

The Legacy of Evelyn J. Mackin, PT

1922 - 2020

Describing Evelyn J. Mackin via a litany of her many accomplishments fails to capture the essence of her being. Her dynamic abilities and visionary capacity stemmed from a combination of diversified qualities. Evelyn's inherent compassion was apparent to all who knew her. She was extremely kind hearted and nurturing, as exemplified by her love for animals and her unwavering devotion to family, friends, and colleagues. Evelyn was exceptionally organized, focused, and dedicated regarding professional objectives, not for herself, but for the benefit of hand / upper extremity (UE) patients everywhere. Her commitment to hand rehabilitation included developing and advancing associated educational endeavors and related organizations locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally. Never confrontational, she quietly negotiated and navigated around barriers that arose as she worked toward these goals. Telling Evelyn "no" only made her more resolute in her efforts to improve patient care through advancing the science and art of hand therapy. Generating trust in those with whom she worked, her inner core of ethics could not be deterred. Always fair, Evelyn consistently gave credit where credit was due; she disdained petty politics; and her love of people and travel made her a natural ambassador.

The following is an annotated timeline of Evelyn's remarkable contributions to hand / UE rehabilitation. Brief quotations, many taken from her written works, provide insight into Evelyn, the person, therapist, and advocate. Readers are encouraged to delve further into these short narratives by perusing the cited full-text references.

Hand Rehabilitation Center (*now the Philadelphia Hand to Shoulder Center*)

Upon graduation from the University of Pennsylvania in Physical Therapy in 1944, Evelyn worked with a wide range of patients including children and veterans. After a fifteen year hiatus as a homemaker, Evelyn returned to the workforce in 1967 to begin working with hand surgeon, James Hunter, MD.[1]

In 1972, Drs. Hunter and Schneider, and Evelyn Mackin founded the Philadelphia Hand Rehabilitation Center that was based on the concept advocated by Paul Brand, FRCS, of integrating hand surgery and rehabilitation to improve patient outcomes.[2] In 1974, a decade following the first American Society for Surgery of the Hand (ASSH) meeting emphasizing tendon surgery in the hand, Drs. Hunter and Schneider, and Evelyn held "*Another Decade of Tendon Surgery*" symposium.[3] Along with highly regarded hand surgeons, Evelyn was the only therapist to present at this meeting and her information was so well received that a new platform for surgeon-therapist conferences was envisioned. Subsequently, in 1976, the Hand Rehabilitation Foundation organized a symposium called "*Surgery and Rehabilitation of the Hand*" that included the then, novel practice of surgeons and therapists sharing the meeting podium.[4] Dr. James Strickland and I were one of the surgeon-therapist pairs to present at this meeting that was attended by 450 surgeons and therapists at the historic Benjamin Franklin Hotel.[4] One year later

(1977), Dr. Hunter and Evelyn were our invited guest speakers when Drs. Strickland and Steichen, and I opened the Hand Rehabilitation Center of Indiana.

The renowned Philadelphia Hand symposium is now in its 45th consecutive year. These internationally acclaimed symposia have generated seven editions of the *Rehabilitation of the Hand* tomes, affectionately known as the “*hand therapists’ bibles*”. [4-10] Evelyn was one of the primary Editors on each of the first five editions of these books. [4-8] Her superb organization skills and ability to select therapist authors based on expertise were vital to content and to meeting publisher deadlines. Additionally, Hunter, Schneider, and Mackin were editors for two editions of *Tendon Surgery in the Hand* books published in 1987 and 1997. Including discussions and chapters by surgeons and therapists, both books are based on proceedings from conferences held in 1984 and 1994 respectively. [11, 12]

In 1990, Evelyn became a Board Member of the Hand Rehabilitation Foundation [13, 14]; and in 1992 she was promoted to Executive Director of this distinguished Foundation [2]. A formal portrait of Evelyn was presented at the faculty banquet of the “*Surgery and Rehabilitation of the Hand*” Symposium in 2003. [15]

Throughout her professional career, Evelyn was an advocate for therapist and surgeon education:

“We have the responsibility to provide and develop in the staff and students the professional and personal characteristics that will serve them for years to come. Our success or failure will be reflected in them, because the composite of their individual enthusiasm, knowledge, skills, vision, values and humaneness is a determinant of what our profession will become. And let their sights never be narrow, for hand therapy will encompass the world.” [16]

Organizations

Always looking to the future, while being supportive and nurturing to those around her, Evelyn worked to advance patient treatment results through her innumerable contributions to ASHT, IFSHT, AHTF, and ASSH. True to her values, she recognized those who helped with significant advancements with which she was associated; while emphasizing the importance of continued growth and compassion for others:

American Society of Hand Therapists (ASHT)

- Evelyn was one of six Founding Members (1975-1978) [2, 17]
“Thus, the American Society of Hand Therapists had its beginning, with the help of those surgeons who gave wise counsel and encouragement to the birth of a new specialty and its society. Dr. George Omer, Dr. Lewis Millender, Dr. Gordon McFarland, and Dr. Robert McFarlane; a special tribute must go to Dr. James Hunter who by his vision and example was making it work at the Hand Rehabilitation Center in Philadelphia.” [16]
- Fourth President (1982)
“Those people who continually maintain a forward momentum are those who, when one door closes, open another. They keep on loving, working and growing; they keep on accepting new challenges to make life interesting and to be the best they can be. And that secret-if it ever was secret - is certainly one of the spirit” . [1]
- Recipient of the First Nathalie Bar Lectureship Award (1986)
“Listening . . . explaining ... and touching the patient truly represent the art of hand therapy. Therapists who practice this “laying on of hands” possess, to begin with, the gift of affection. We like people and have chosen a profession that requires touching. The

close up reassuring massage of the therapist; caring, gentle fingers fitting a splint to a painful, arthritic hand; the encouraging words, "you can do it" and the quiet, comforting discussions between the therapist and patient across the treatment table, during which many things can be worked into the conversation, is a uniquely personal relationship. It has its roots in the beginning of medicine's history and needs preserving."[16]

- Recipient Lifetime Fellowship Award (1990)

International Federation of Societies for Hand Therapy (IFSHT)

"It was shortly after the Congress in Japan that a group of therapists from several countries met during the Congress of La Societe Franaise de Chirurgie de la Main (GEM) in Paris. With encouragement from Drs. Raoul Tubiana and Yves Allieu (France) and R. Georgio Brunelli (Italy), the International Federation of Societies of Hand Therapists was founded."[2] *"The major purpose of the triennial congress is to share information with hand therapists throughout the world".*[18]

- Evelyn was an Inaugural Member
- President, First International Congress (1989, Tel Aviv)
"During these past years since the First Congress held in Rotterdam, therapists have continued to learn from the sciences of biology, biomechanics, anatomy, and neurophysiology, and this quest to learn has not been just in any one country - it's worldwide and our collective knowledge is reflected in growth and change in many clinical areas, including management of healing wounds, splinting, management of the healing tendon, sensibility, evaluation, and return to-work programs".[2]
- President, Second International Congress (1992, Paris)
"... we now have 18 member societies ... In addition, we have [7] corresponding members ..."[2]

American Hand Therapy Foundation (AHTF)

Evelyn served as an AHTF Board member and later as an Advisory Board member. In 2005, AHTF established the ***Evelyn Mackin Grant for Education by a Traveling Hand Therapist***. Offered annually, the purpose of this *"award is to foster professional relationships throughout the international hand therapy community and increase the visibility and quality of hand and upper limb rehabilitation all over the world through education and communication."*[19] In 2015, Evelyn was conferred with the first AHTF Lifetime Achievement Award.

American Society for Surgery of the Hand (ASSH)

In 2008, Evelyn was one of an inaugural group of hand therapists to be accepted into ASSH as Affiliate Members.

Journal of Hand Therapy (JHT)

Serving for ten years (1987-1997) as the first Editor of the Journal of Hand Therapy, Evelyn introduced content editors, practice forums, annual special topic issues, international issues, and established high standards for the Journal. Under her guidance, in 1993, the Journal was included in the all-important Index Medicus and MEDLINE on the MEDLARS system.[20] Over a six year span from the inaugural issue in 1987 to 1993, readership increased to over 4,000 in 42 countries[20, 21]. When a disgruntled vendor threatened to sue the Journal to stop publication of unfavorable product research, Evelyn consulted outside experts and, following extensive reviews, the study was subsequently published.[22, 23] Evelyn was uncompromising when it came to integrity of the Journal. She refused to back down in the face of adversity. She often said that the Journal was her most important and lasting contribution to hand / upper extremity

rehabilitation. Ever concerned about patient care, as Evelyn prepared to retire as the Journal Editor, she cautioned of the potential effects of managed care.

- Editor, 1987-1997

“The Journal will advance the activities of the Society and help its members and other readers attain and maintain expertise, by providing a quarterly forum and resource for all involved in the care of the disabled hand. Its purpose will be to examine critically concepts of evaluation and treatment in current practice and to introduce important new ones. We welcome a rich diversity of views and timely, constructive criticism as essential ingredients of a lively and accurate discussion in these pages ... We intend this Journal to be a refereed publication about which we in the Society can be confident and justly proud.”[21]

“From the Journal's inception, the Editorial Board has been unwavering in its conviction that we maintain standards and that we never compromise these standards in order to fill space or for market expediency. While our readers must pass final judgment, we believe that we have accomplished this goal”[24].

“It is almost impossible to thank all of those who helped us achieve inclusion in the Index ... the Editorial Board, whose commitment ensured that only information that is among the best being produced today be accepted for publication ... our publishers, Hanley & Belfus, who believed that a journal devoted entirely to the specialty of hand therapy had merit ... all those surgeons and therapists who wrote letters in support of the Journal to the NLM committee ... and, most of all, all the authors, who supported the Journal by submitting excellently researched and written papers. On behalf of therapists and surgeons worldwide who need and will benefit from access to the knowledge that has rapidly developed in the area of hand treatment, we sincerely thank these authors.”[20]

“With a multifaceted interest in managed care, for better or for worse, the federal government is, to a very large extent, shaping the destiny of hand therapy. Our role must be to preserve the principles that allow the hand therapist to provide quality care as we strive to meet these demands and to adjust to or find the mechanics under which we can best serve our patients.”[25]

International Networking

In addition to her involvement in creating the IFSHT, Evelyn frequently served as invited faculty at international symposia. Along with many other hand therapists, Evelyn and I often shared in this capacity representing hand therapists from our parent disciplines of physical and occupational therapy respectively. Since hand therapy had its beginnings in the United States, therapists from other countries quickly became intrigued by the concept, especially as hand surgeons with whom they worked urged them to learn more about this rapidly developing specialty. Together, we presented in ten countries and sixteen cities; and this was minuscule compared to the number of countries and cities in which Evelyn served as invited faculty alone. Furthermore, she worked with Dr. Pillet in Paris helping with his special prostheses for those who sustained hand/UE amputations. This cooperative venture eventually led to Dr. Pillet starting amputee clinics in the United States with Evelyn as an integral part of the team that included technicians, secretary/schedulers, and eventually more hand therapists. As hand therapy became established in countries outside the United States, Evelyn's travel continued but with a different focus. Instead of helping therapists begin hand therapy models and facilities, she worked to expand knowledge bases, especially in the arena of postoperative tendon rehabilitation.[4, 5, 7, 8, 11, 12, 26, 27] Additionally, in 1996, along with celebrated

French hand surgeon, Raoul Tubiana, MD, and Jean-Michael Thomine, MD, French orthopaedic surgeon, Evelyn was an editor on the book, "Examination of the Hand and Wrist".[28] There is no question that Evelyn was the single most influential therapist to shape hand/UE rehabilitation concepts internationally.

Difficult Times

Witnessing hand therapy spread nationally and internationally was exhilarating, challenging, and fun; but heartbreaking times were stark reminders that life is precious. In 1987, Evelyn's husband, Alexander, died. His funeral coincided with a workshop in New Brunswick, Canada to which she had previously committed; and Evelyn asked me to substitute for her. Two days later and armed with 32-pounds of slides (no PowerPoints in those days) that she express-mailed to me, I was on my way to Canada.

Six years after her husband's death, Evelyn and I were faculty in 1993, at a conference organized by hand surgeon, Frank Burke, FRCS, in Derby, England. We had a layover at London's Claridge Hotel before catching our flight home the next day. Arriving at the Hotel in late evening, we were stunned to see TV reports of the first World Trade Center (WTC) bombing. It was surreal to be away from our beloved homeland when it was attacked. Two years later, the Oklahoma City bombing occurred; and on September 11, 2001, the Twin Towers came down. These escalating episodes, over eight years, had a cumulative effect on Evelyn. In London, she was tearfully disturbed at the WTC bombing. When the 1995 Murrah Building bombing occurred, Evelyn reacted by publishing an editorial unlike anything she had previously generated. She substituted her scheduled Journal Editorial space with a narrative of the bombing aftermath written by Patti Mullins, a hand therapist from Oklahoma City. Evelyn titled the substituted Editorial describing the scene and reactions of emergency and medical personnel, "Lest We Forget".[29] This chronicle continues to bring tears to those who read it. Finally, the loss of life and obliteration of the Twin Towers were horrendous events experienced collectively by humanity on a near worldwide scale. Evelyn was a member of the "*Greatest Generation*" and she, as those who lived through WWII, was deeply influenced by its massive casualties and destruction. Gentle and kind, she could never bring herself to speak of the Twin Towers carnage. Instead, she would shake her head and walk away if the subject arose.

Family

Evelyn's resilience came from her love of family. She was so very proud of her son, his wife, her two granddaughters; and her nephew. She loved them dearly. In 1998, Evelyn married Robert T. Henry, Jr., DVM (Bob) and embraced his grown children, three daughters; a son, and his grandchildren as her own.[30] Bob, a veterinarian, encouraged Evelyn to continue her hand therapy work and travels; and was much beloved by her friends and colleagues. Sadly, Bob died in 2007. Evelyn continued to be active in her travels and support of the Hand Rehabilitation Foundation, its symposia; and the hand therapy organizations she supported until her retirement in 2015.

Personal Mantras

Evelyn had two mantras that she readily shared. She consistently reminded colleagues of the importance of sharing professional knowledge and expertise. Many of her presentations as well as some of her written works ended in a passionate reminder to "Pass it on"! Evelyn most certainly was the epitome of this philosophy. It is impossible to imagine where hand / UE rehabilitation would be and the patients we treat without her extensive and important contributions. Her second, more personal, mantra was gently shared with coworkers and close colleagues: "Family comes first". She confided that this was the more important of the two.

-Elaine Ewing Fess, OTD, MS, OTR, FAOTA, CHT

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