



Evelyn Hutchins was born in Snohomish, Washington in 1910 and developed an independent spirit as a child. Her divorced mother was a worker and agitator for suffrage for women, her stepfather a maritime worker blacklisted on the west coast for striking. Evelyn moved to New York as a young woman to be a dancer, but wound up in burlesque clubs when the Depression forced her to accept any work.

Educated in the school of hard knocks, she demanded respect as a feminist. When the Spanish Civil War broke out, she drove trucks to collect clothing and other humanitarian aid to ship to Spain, and when the call for recruits for the American Medical Bureau went out in late 1936, she volunteered to be an ambulance driver. However, the organizers considered her unqualified for the risky work because she was a woman. Hutchins continued to agitate for the opportunity and eventually convinced them to send her to Spain. There she served courageously as a truck driver, experiencing dangerous combat conditions on many occasions.

Excerpt from an Interview with Evelyn Hutchins

I went to drive. They probably considered that in case something went wrong I could do a lot of clerical work. On that basis they were willing to send me there.

I had driven a number of ambulances here around the city, taking them back and forth to the boat, and they were satisfied that I really could handle the cars. It was found that I could drive the car as well as, and better than, some of the fellows who were going...Some fellows thought it was very funny that I should be there driving. I am little but I never made any attempt to swagger or act mannish. I acted just the way I always acted. I used to argue with them about it. They would say, "You are so little, what can you do?" And I would tell them, "I am just me." I was a girl, I was small and didn't weigh much but I was doing a job and wasn't that enough. They would like to take pictures of me next to my truck; because I was small they thought it was very funny. Some of them would say, "All I have to do is give one hard blow and you'll keel over." But the important thing was that the fellows who understood why I wanted to be there, why I had taken the job of driving which was the only possibility of getting as close as I could to the actual fighting, they didn't think a girl shouldn't want to fight and have a machine gun instead of driving a car - these fellows were the fellows who took the thing seriously, and I found them to have a more serious and level headed attitude about things that happened.

I always had to shift for myself and take care of myself and make my own decisions, and sometimes it would be tough on me. If that conditions you, I was conditioned. On the other hand I have always been very incensed at a lot of different injustices I have seen, and at the injustices I have seen against women. I have been frustrated so many times because I was not a man. So I probably see things faster than somebody else who doesn't care. Some girls might not mind not being allowed to go to the army...I was always told by everybody that I must not do this, or I must not do that because girls don't do those things. I was told so many times that girls are inferior to men, that men can do things and girls can't, and I couldn't take it. I didn't care how hard it was on me.

So far as the political situation in Europe, I am not like some people who think that all this stuff is just propaganda. I remember when Mussolini issued a decree - I was just a kid at the time - he issued a decree that women were not to wear short skirts,



[...]

and that they were to keep their proper places. Well, Mussolini was definitely out so far as I was concerned. I was convinced that anybody with that kind of an attitude was absolutely no good for the people generally. I never felt that I was an outstanding genius, but people had to give me a chance to think and develop whatever thinkabilities I had. If a person would not give me a chance I would fight them. Hitler has the system where he sends women to camps to be breeders. That strikes me at my very most innermost desire for freedom, and self-expression, and for culture, and education. Just being an ordinary human-being I couldn't tolerate a thing like that. It has gotten to mean so much to me that I don't care what I do in the process of fighting against conditions like that.

I got the idea of going to Spain first and then my husband got the idea and my brother got the idea, and they got there ahead of me. And I worked so hard to go over there. I had saved money for it, I had to convince people. I had to argue with them, and to prove things. But the average fellow or my husband had no difficulty getting there. It might have helped that he was there. I don't know....I went over there because I wanted to do a job.

(The complete interview can be found in John Dollard's
manuscript collection: ALBA Collection #122, Tamiment
Library, New York University.)