enroute from Bedford Road to the classes. Leading up to Etta's second year, Principal Jean Hutchinson, asked the students to give reasons why they should be in one or the other residence. Etta's cheeky written response was, "I was given the responsibility by my big sister to give a lump of sugar to Fred the horse, every morning on my way to classes." Needless to say, Etta enjoyed her second year at St. George Street! Joyce Scott (McMaster) was her roommate.

## Summer in Saskatchewan

It was customary practice for students to take a Summer Mission Field, between their first and second year at the Training School, so in 1951 Etta was sent to a three point pastoral charge, at McLaren, Saskatchewan. Often, as in this case, the summer minister was the only minister for the year, and church life was concentrated in the summer. Etta recalled the

theological and liturgical challenge of covering the whole church year, including Christmas and Easter, in the summer months. She first lived in the teacherage, but because it was in an isolated place, outgoing and social Etta didn't enjoy, "being alone out in the sticks, so I eventually boarded with a family, who treated me like one of their own." Etta continued:

What do I remember about that experience 61 years ago? In a nutshell, one had to learn to adapt to different customs and cultures, ... lots of new experiences. I had a new three speed red bicycle to go from one area to the other, and adventures with animals who liked red! I got stuck in gumbo, etc. etc. ... and certainly I had very rewarding and rich experiences with the different farming communities."

The opportunity for this rural, yet sea coast woman, to cross cultures into rural, but dry land prairie was a good preparation for her life in another country. Other women who attended the Training School in this era describe the same kind of awakening to new cultures and different attitudes and perspectives on life, either upon arrival in the big city of Toronto for those from rural roots, or, with an urbanite's first encounter with rural life. As Jessie MacLeod, another UCTS student remarked on her summer field in Success, Saskatchewan, "Many days the only "success" was in the town's name!"<sup>2</sup>



*Etta in 1952 at her graduation from UCTS.*

## Decision to Become a Missionary

Mission work in another culture was a dream that Etta harboured since childhood. The desire was deepened by Etta's mentor, Ruth Tillman, who had a strong interest in global affairs, so it wasn't a surprise that when UCTS Dean, Harriet Christie invited visiting missionaries to the school, Etta attended the presentations with keen interest. In the early 1950s the church in Canada was in a boom period, and the demand, and competition, for women workers was strong. The students at the Training School



faced several options for a career after graduation. The Woman's Missionary Society (WMS), the largest employer of women in the United Church, attracted many of the students. For those who had a goal to work specifically for the WMS, especially overseas, becoming a WMS worker by being commissioned as a missionary, was much akin to making a commitment like a Deaconess. For many WMS women the commitment was threefold: to God and Jesus; to the WMS and its sisterhood of other workers, along with the hundreds of thousands of local members throughout Canada; and, as a smaller aspect of the trinity, to the United

Church of Canada. Katharine Hockin, a missionary in China (and Deaconess) said of the WMS, "You never felt you were an employee. You felt you were all sisters. We were all basically servants of the

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<sup>2</sup> Interview conducted by Caryn Douglas, September 2011.



Kingdom”.<sup>3</sup> As Donna Sinclair describes in her book on the WMS, the organization had a keen desire to make it possible for women to serve. They engaged as many as 186 women a year, in India, China, Korea, Japan, Angola, Northern Rhodesia (Zambia), Trinidad, Nepal, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and, Canada.

UCTS students could also choose to join the Order of United Church Deaconesses, by being designated. Some WMS workers were also Deaconesses, but most of the WMS women took their identity from the WMS and didn’t feel the need for designation. While Etta was a student, her interest was in the work, and serving the WMS would allow her to do the work she was most called to do. She didn’t perceive a need, nor have a desire, to be a Deaconess. Being ordained had also never occurred to Etta; a route that would have required a different educational path.



Hilda Johnson in India, where she served for thirty-six years working in small villages and later teaching New Testament at Union Theological Seminary in Indore. See chapter 7. (Photo courtesy of Berkeley Studio, The United Church of Canada.)

Etta remembers, “In our second year, Tommy Tucker and [Pastor] Fredico from Angola came and they talked about the need for teachers”. Others came too, pitching their opportunities, including the United Church’s Home Missions and, Etta continues, “Mrs. Campion [from the Deaconess Order spoke to me, she] saw me going to Newfoundland. I didn’t want that.” Etta was impressed with Ruth Taylor, the WMS Overseas Missions Executive Secretary. “Mrs. Taylor” as she would have been called in 1951, was described by another missionary<sup>4</sup> as “never possessive. She listened. I was always glad I was connected with

her.”<sup>5</sup> Etta was sure she wanted to serve with the WMS, but where should she apply to go? She did consider Trinidad, the destination in her very early sense of call, but there was no need for personnel there at the time. As Etta describes it, “Angola was with me, in my mind, the need was so great.” But, her decision was complicated by the hard lobbying of Hilda Johnson, a WMS Missionary in India who was home on furlough. Hilda described the need in India and persistently asked Etta to commit to serving there. Etta went to Harriet Christie with Angola and India on her list to get her advice. Harriet’s wisdom aided Etta in determining her first choice was Angola, and the WMS commissioned her as an educational missionary after her graduation from the Training School in 1952.

The class of 1952 was the largest ever for the Training School. *The United Church Observer* featured the class in a cover story. (see photo below) At the graduation ceremony, Principal, Jean Hutchinson “spoke

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<sup>3</sup> Donna Sinclair, *Crossing Worlds The Story to the Woman’s Missionary Society of The United Church of Canada*. The United Church Publishing House, Toronto, 1992, p12.

<sup>4</sup> The term missionary has been replaced in the United Church by the title, “overseas personnel”. Missionary is used here as the term was employed in the 1950s.

<sup>5</sup> Donna Sinclair, *Crossing Worlds The Story to the Woman’s Missionary Society of The United Church of Canada*, p85.

on the comprehensiveness of the course of training which is given, not only by the staff of the School and Emmanuel College but by ministers, deaconesses and secretaries of Church Boards; by members of committees, Church members in a variety of professions, specialist in their own fields. The presence of CGIT and Explorer groups in the audience [of over 1,000] was evidence of the success of the students' field work in these areas."<sup>6</sup>

Etta's entry into what we would now call ministry, although that would not have been the term used to describe her work then, as Ministry was reserved for those who were ordained, coincided with the most successful period of expansion for the United Church. In the post war period of optimism and focus on family life, church was the centre of community for many. Interest in mission work was wide spread and Etta's appointment would have been accompanied with the prayers of many across the country.

## Angola

Angola is one of the largest countries in Africa, a bit larger than Ontario. The population in 1952, almost entirely rural, was 4.5 million, of which 80,000 were white, mostly Portuguese. Angola became a colony of Portugal in 1655, but as Etta was preparing to arrive, its relationship with Portugal was shifting as Portugal granted all of its colonies provincial status in 1951. Tight control was retained, however. A campaign by the Portuguese government resulted in the white population expanding to nearly 200,000 by 1961. Political movements for independence, which had their early beginnings in the post war years, led to the creation of political parties key in the fight for liberation from colonial control.

The War of Independence, begun in 1961 ended when a coup in Portugal deposed the government there. A cease fire was declared in April, 1974 and independence in November 1975. But factions in the country which had developed during the struggle for independence clashed and violence continued. New international involvement (including USSR and Cuba, as well as others) and the declining influence of Portugal resulted in great instability. All out civil war erupted, lasting from 1975 to 2002 when the Peace Accord was signed.



Angola is a country rich in natural resources, but its population has been, and continues to be poor. The economy was largely agrarian, but the discovery of large oil reserves in 1955 brought a shift. The economy, increasingly based on mineral and oil extraction, benefitted ethnic Europeans. Farmer's land holdings decreased and the average income of ordinary Angolans dropped throughout the 60s and 70s.

The majority of Angolans are Christian. The Roman Catholic Church was the dominant colonial force and about 2/3 of Angolans or more were Catholic in the 1950s. In general, the Protestant missions, began in

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<sup>6</sup> United Church Observer, Volume 14, No. 7, June 1, 1952.

the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, were more supportive of the ordinary people than the Catholic Church which worked more closely with colonial administrators.<sup>7</sup> Protestants learned the local languages, emphasized teaching and medical work and favoured the development of local leadership, giving them greater influence than their small numbers might have warranted. Leaders in the major nationalist movements in the 1970s, for example, were all raised as Protestants. Protestants, from several countries (Canada, United States, England) and across denominations, worked together in the era when Etta's direct contribution to Angola began.

The decades of war destroyed the physical and social infrastructure. A whole generation of people missed out on a basic education. Many were killed or fled as refugees. The country, now 25 million, is attempting now to rebuild. Etta, and many of her former colleagues, are dedicating resources to help the people among whom they served, people that became their friends.

## Language Study

Angola was a colony of Portugal in 1952 and the Portuguese government required missionaries to study language in Portugal before allowing entry into Angola. Likewise, the WMS expected all their mission personnel to learn the local language, and it was standard for mission appointments to begin with language study, either in the destination country or where a suitable program was offered. Twenty five



*Etta Snow, (far left) Margaret Adams, Bev Brown, Lillian Taylor, Evelyn Swann, studying language in Portugal in 1952.*

year old Etta left the New York harbour in August as one of 7 United Church folks destined for Portugal, 4 as WMS appointments and 3 with the United Church Board of Mission. The last night on board their ship, champagne was served. Etta had never had any, but her fellow WMS appointee, Lillian Taylor, who became a life long friend of Etta's<sup>8</sup>, assured her it was lovely and along with the other two WMS women they enjoyed a glass. One of the Board of Mission people however was appalled, proclaiming, "lips that touch liquor will never touch mine!" Lil had her co-drinkers in gales, impersonating the temperance missionary and asking, "who would ever want to kiss him anyway?"

Later, during their orientation in Lisbon, the issue was raised again by the offended missionary's wife. The orientation leader smiled and explained that in Portugal wine was literally as common as water, and often safer to drink, so that they would have to get used to it. Their orientation leader went on to make it clear that in Angola it would be an entirely different matter. For church personnel, drinking alcohol was not acceptable, and Etta respected that entirely. For Etta it was another lesson in respecting the culture of the people that you lived among and served. This was a platform in the approach to mission

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<sup>7</sup> Some Catholic Orders, such as the Jesuits were exceptions to this generalization.

<sup>8</sup> Lillian died in 2011.



work undertaken by the United Church, even in the 1950s. In hindsight, it is possible to see however, that in subtle and sometimes not so subtle ways, the missionaries worked to convert people to western attitudes, culture and theology. The relationship between the missionaries and the people they worked among was complex.

After 8 months in Lisbon they were ready to go to Angola but a delay in getting visas meant that Etta and her WMS co-workers spent the summer in England, only able to arrive in Angola in October, 1953. Etta knew that she was going to a country that was poor and that the standard of living would be very different from anything she had experienced.

She had been prepared in the orientation sessions for a life without plumbing and electricity (as were some WMS missionaries headed to rural Saskatchewan in the same era) so she was totally shocked when they arrived at Dondi Mission to find modern standards with an indoor flush and a refrigerator. "Our first night there, there was ice cream on the table for dessert!" Etta chuckles. But Dondi wasn't like the rest of Angola, and as the years passed, in some ways the creature comforts grew, but with the increase in violence in the growing civil unrest in the 1960s conditions deteriorated for many Angolans.



*Dondi Mission in 1953. The United Church was part of a larger Protestant mission effort to provide health care and education for Angolans.*

Before getting underway with the work she came to do, Etta had more language study ahead, as she needed to learn Umbundu, the indigenous language. Formal lessons were provided by an Angolan teacher and United Church missionary, Millicent Howse, also from Newfoundland. Millicent's father, a United Church minister, had baptized Etta and her brother, and in a quirk of fate, Millicent had left Newfoundland for Angola on the very day that Etta was born. Instruction involved 30 lessons of grammar accompanied by afternoons in conversation with a student teacher. Etta explains, "In the seventh month [of the eight month program] I was sent to an [Angolan Girls in Training] camp with about 50 teenage girls and Angolan leaders and was left with them for a week and none of them knew any English. That was quite an experience!"

## **Angolan Beginnings**

With only 8 months of training each in two new languages, Etta was sent to join Deaconess Margaret Halliday and missionary Kate Rutherford at Lutamo Mission Station. Etta is "one of the heroes of the faith," says Joyce Myers-Brown, an American colleague. Myers-Brown says Snow's excellent language abilities were crucial to the missions in Angola. "You could get by in Portuguese," says Myers-Brown,

“but to speak with the people in their own language, as she learned to do, that was so much better.”<sup>9</sup> In her 1955 report Etta wrote, “I have been promoted from a language student into “full-time” work – not that language study is completed. One seems to acquire a new vocabulary every day. Actually I am at the stage when I’m never sure what’s coming next – Umbundu or Portuguese. Many times it’s a mixture of both.”<sup>10</sup> In 2009, when Etta visited Angola, her travel companion wrote, “Etta spoke in Umbundu at every gathering we attended. Young and old were moved and amazed by her fluency in their mother tongue. Many young Angolans have not had an opportunity to learn their own language.”<sup>11</sup>



*Lutamo Elementary School in 1960s. The Vocational School, where Etta was the Director before being forced to leave because of the civil war, was adjacent. From the ruins of this building a new school has been built, to be opened in 2016 thanks to \$500,000 raised by United Church men (AOTS).*

The focus on Etta’s work was education, both Christian and secular. In 1954 when her co-worker Margaret Halliday went on furlough, Etta assumed oversight of the 180 students at the Girl’s Boarding School and the supervision of the Vocational school at Lutamo. Etta described the school in a report home. “We have fifty-six girls, twelve of these are taking the second year course, the first time we have offered it. ... The course is given to girls who for financial reasons or age are not able to attend the regular school year. During the dry season they are given eight weeks training, and in order to come here must be able to read Bible passages. ... It is amazing what can be accomplished in such a short time, and with the perseverance to keep on trying. They stay here until April, and during that time are taught the three r’s, cooking, sewing and knitting, etc. Most of

them will marry, and we try to help them see how reading can enrich their lives; and how they may establish a Christian home that might serve as a good example in the community.”<sup>12</sup> Forty-eight of the fifty-six first year girls graduated. Etta wrote, “The [graduating] girls ... were responsible for the [graduation ceremony], cooking the food, arranging the tables, making the place cards and seating the guests. The success of this dinner showed what can be done with training.”<sup>13</sup>

Judged from our current day context in which we are more aware of the overt and subtle power of colonialism to “normalize” culture to a westernized standard, there is a feel of paternalism to Etta’s news home. For the Angolan missionaries there was a direct linkage between a Christian home and a

<sup>9</sup> Deborah Aldcorn, “Across the years and miles, Africa calls to Etta Snow”, *Toronto Conference Insight, The United Church Observer*, March/April 2012.

<sup>10</sup> Woman’s Missionary Society, *Missionaries Reporting, Part 1*, 30<sup>th</sup> Annual Report of The Woman’s Missionary Society, The United Church of Canada, 1955 Edition, Woman’s Missionary Society, Toronto, Ontario, p 132.

<sup>11</sup> Jean Burgess, “A personal visit to Angola”, Angola Memorial Scholarship Fund Newsletter, Fall 2009.

<sup>12</sup> *Missionaries Reporting*, 1955 Edition, p 133.

<sup>13</sup> *Missionaries Reporting*, 1956 Edition, p 20.

home where North American style domestic skills are practiced. But teaching women domestic skills mixed with social graces would have been natural to these missionaries. The curriculum at the United Church Training School all during the 1950s and even into the mid 1960s required women to learn and demonstrate that they could set a table for tea and host a reception.<sup>14</sup>

## **The Influence of Maternal Feminism**

The early 20<sup>th</sup> century roots of this kind of training and role expectation for women can be found in maternal feminism, a foundational philosophy for the Deaconess and women's missionary movements, particularly strong in the United Church's Methodist past. In maternal feminism women are assessed as natural caregivers and the "mothers of the nation". Women's participation in public life, as an extension of their domestic role, is therefore deemed essential because, by their nature, they will make decisions that will result in good care of society. A strong public presence requires strong domestic qualities. Theologically this philosophy informs a strain of Social Evangelism. It has Presbyterian roots, but was also seen in Methodism, and was carried into the United Church. For Social Evangelists, Christians were called upon to alleviate the suffering in the world. This task was to be accomplished through conversion of individuals to Christianity along with the church's role to cooperate with the home to educate Christians into an active citizenship, resulting in a moral influence on social and political realms. Maternal feminism informs and is informed by this theological perspective and the combination underpins missionary activity.

In the Angolan missionary work in the 1950s the maternal feminism influenced Social Evangelism is evident and Etta expresses these ideas in her WMS reports. She writes of her work at the Ballantyne Boarding School; "personal contacts [because of the large number of girls] are limited, but through worship services and other avenues, we seek to instill in them those qualities that make for character formation thereby helping to establish healthy relationships in group living."<sup>15</sup> But missing in Etta's writings are the more overt calls to follow Jesus, and an emphasis on personal salvation, which appear in the reports of others from the era. Etta's childhood discomfort with "testimonials" is continued and reflected in her evangelistic approach and theology during her 20s and early 30s. Etta's approach bears the marks of other theological influences too.

The missionary drive is also influenced by the Social Gospel, a theological view prominent in Methodism and formative in the United Church.<sup>16</sup> As in Social Evangelism, maternal feminism is informed by, and informs, the Social Gospel. Social gospel proponents understood that eternal salvation relied on a temporal salvation *for all human beings* from the social evils of poverty, violence, and other forms of

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<sup>14</sup> See Gwyn Griffith, *Weaving a Changing Tapestry The Story of the Centre for Christian Studies and its Predecessors*, The Centre for Christian Studies, Winnipeg, MB, 2009.

<sup>15</sup> *Missionaries Reporting*, 1956 Edition, p 20.

<sup>16</sup> See Sherri McConnell, *Canadian Deaconess and Missionary Education for Women – Training to Live the Social Gospel: The Methodist National Training School and the Presbyterian Deaconess and Missionary Training Home, 1893-1926*, MA Thesis, U of Winnipeg, 2003.

oppression and injustice. They believed that, “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” would be accomplished through structural economic, political and social reform.

A continuing education course for Deaconesses and women workers at the United Church Training School in 1933 focused on this idea of “Christianizing of the Social Order”,<sup>17</sup> in preparation for a significant 1934 report on the topic by the United Church. The report was the focus of a subsequent national gathering of the Deaconess Association and Women Workers and the theme is picked up again in meetings in the 1940s with theme speakers focusing on the world economic order and Marxism.<sup>18</sup> Much missionary work well into the 1950s was fuel by the Social Gospel variant of maternal feminism. It too is evident in the work in Angola, and increasingly so into the 1960s.

## Literacy Training

At the same time as the missionaries were linking domestic skills with good Christian practice, they also made the link between Christianity and public leadership for women through attaining the skills traditionally prized in male leadership: another angle in the complex shape of the missionary endeavor. Angolan families placed a priority on educating their sons. The United Church and the WMS worked with boys, but the WMS placed *their* priority on educating girls. There was a Social Gospel motivation for teaching domestic skills that gave women organizational practice and some practical skills for earning an income in a world where the waged economy was growing. But it was the literacy training which was key to developing women’s potential to participate in the public sphere.

When Etta moved to Camundongo and joined Frances Walbridge, another WMS Missionary, one focus of her educational work was the Angolan Girls in Training (AGIT) program, called Fire and Light. It was started by another United Church missionary<sup>19</sup>, Margaret Dawson, who had been serving in Angola since 1935. As Etta explained, the AGIT was designed as a combination of Christian education and literacy training. For a young girl, aged 12 to 15, to move on from Firelighters to the Seniors group called Torchbearers, she had to be able to read. In a 1956 report Etta wrote, “The ability to read has become so important here that some boys are willing to pay the school fees for their prospective brides, so that they will know how to read.”<sup>20</sup> The Laubach method of “each one, teach one” was used to accomplish the goal, with a high degree of success. “The “Each One Teach One” philosophy means that if you can read, you can teach another person to read. No teaching experience is required. Tutors work with students on a one-to-one basis, or in small groups. Experienced tutors can become trainers through an

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<sup>17</sup> August 8, 1933 Letter to Deaconesses from Mary Eadie, Secretary, Committee on Deaconesses and Women Workers.

<sup>18</sup> For example, Rev. Alex Cameron spoke on “The Church and the Economic Crisis of Capitalism” and Mr. Millard gave an address on the role of Labour Unions in Canada. Joint Conference The Deaconess Association and The Fellowship of Professional Women, Hamilton, Ontario, June 1942

<sup>19</sup> In 1962, Margaret Dawson, at the end of her career, became a United Church Deaconess when the Woman’s Missionary Society was ended as it was merged into the United Church missionary system.

<sup>20</sup> Woman’s Missionary Society, *Missionaries Reporting, Part 1*, 31<sup>st</sup> Annual Report of The Woman’s Missionary Society, The United Church of Canada, 1956 Edition, Woman’s Missionary Society, Toronto, Ontario, p 20.

apprenticeship with experienced trainers.”<sup>21</sup> It is described by Frances Walbridge in Donna Sinclair’s book on the WMS in this way, “The girls begin with an illustrated Laubach primer, progress to fifteen easy-to-read stories about Jesus, and then read Mark in a special big-print edition just published by the Bible Society. Emi Hama, an African teacher, and I are writing stories for the girls with the 400 word vocabulary found in the primer and the fifteen stories.”<sup>22</sup>



*Margaret (Muggie) Dawson (right) and Elizabeth Utting, another United Church missionary, at a wedding in Angola.*

In 1960 some of the success of the literacy campaign among girls is noted by inclusion of girls in secondary education. “The secondary school course at ... the Professional and Technical School prepared a class of 17 for the examinations at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> year ... and all 17 were successful. The school had a registration of 63 this year in the first year and 24 in the second ... a significant number of these are girls.”<sup>23</sup>

The WMS operated the residential Means School for Girls, at the Dondi Station<sup>24</sup>. Missionary Evelyn Swann reported that, “when a girl is born to a family they say, “U Meansie” meaning literally “One of Means School.”<sup>25</sup> Rev. Adelaide Tomas Manuel received her early education at the school, until it was closed in 1975 because of the civil war. Despite the hardships of war,

Adelaide was able to go on to get a university education. She is now playing a key role in women’s work in Angola and is Principal of the Seminary.<sup>26</sup>

The WMS also supported girls’ education through village schools. The Chissamba region Church schools alone had more than 3,000 students (boys and girls)<sup>27</sup>. Teacher training for these schools was another aspect of the work, as the missionaries cite that the shortage of qualified teachers was a significant problem. In addition to teacher training, the church had programs for nurses, midwives, pastors and rural development agents.

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<sup>21</sup> <http://www.laubach-on.ca/>

<sup>22</sup> Donna Sinclair, *Crossing Worlds The Story to the Woman’s Missionary Society of The United Church of Canada*, p39.

<sup>23</sup> *Missionaries Reporting*, 1960 Edition, p 135.

<sup>24</sup> Larry Henderson, *The Church in Angola*, Pilgrim Press, Cleveland, Ohio, 1992. “The central school for girls was opened on the Dondi property in 1916, it was named after John O. Means, the ABCFM Secretary (American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions), who made the original proposal that a new work be started among the Ovimbundu in central Angola. The Means School curriculum also had three sections: academic, Bible and home economics. In the 1930s and 1940s, Means and Currie [for boys] were considered the foundation of a future university of Angola.”

<sup>25</sup> *Missionaries Reporting*, 1956 Edition, p 9.

<sup>26</sup> Angola Memorial Scholarship Fund Newsletter, Spring 2006.

<sup>27</sup> *Missionaries Reporting*, 1956 Edition, p 8.



Many years later, when Etta visited Angola she heard directly from many people their appreciation for the education the church enabled. “Graduates continued their studies and were now teachers, pastors, nurses, engineers, doctors, lawyers, farmers and Christian educators [helping in the post civil war rebuilding of a civil society and functional economy.] “The Missionaries trained us to be leaders of our Church and country” they tell us, “And we are.”<sup>28</sup>

## Furlough in Canada

In 1957, it was Etta’s turn to return to Canada on furlough. It was the practice of the WMS to give their staff a furlough approximately every 6 years. It was a time to get upgrading in their field, much as one would on a sabbatical, and many took additional degrees, for example. Furlough was also a means to provide education about the work of mission around the world. This “deputation” activity built strong links between local WMS women and the missionaries and helped with raising money, although its primary purpose was to bring awareness to Canadians. Furlough also allowed the missionaries to maintain connections to Canadian culture and their families. The WMS was aware that when the

women retired, they would be returning to Canada, and they would need to fit in. Deaconess and WMS missionary to Japan, Daphne Rogers explained that the WMS was very intentional about maintaining an identity for their missionaries as Canadians. Daphne said that the WMS was afraid that the women would “become native”.<sup>29</sup> The WMS primarily employed single women as missionaries, the exception being widows, so there were rarely children in Canada to ensure ties. Some women adopted children, often girls, in the country (or First Nation reserve) where they served,<sup>30</sup> but this was not encouraged. Involvement with local men was strongly discouraged.



*Missionaries on furlough, like Etta, lived in the UCTS residence: students benefitted from learning about mission activity. Here students at the weekly tea in 1957. Photo from Merrill Brown.*

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<sup>28</sup> Marion Pardy, “Hello Bay Roberts ... Angola Calling”, *The Connector, Newfoundland and Labrador Conference Newsletter*, The United Church of Canada, May 2012, p 4.

<sup>29</sup> Interview conducted by Caryn Douglas with Daphne Rogers, Fall 2006.

<sup>30</sup> Beulah Bourns, who served in Korea between 1932 and 1974 adopted two children. I knew Beulah in her retirement when she lived with a niece in a small Manitoba farming town. Sometime around 1984, Beulah was in declining health, but she was committed to making one last trip to Korea to arrange a marriage for her youngest daughter. Beulah told me then that the church frowned on the adoption of children.

## Becoming a Deaconess

While in Canada, Etta was to attend the General Council meeting of the United Church and the missionaries in Angola expected her to represent them as a voting delegate. When United Church Training School Principal Harriet Christie informed Etta that she would not have a vote as a missionary, Etta was perplexed. "What am I going to do?" she asked Harriet, "Everyone is counting on me to represent them?" Harriet, who was a Deaconess, and as Principal of the Training School sat on the Committee that oversaw the Deaconess Order, explained to Etta that if she were a Deaconess she would have a vote. Harriet assured Etta she could pull the strings to make it happen quickly so Etta agreed. However, as the meeting of Toronto Conference, where she would be designated, was drawing close, Etta, along with a number of other residents at the Training School, was hospitalized, and in isolation no less, with hepatitis. However, Etta's determination seems to have been well matched by Harriet's so a scheme was set in place. Etta left the hospital by taxi and was taken to the back door of Trinity United Church and then into a small room behind the chancel. When the time came for the Designation of Deaconesses, Etta was summoned from the room and joined the other candidate, Thelma Conway (Clear). She was designated, Mrs. Campion, the Secretary of the Deaconess Order, handed her a bible; Etta walked out the door, into a waiting taxi, and was delivered back to her hospital room.

This is undoubtedly a unique story of designation, in more than one way! It was a "designation" of convenience and the act did not stir a spiritual awakening or a call to the structured diaconate in Etta. As she remembers, "I don't really have any recollections back then about feeling a part of the Deaconess community, the perception at that time was [that] I was ...a WMS missionary."



*United Church missionaries, taken at Nova Lisboa, now Huambo, in 1968. Top row: Mary MacDougal, Marie Crosby, Betty Gilchrist, Larry Henderson, Phyllis Burgess, George Burgess; 2nd row from top: Margaret Neumann, Billy Burgess, Frances Wallbridge, Amy Schauffler, Kate Brown; Sitting: Evelyn Swann, Kate Rutherford, Edith Radley, Neil Burgess, Lillian Burgess, Alice Moreira, Lillian Taylor, Etta Snow, Joyce Myers* Photo from Nancy Henderson James

## Growing Unrest in Angola

As the decade of the 1950s gave way to the 1960s waves of political and social unrest grew across the world, including in southwest Africa. Rising with this swell is the expression of a new variant on the Social Gospel, informed by emerging awareness of colonialism, racism and sexism. The WMS Angolan

report for 1960 reflects this growing view. “In the midst of [the acute tension and violent disturbances happening in Africa] the Christian Church has to carry on its work of witness and service. Christians of any land cannot stand aloof from such events, and especially in Africa today, *they are called to make plain to governments and peoples alike*, the principles of freedom and the inherent worth and dignity of every individual person, of whatever race.”<sup>31</sup> [emphasis mine]

Etta recounts, “Coming up to the 1960s, we heard northern Angolans were going to jail for talking about justice and so on. In the south, we were being cautious.” In 1961 the War of Independence from Portugal began. It was to last until 1975. The war was waged against the Portuguese Armed Forces by 3 main rebel groups who did not cooperate among themselves. It was primarily a guerilla war in which Angolan citizens were terrorized from all sides. People were taken prisoner, or just disappeared. The war was also a battlefield in the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the United States.

Even though church people were expected to remain neutral, Protestants were considered supporters of the rebels by the Portuguese government.<sup>32</sup> The movements of the missionaries were under careful watch. Many of the missionaries with children left as the violence continued, and those who remained were increasingly isolated. Soon Etta was the only missionary at the Lutoma Station. She was supervising a network of church schools and 14 pastors in a rural district. The military investigated her and her work. After one of her “dry season” schools, people who had been in her class were asked by the authorities what she had been teaching. Etta explained that all she was teaching was the Bible. “We used Bible passages”, she declares, “to be subversive. We were suffering now like those in the Bible. We used Revelation, and the image of the New Jerusalem, slavery in Egypt ... . There were key words [we had to avoid] so we wouldn’t get others into trouble, key words like freedom, liberation, justice. Saying those words was enough to go to jail. We used the stories of faith though, the stories are the stories.” Etta also shared about her involvement in helping to get leaders out of the country. While the foreigners were under suspicion they also had some level of immunity from harm because they were North Americans. A code was developed so that they could send messages to the families of those they had helped to escape, phrases like, “the flowers are blooming” conveyed the good news that loved ones were safely across the border. It was during this time that Etta was given the name “the Comforter.”

## Another Furlough

In 1962, the Woman’s Missionary Society was ended in the United Church and its work was merged into the Church’s Board of World Mission. The expectations of periodic furlough and deputation continued, but with the uncertainty in the country Etta was reluctant to leave for fear she wouldn’t be allowed to return. In 1968, however, she did take a furlough year and spent it passionately telling the story of Angola and explaining to church people across Canada what was going on in the complicated situation.

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<sup>31</sup> *Missionaries Reporting*, 1960 Edition, p 135.

<sup>32</sup> Aldcorn, Deborah. “Across the years and miles, Africa calls to Etta Snow”, *Toronto Conference Insight, The United Church Observer*, March/April 2012.

She was granted a visa by the Portuguese and returned to Angola in 1969, but after only a few months word came that her mother was not well and was expected to die very soon, and, that she wanted to see Etta before she died. Etta hesitated to leave, but decided to risk it once she was able to get permission from the authorities in Angola for a one month leave with a guarantee that she could return. But after a month in Newfoundland, Etta's mother was still alive. Uncertain what to do, Etta went to see Joey Smallwood, the Premier of Newfoundland, who had been a friend of her father and explained her dilemma. While she sat across from him at his desk, he called the Consulate and External Affairs in Ottawa and secured an extension on her visa. Several more months passed by and finally Etta's mother said, "I am getting better, you need to return to your work in Angola." Etta returned to her work among war besieged Angolans. Her mother lived for almost another year.



*Etta while on furlough in 1969, she lived in residence at Centre for Christian Studies (then called Covenant College). Photo UCC Archives, Toronto*

## **Evacuation from Angola**

In a quick succession of events, the War of Independence ended, when a leftist overthrow of the Portuguese government granted Angola independence effective in February, 1975. But by July fighting was resumed in the beginnings of a bloody civil war that raged until 2002. The renewed fighting sparked a mass exodus from the country, and over 300,000 people left Angola in the following months, including many missionaries. The situation grew in intensity. Etta, along with one of her colleagues, Evelyn Swann, was determined to stay for as long as possible because of the deep commitment she felt to her Angolan colleagues. It is another example of her stubborn determination and passionate faith.

The follow excerpts are from an article Etta wrote in 1976:

As I listened to the BBC news at seven that night, [August 8] shots sounded through the air, getting louder and more frequent. My African neighbours had put out their lights and I dimmed mine. Two girls, working in the kitchen, were trying to be brave by singing softly. They came into the living room where we put a log on the fire, and sat along the wall away from the windows, in case a grenade was thrown through them.

At a consultation with the Angolan church leaders on August 19, it was decided [which missionaries should go on the last scheduled plane out.] ... Later that evening Evelyn Swann and I were advised to go [the next day]. ...



Dawn came. How could I leave by 8 a.m.? The car was stored in the garage. Money was left for the house girls, and the night guard who will look after the house while I am away. As we waved to friends along the way, the familiarities of the mission road faded into the background, and questions that had no answer came to my mind. When would we come back? What if we can't? Is this how one's ministry phases out after 23 years? "Kuata ekoleko", have faith, I remembered one of the women leaders saying to me yesterday ...<sup>33</sup>

Etta reflects now on that traumatic time: "We really thought we would only be gone for a few months, ... I was a refugee from Angola." After 3 nervous days waiting in Nova Lisboa for a plane which took her first to Namibia, Etta arrived in the London airport only to be met with loud speakers announcing a bomb threat and evacuation. She wrote in 1976, "It all sounded familiar. Just a week ago I was doing the same thing in Angola. Bang! It was only a small bomb ..."

## Decision to stay in Canada

For the next 6 months Etta was on salary with the Board and was deployed doing deputation, but Dr. Roy Webster, Africa Secretary for the Division of World Outreach, told Etta that the church could not continue her employment if she was not serving outside the country. As Etta shared the next part of the story the passion in her voice rose notably. "What?" she exclaimed both then, and as she recounted her experience, "What should I do? After 23 years in Angola that was it? I didn't choose to leave, I had to, I was evacuated. Roy said at my age they wouldn't send me somewhere where I had to learn another language; he wanted me to go to Brazil. He said, "you can speak the language." But I couldn't give my heart to the Brazilian people, not like I had given my heart to Angolans. My heart was in Angola." Etta's resistance to Brazil was partially related to her belief that the civil war would end and that she would be able to resume her work in Angola. No one could have predicted that it would continue for more years than Etta's ministry in the country had. The loss of her work in Angola was very traumatic for her and it was a difficult time to make significant life decisions.



*Etta approaching Lutamo Vocational School destroyed during the civil war and left in ruins, here in 2009.*

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<sup>33</sup> Etta Snow, "Evacuation from Angola" in *Mandate Magazine*, The United Church of Canada, January 1976, p 8-10.



## Centre for Christian Studies and Emmanuel College

With no plan beyond the immediate, and an aching in her heart, Etta accepted the offer of the Centre for Christian Studies (CCS, formerly United Church Training School) to become the Director of Residence. She and her colleague at CCS, Kay Pearson, enjoyed working together; they had a deep and long friendship<sup>34</sup>. Still confident that she would be able to return to Angola, Etta also decided to pursue more theological education so that she could become Ordained and she enrolled at Emmanuel College.

While in Angola Etta had experienced the exclusion of sexism, but it was the effects of clericalism which were most hurtful. All through this period, not just in Africa, ordained ministers were afforded a status far above the laity and other church workers such as Deaconesses. In describing her desire for ordination, Etta didn't identify her own need for the status, but emphasized that the Angolans wanted her to be a minister. The people that she worked alongside wanted to see her recognized for the gifts and leadership skills she had shared with them. "People couldn't understand when it came to communion why I wasn't at the front. ... The people had no problem with me being a woman, they wanted me to be a minister," she explained. In 1978, Etta was ordained by Toronto Conference, on behalf of Newfoundland and Labrador Conference, the first woman from Newfoundland to be ordained. Etta continued for another year at CCS. Between 1980 and 1996 she served the following Toronto area pastoral charges: Guthrie-Hawkstone (80 -83), Humber Valley (83-87) [see end note], Brown's Corners (87-90), Westennial (90-96) and Davenport-Perth (93-96). Etta officially retired in 1994.



*Etta in 1982 at a Centre for Christian Studies event.  
Photo Kay Pearson.*

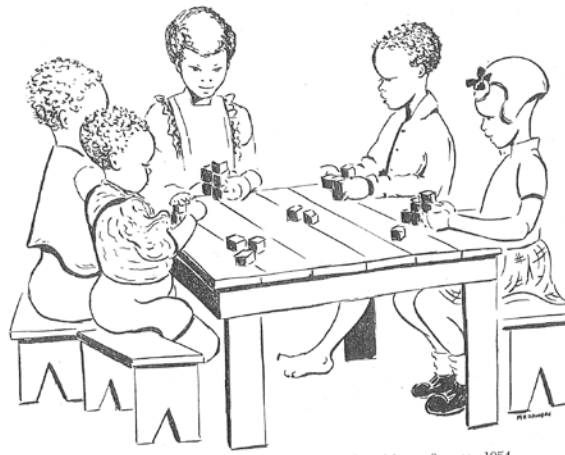
## Angola Memorial Scholarship Fund

One way that Etta could continue ministry with the people of Angola was through the Angola Memorial Scholarship Fund (originally The Gilchrist Memorial Angola Student Trust Fund), established in 1971. The Fund exists to provide leadership training and education for all Angolans. She has taken key roles in the governance and administration of the fund. When Etta "retired" she found part time work as the wedding chaplain at the Old Mill, a popular restaurant in Toronto. The extra income she earned helped her to continue to support the redevelopment of some of the facilities destroyed during the Civil War. At age 85, she has just now retired from that part time responsibility. It illustrates how deeply Angola is in her heart.

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<sup>34</sup> Kay died in December 2015.

Etta has travelled to Angola many times since fleeing in 1975<sup>35</sup>. In 1995<sup>36</sup> she visited on behalf of the Scholarship Fund, accompanied by her friend Kay Pearson. She was unable to visit former mission stations because of transportation problems. She returned in 2002, along with Ed LeMaster, and in 2004, shortly after the end of the civil war, when she was accompanied by Marion Pardy, a former United Church Moderator, and Deaconess. Marion writes, "It was a painful, tearful, joyful reunion for Etta and for her Angolan friends. ... There was devastation everywhere, except in the faces and voices of the people. ... "Oh, my friends, let us rejoice, let us rejoice! Dona Etta has arrived. ... Thank you God." ... Some said, "I thought I would never be alive to see you again." And some, regrettably were no longer alive. But the adult children of the deceased were there because their parents kept the Dondi [Mission] and other stories alive. ... On Sunday morning at Dondi some 800 people arrived for worship. Some had walked 40 kilometres to see and hear Etta. ...



SOME MEMBERS OF THE FIRST "CHILD GARDEN" AT MEANS SCHOOL, 1954  
 "The interest depicted in the sketch is symbolic of the daily interest of the children from 12.30 to 4.00 every afternoon."  
 Left to right: Clarindo (age 4), Luiz (6), Cristina (7), Americo (6), Jeannie (5)

*Jean Burgess, Etta's travel companion in 2009, is the little girl far right, in this drawing by Margaret (Muggie) Dawson from 1955 Missionaries Reporting, WMS publication.*

The faces of the people shone; their eyes glistened; their ears attentively heard every word."<sup>37</sup> A third trip was taken in 2009, along with Jean Burgess, whose parents had been missionaries alongside of Etta. (A fourth trip, taken in 2014, is described below)



*In 2009, Etta met "Etta", whose mother, a grad of Lutamo Vocation School, named her daughter after the respected Director of the school.*

## In retirement

In addition to her Angolan work, Etta is the Minister Emerita and Voluntary Associate Minister at Humbervale United Church in Toronto where she leads in worship periodically. Etta has been a registered guest at three meetings of the World Council of Churches: Korea in 2014; Brazil, 2006; Zimbabwe 1998 (along with the event to mark the end of the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women) and Vancouver in 1983. She

<sup>35</sup> See end notes regarding another trip.

<sup>36</sup> Angola Memorial Scholarship Fund Annual Meeting Minutes June 14-15, 1995.

<sup>37</sup> Marion Pardy, "Hello Bay Roberts ... Angola Calling", *The Connector, Newfoundland and Labrador Conference Newsletter*, The United Church of Canada, May 2012, p 5.

still enjoys watching baseball, football, and tennis, and has an active social life.

## 60 Years in Ministry

In her 86<sup>th</sup> year, Etta is still energetic and lively. She is storyteller, as ever she must have been. The nonsense, tell it like it is, approach to her discourse, present throughout her life, may now be tempered at times by strategic caution; but not always.<sup>38</sup>

On June 24, 2012 a celebration to honour Etta's 60 years in ministry was held by the Humber Valley congregation and her friends and colleagues.

## Another Trip to Angola

In 2014, Etta travelled again to Angola, to help with the celebrations of the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Dondi Mission, where she had begun her Christian Education ministry 60 years earlier. She was able to visit Dondi, Lobito and Luanda, receiving "an overwhelming welcome" everywhere she went during her 4 week visit.<sup>39</sup> Conditions were still difficult for many Angolans living in poverty and denied basic human rights, but she was able to report on progress with reconstruction of new facilities and increasing programming. She also met with church leaders to discuss issues such as increasing access to African theological resources for training church personnel.



*Etta was supporting the reconstruction of the Vocational School at Lutamo and hoped to attend its official opening in 2016.*

During her trip she had the pleasure of presenting a cheque for over \$8,000 for the re-opening of the Lutamo Domestic Sciences School to her former teaching colleague and friend Dona Leontina Namueca. Leontina took over as director of the Vocational School when Etta was forced to flee in 1975, until the war forced its closure a few months later. The donation was a result of funds collected in honour of Etta's Diamond Jubilee in ministry. When the School was destroyed, Leontina operated a house school for girls and

young women. With the end of civil war she established a 3 month residential course in domestic sciences and other course. Etta shared Leontina's dream of reopening the Vocational School, with a new building on the original site. Plans were in place for Etta to return to Angola later in 2016 so that she could officially open the new building, plans ended by her death in March.

Post Script: In September 2016, Etta's cremains were taken to the church at Lutamo/Dondi today and the buried on September 3 after the dedication of Etta's school (Escola Domestica).

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<sup>38</sup> In editing drafts of this biography, she insisted that I rewrite quoted passages which I had used verbatim from my interviews with her!

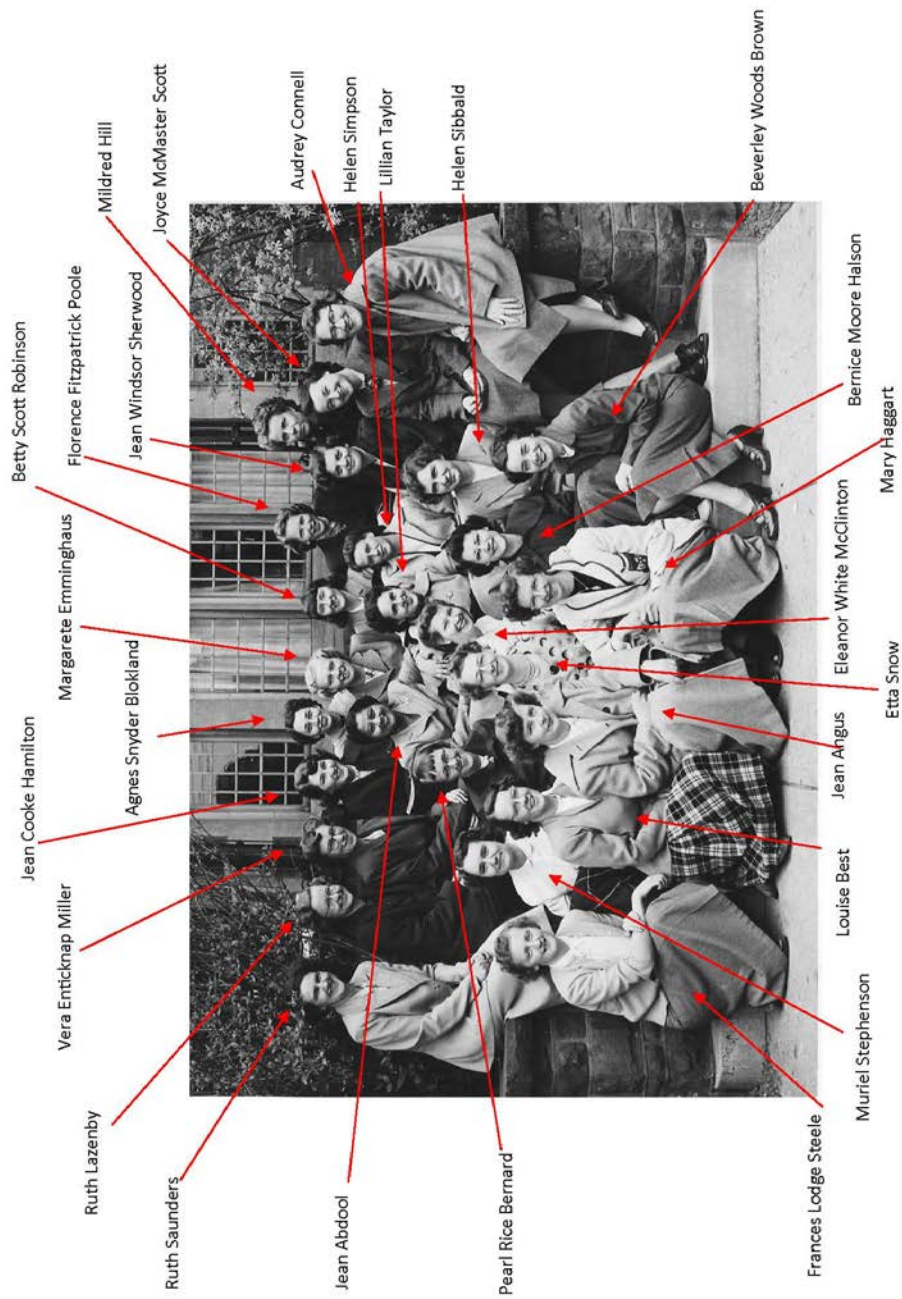
<sup>39</sup> Etta Snow, "2014 trip to Angola – 60 years after beginning my Christian Education work", Angola Memorial Scholarship Fund Newsletter, Spring 2015.

#### END NOTE

I met Etta in 1987 when I was a student at the Centre for Christian Studies. Etta had recently been dismissed from her Associate Minister position at Humber Valley United Church. She had decided to fight what she felt was a wrongful dismissal and what she saw as the inappropriate power the congregation had given to the Senior Minister. When I interviewed Etta for this project she was unable to talk to me about her experience because of the agreement she had made in the settlement of the case. What I am sharing here is my strong memory of what she said to a few of us one day. It left a big impression on me at an important time of my feminist formation.

Etta was very clear that she was taking on this fight, one which she knew from the outset could be difficult, not for herself but for other women. She was 60 years old at the time, and she had factored in to her decision that by going public she risked never getting another job. She said, "It doesn't matter now about me, I can go on pension. I am doing this for younger women. Someone has to do something to challenge male power." I really only know the story from Etta's perspective, and from some talk that was circulating in the Toronto church network at the time. I do not know what the outcome of her complaint was, except that there was a settlement and the Senior Minister remained at the church. I do know that her commitment to action made a difference to at least one younger woman. I have more than once thought of her courage when I have said or done something to challenge authority. Etta and my mother became friends when my mother began work at the Centre for Christian studies in 1988. I recall my mother saying of Etta one day, "She is what she says." I would concur.

Written by Caryn Douglas, June 2012, revised in 2016. An electronic version of this biography is available on [UCCDeaconessHistory.ca](http://UCCDeaconessHistory.ca)



**Some of the 1952 United Church Training School Graduates**

United Church Observer Photo



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Interview with Jessie MacLeod, conducted by Caryn Douglas, September 2011.

Interview with Daphne Rogers, conducted by Caryn Douglas, Fall 2006.

Emails from Etta Snow to Caryn Douglas, May 24, 28, 2012, June 11, 2012.

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## Websites

Angola Memorial Scholarship Fund <http://www.angolamsf.org/esnow.html>

The Laubach Method of "each one, teach one" <http://www.laubach-on.ca/>