

With All Her Might: The Life of Gertrude Harding Militant Suffragette

Gretchen Wilson

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Extraordinary stories can come from the most ordinary of lives. First-time author Gretchen Wilson's chronicle of the life of her great-aunt is one such tale. *With All Her Might* is a compelling insider's guide into the struggle that won women the right to vote in Great Britain.

The youngest of seven children, Harding grew up on a farm in New Brunswick, Canada, until the discovery of a minor heart ailment sent her to Honolulu to live with her older sister. Her life was sheltered and comfortable, but she was entirely dependent on the generosity of male relatives (her sister's wealthy husband nearly had Harding evicted when he learned of her "disgraceful" one-day job at a local cafe).

On her first trip to London in 1912, Harding witnessed a poster parade for women's suffrage and quickly volunteered as an "errand girl" for one of the most militant groups in the movement. Like most suffragettes, Harding risked disapproval and even disassociation from family members. Some of her compatriots were jailed and others participated in hunger strikes. She eventually worked as a bodyguard for the group's leader, Christabel Pankhurst. Harding's own first-person accounts, pen sketches, political cartoons and photos of her life and activities are rounded out by Wilson's historical research. In sharing her great-aunt's story as a human rights activist, Wilson reminds us of the debt we owe to those whose blood, sweat and tears won the rights we take for granted today.

SHARON FLESHER (July / August 1998)

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