

Evelyn Bishop: The Heroine of Gatlinburg

BY DONALD CRAIN
SPECIAL TO THE MOUNTAIN PRESS

GATLINBURG

With the challenges of the 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic, I am reminded of my father's favorite relative — his Aunt Evelyn Bishop. During the worldwide Spanish Flu Pandemic of 1918-1919 almost one million American citizens perished, together with over 40 million individuals worldwide. Evelyn Bishop became the heroine of the Gatlinburg region as a result of her brave and selfless efforts to battle the virus on behalf of the citizens of that region.

At that time, Evelyn Bishop was the relatively new Head Resident (principal) of the Gatlinburg Settlement School. The School was founded in the 1912-13 timeframe by wealthy benefactors from New England and the Pi Beta Phi Sorority. These individuals started this modest enterprise because the Gatlinburg region had no public schools. The School struggled initially because the local citizenry was highly skeptical of sending their children to a school "run by Yankees." After all, this was less than 50 years after the close of the Civil War in an area largely supportive of the Confederacy and whose sons, brothers and fathers fought and died in that incredibly bloody and divisive war.

Evelyn Bishop was the daughter of my great-great grandfather, Elwell A. Bishop, who was the President of Murphy College in nearby Sevierville, Tennessee. President Bishop came to Murphy College in 1912 and brought his unmarried daughter, Evelyn, with him. Evelyn Bishop was a graduate of Syracuse University with a degree in Music and the Fine Arts. She was a music instructor at Murphy College before becoming the Head Resident of the Pi Beta Phi Settlement School in Gatlinburg. President Bishop



Above left: At age 12, Donald Crain saw his Great Aunt Evelyn for the second time, after initially meeting her years earlier. Left to right: Aunt Freida, Steve Crain (Donald's brother at age 14), Miss Evelyn and Donald Crain. **Above right:** Evelyn Bishop, or "Miss Evelyn" as she was known, became Head Resident (Principal) of the Pi Beta Phi Settlement School in Gatlinburg in 1917. While the town still did not even have a nurse, Miss Evelyn helped the community through the 1918-19 Spanish Flu pandemic.



Submitted photos

was previously the President of the Methodist Seminary School in Montpelier, Vermont, before coming to Tennessee.

During the initial phases of the Spanish Flu Pandemic, Evelyn Bishop was alarmed at the lack of medical facilities and the absence of any doctors or clinics in the Gatlinburg region. Despite her best efforts and the efforts of many others, no doctors or facilities could be made available in Gatlinburg. Accordingly, she determined to take matters into her own hands.

With the assistance of a helper and a mule, Evelyn Bishop visited all the homes in the region — several hundred in all — and taught the residents the basics of good hygiene and how to disinfect their homes, as well as how to clean and boil clothing to prevent the spread of germs and the virus from person to person. She also demonstrated how and when to quarantine the ill and when and how to disinfect their bedding, clothes and eating utensils. She also distributed disinfectant to the homes in the hollows, ravines and mountain dwellings of the secluded area residents.

"Miss Evelyn," as she affectionately came to be known, made these long and challenging treks for weeks and months at a time during 1918.

As a result of her heroic and selfless efforts, there were only three cases of the deadly Spanish Flu in the Gatlinburg area, and no deaths during this period when millions perished in the United States and worldwide.

Realizing the absence of adequate healthcare, Miss Evelyn spearheaded the hiring and funding of a nurse at the Settlement School in 1920 and the purchase of an adjoining 75-acre farm and the conversion of the four-room home into Gatlinburg's first medical clinic. One story shared in the local newspapers at the time in 1920 described an instance where a 10-year-old boy with a badly broken leg was carried on a stretcher for several miles over hazardous terrain in a rainstorm and over a narrow pole bridge by Miss Evelyn and a helper to the nurse and newly supplied Settlement School clinic.

While most residents were initially skeptical of the Pi Beta Phi Settlement School,

as a result of Miss Evelyn's heroic efforts, every person in the region came to know and love "Miss Evelyn" and everyone wanted their children to attend Miss Evelyn's school, which continues to exist and is successful still today. A nearby street bears her name. The internet is a fertile reading ground for those who wish to read further about this remarkable soul.

I personally met Aunt Evelyn two times — once when I was eight and once when I was 12. She was truly a very kind and remarkable person. She was perhaps the single most influential person in my father's life. George Douglas Crain graduated from a rural high school in Fairhaven, Ohio, in 1938 and travelled to Tennessee to help his Aunt Evelyn build a boarding house for the single female teachers of the Settlement School who had difficulty finding lodging in this rural community.

This is where my father learned the crafts of masonry, carpentry, plumbing and general construction, but more importantly, he learned valuable lessons on how to live an exemplary life in an honest

and Christian-like manner from a remarkable human being and one of the best teachers one could hope for. The two years that my father spent under Aunt Evelyn's influence helped set his moral compass in the right direction and kindled faith in God and a love for education and learning that he passed along to his wife and children in years to come.

Henrietta McCutchen Huff, a Gatlinburg resident and teacher in the Settlement School, wrote the following about Evelyn Bishop in 1961 upon her passing:

"On April 29, 1961, Evelyn Bishop reached the end of life's trail. That day, Gatlinburg lost its best beloved citizen and Pi Beta Phi, one of its most effective exponents of fraternity ideals.

It would take chapters to tell how 'Miss Evelyn' wove her art of living into the fabric of the community. Those were crucial years when the School project needed shaping and steering. Her big test came during the flu epidemic of 1918. Without a doctor or any nurses, the people turned to 'Miss Evelyn.' She walked the trails to remote cabins, giving personal care and teaching worried men and women how to care for the sick. Not a single person died of the flu. Her courageous and tireless response dissolved the town's last reservations about the School and sparked a whole community's affection for 'Miss Evelyn.'

What 'Miss Evelyn' gave of herself cannot be measured. Children learned to appreciate their heritage of ballads and folk songs in her daily visit to 'chapel.' Her lovely contralto entertained visiting Pi Phi's, comforted bereaved mountain families, and livened evenings for the staff. Fittingly, her piano was bequeathed to the School."

Said a physician of her flu ordeal: "I believe her physical powers were kept up by her confidence in God and her loyalty to goodness."

What an epitaph! God bless "Miss Evelyn."