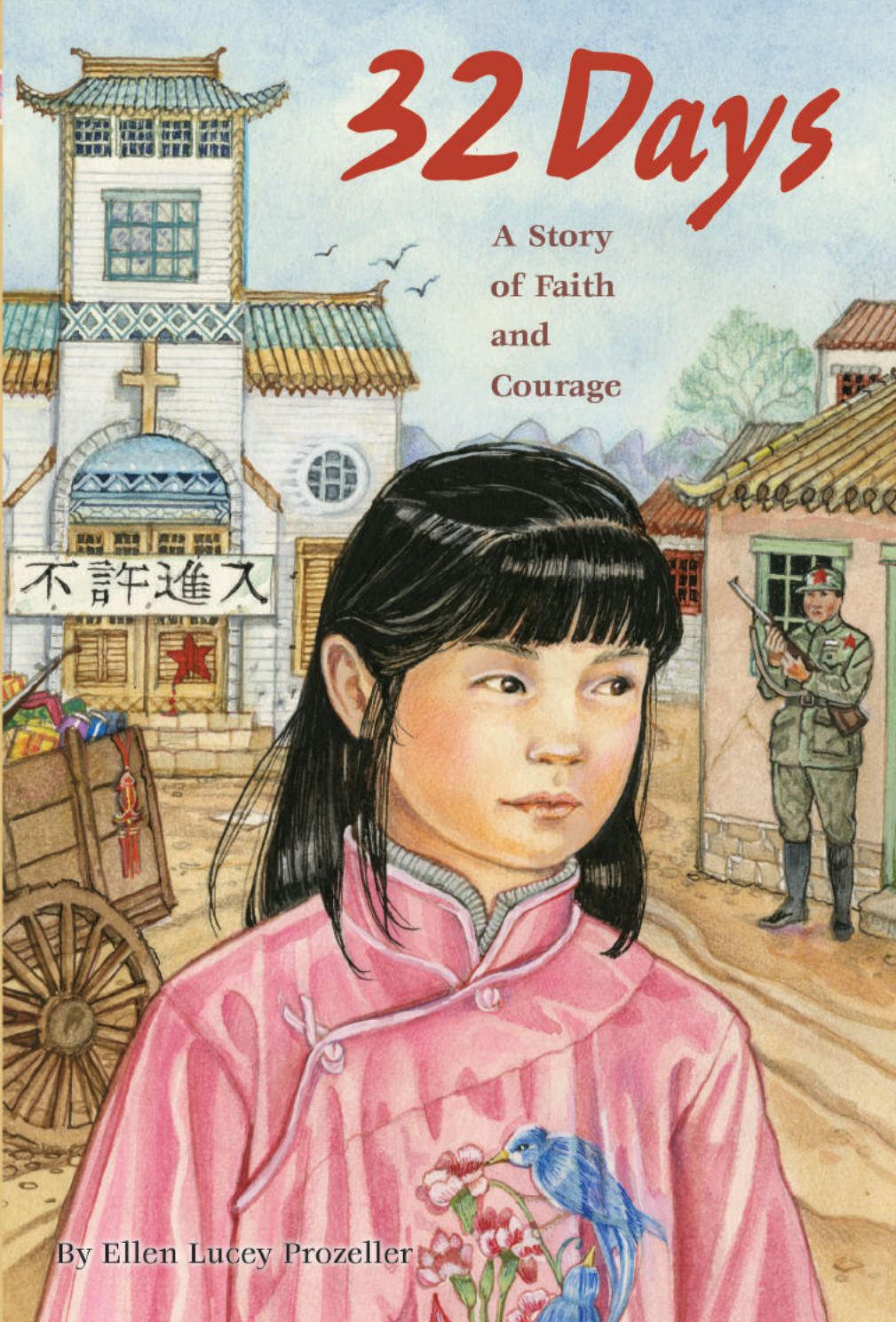


32 Days

A Story
of Faith
and
Courage



By Ellen Lucey Prozeller

32 Days

32 Days

A Story of Faith and Courage



Written by Ellen Lucey Prozeller

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Prozeller, Ellen Lucey.

Title: 32 days : a story of faith and courage / written by Ellen Lucey Prozeller.

Other titles: Thirty-two days

Description: Boston : Pauline Books & Media, 2016. | Summary: Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen relates the story of young Pei, whose devotion to the Blessed Sacrament in 1948 China, at the risk of her life, inspired him to spend more time with Jesus. Includes historical information, discussion questions, and glossary.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016012138 | ISBN 9780819806574 (pbk.) | ISBN 0819806579 (pbk.)

Subjects: | CYAC: Christian life--Fiction. | Lord's Supper--Fiction. | Communism--Fiction. | Family life--China--Fiction. | Catholics--Fiction. | China--History--1949--Fiction. | Sheen, Fulton J. (Fulton John), 1895-1979--Fiction.

Classification: LCC PZ7.1.P785 Aah 2016 | DDC [Fic]--dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2016012138>

Design by Sr. Mary Joseph Peterson

Cover art by Carlotta Tormey

This is a fictionalized account based on the true story of an eleven-year-old Chinese girl who risked her life to visit Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. The story also includes Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen. While Archbishop Sheen and the Chinese girl, whose name has been lost to history, are real historical figures, elements of this story are fictional products of the author's imagination.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

"P" and PAULINE are registered trademarks of the Daughters of St. Paul.

Copyright © 2016, Ellen Prozeller

Published by Pauline Books & Media, 50 Saint Pauls Avenue, Boston, MA 02130-3491

Printed in the U.S.A.

32DSFC VSAUSAPEOILL6-710062 0657-9

www.pauline.org

Pauline Books & Media is the publishing house of the Daughters of St. Paul, an international congregation of women religious serving the Church with the communications media.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

20 19 18 17 16

This book is dedicated to
Ignatius Cardinal Kung Pin-Mei,
Venerable Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen,
and Our Lady of Sheshan

Contents

Introduction	1
Prologue	5
Chapter 1: Facing the Beast	9
Chapter 2: The Communists Are Near	13
Chapter 3: NaiNai and YeYe	18
Chapter 4: An Unexpected Gift	24
Chapter 5: Pei Visits Jesus	29
Chapter 6: Christmas Day	35
Chapter 7: Captain Chen's Brutality	40
Chapter 8: Comrade Zhao	46
Chapter 9: An Attack in Church	52
Chapter 10: A Secret Message	58
Chapter 11: The New Year	65
Chapter 12: A Risky Adventure	70
Chapter 13: The Pink Jacket	75
Chapter 14: A Near Escape	80
Chapter 15: Trouble at School	85
Chapter 16: A Change of Heart	92
Chapter 17: A Secret Is Revealed	97
Chapter 18: The Last Visit	103
Epilogue	109
Editor's Note	112
Discussion Questions	114
Glossary	116

Introduction

Near the end of his life, Archbishop Fulton Sheen shared with a television journalist an event in a young Chinese girl's life that deeply inspired his prayer life. We know very little else about this young girl. Even her name is lost to history. But her courage and faith have not been forgotten. This book is a fictionalized account of Archbishop Sheen's interview and the shocking events in this young girl's life, which have inspired many people.

32 Days is not a history book, but it is a book about faith and courage. However, to understand the events that take place in this book, it is important to know a little about the history of China and the time in which this story occurs.

Christianity was first introduced to China in the seventh century by an Assyrian monk named Alopen. By 1700 there were about 200,000 Catholics in China. Unfortunately, the emperor at the time was angered that the Church did not allow certain native ceremonies, so he ordered all the missionaries to leave at once.

Then, in the 1800s things began to change. There was more Western influence in China, and Christianity had more freedom to spread. Many missionaries went to China to evangelize the people and establish churches and schools. During this period many people converted to the Catholic faith.

In the 1920s China was divided between two opposing political forces: the Nationalist Party and the Chinese Communist Party. On one side, the Nationalist leader, Chiang Kai-shek (Chee-ahng Kye-shek), with support from the United States, wanted the rich to maintain control, and he also wanted to modernize China. On the other side, the Communists, led by Mao Zedong (Maow Zuh-dohng) and supported by Russia, wanted a society without a ruling class and without religion.

Because they were promised a better life, many peasants supported the Communists. The Communists were able to take control—first of

the countryside and then of the major cities –without much resistance. In 1949, Mao Zedong declared the beginning of the People’s Republic of China.

The new Communist government forbade the practice of religion. Foreign-born priests and religious brothers and sisters were expelled from China. Those priests, brothers, and sisters who were born in China were imprisoned in harsh labor camps or sentenced to death if they continued to cling to their ministry and religious vocation.

The story of the girl who inspired Archbishop Sheen takes place in 1948 in a little village near Shanghai, China, just before the Communists took over the government.

Prologue

A white-haired bishop sat in an easy chair across from his interviewer in a small TV studio. This wasn't the first time he had been in front of the cameras. No. He had plenty of experience on his own television show, *Life Is Worth Living*. Known for his warmth and humor, Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen had been a very popular and influential TV personality in the 1950s and 1960s. His weekly show had been watched by millions of people, Catholic and non-Catholic alike. Archbishop Sheen had become famous for his ability to explain deep ideas in a simple way, often while writing on an ever-present blackboard. With a big smile on his face, he enjoyed bringing the Gospel to anyone willing to watch.

It was now 1979, and Archbishop Sheen felt just as at home on this production set as he had on his old one. With a sign from the director, the show began and so did the interview.

“It’s an honor to welcome Archbishop Fulton Sheen to our show. Is this pretty much like the set you had on *Life Is Worth Living?*” asked the interviewer.

“Almost . . .” the archbishop responded with a chuckle. “But you’re missing a very important part—the blackboard!”

“I’m afraid I don’t have a blackboard, Archbishop Sheen. But as you can see and feel, we have plenty of studio lights.”

“Yes,” the archbishop agreed, wiping his brow. “They’re certainly hot!”

“I remember your show, Archbishop Sheen. I bet we all do,” said the interviewer while gesturing toward the studio audience. “In fact, I’d go so far as to say that you are perhaps the greatest and most beloved preacher of the twentieth century.”

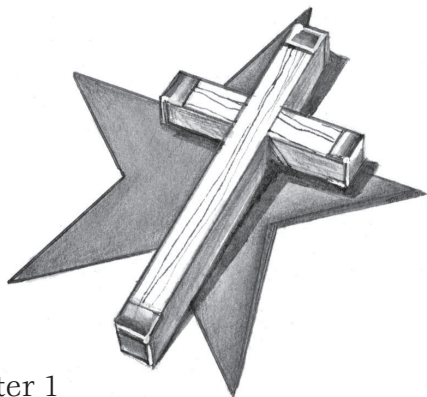
Archbishop Sheen smiled. “Don’t stuff my head with such praise; it’s big enough already! But seriously, I hope that people grew closer to God with the help of my show and that they never forget that the love of God—especially Jesus in the Holy Eucharist—is by far the most important thing to remember.”

“Archbishop Sheen, you’ve met popes, bishops, priests, world leaders, and various holy men and women. Of all of them, who has inspired you the most?”

The archbishop did not think long before responding. With a twinkle in his eyes, he said, “You’re right. I’ve been blessed to meet all kinds of famous and important people—but none of them inspired me more than a little Chinese girl. I never met her, but ever since I heard about her, she has inspired me to impress upon my listeners the importance of spending time with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and not taking him for granted.”

“Really?” the interviewer asked, intrigued. “A little Chinese girl?”

“She was eleven years old,” Archbishop Sheen began, “and in many ways she was just an ordinary girl. Yet her courage and love for Jesus in the Most Blessed Sacrament made her quite extraordinary. Would you like to hear her story?”



Chapter 1

Facing the Beast

The sun was bright, but Pei (Pay) was inside helping MaMa clean their small home in the countryside outside of Shanghai, China.

Pei looked out the window wistfully. *When will my chores be done so I can go play?* she wondered.

Because of the war, life was becoming more difficult for Pei's family. It seemed as though every day brought less time to play and more time for chores so her parents could provide food for their small family. Suddenly, Pei was startled out of her daydreaming.

"Take me out—now!" demanded Pei's little sister, Ling, with a stomp of her foot. "I want to go outside! Pleeeeease?"

Pei shook her head. She had so much to do to help MaMa.

“Look,” four-year-old Ling continued while pointing to her head. “I’m already wearing my warm hat.”

“But I have chores to do,” Pei explained, as she adjusted Ling’s hat. “It *would* be nice to get some fresh air, though. I suppose we *could* go if we didn’t stay too long. All right, let’s ask MaMa!”

Ling clapped her chubby hands as Pei grabbed her hat. Holding hands, the two sisters left their small house with their mother’s permission. The girls smiled as they breathed in the fresh, clean air.

“Aah,” said Ling as she sniffed the air with her nose. “It smells nice out here. Not like our house!”

“Yes, it’s lovely. And look over there, Ling! Let’s get some stones. Do you want me to show you how to make them skip when we get to the pond?”

“Yeah!” said Ling, as she ran on short legs to the pile of stones nearby.

“Look for big, flat ones; they work best,” added Pei. Once their pockets were filled, the two strolled on past the edge of the village and toward the pond.

“See the yellow and white flowers?” asked Pei, as she drew Ling’s attention to a fragrant bush. “It’s wintersweet, and it’s MaMa’s favorite. She likes it because it smells so good. I’m going to break some stems off for her.”

While Pei was gathering the wintersweet branches, Ling ran ahead.

Hearing her sister's laugh, Pei looked up and called out, "Don't get so far ahead of me, Ling! You could get hurt or—"

Suddenly, the earth shook and the sound of thundering hooves drowned out Pei's voice.

"Ling!" shouted Pei, as a big, wild boar bared its tusks and raced toward her little sister.

The younger girl was filled with terror while Pei, heart pounding, sprinted to try and protect her. Although Pei hadn't heard of any recent wild boar attacks, her parents had always warned her to flee from the dangerous animals. Pei scooped up Ling and froze. The huge animal was nearly upon them!

"Leave us alone!" Pei yelled as she held a trembling Ling tight.

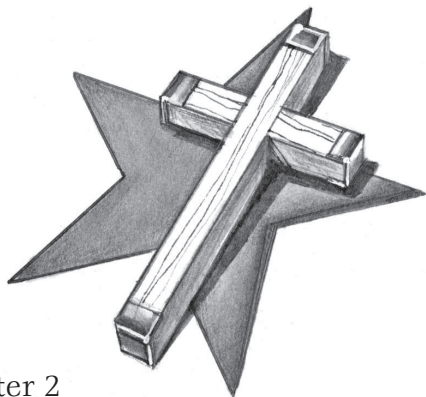
Ling hid her tear-soaked face in her sister's neck. Pei could smell the beast's stench. Its fierce eyes flashed and its sharp tusks dripped with thick, white drool. Pei's mind was racing. *O God, what do I do? Help us!* Quickly, hardly thinking, Pei reached down, grasped a handful of dirt, and threw it at the charging boar.

The cloud of dirt covered the boar's face, startling but not stopping him. Angrier than ever, the boar backed up, lowered his head, and charged

the sisters. Convinced that they had only moments to live, Pei grabbed the first stone she found in her pocket and hurled it at the animal. Then Pei scrunched her eyes shut and turned her back to the beast, hoping to protect her sister. *“Jesus, save us!”* she prayed.

The boar’s low growl suddenly changed to a high pitched squeal. Pei had hit her target! Opening her eyes and turning, Pei saw the beast run back into the woods. She sighed in relief, and dropped to the ground with Ling still in her arms.

“Thank you, Jesus,” Pei whispered. “Thank you.”



Chapter 2

The Communists Are Near

Breathless, with cheeks red from running in the chilly air, the girls burst through the door to their home.

“Oh, MaMa!” Pei cried, throwing her arms around MaMa’s neck. “I’ve never been so happy to be home! We barely escaped! God protected us!”

“What?!” asked MaMa, who quickly put down her embroidery work to look at her daughters.

“MaMa, a big, stinky, ugly animal wanted to eat us!” said Ling.

“Good heavens, girls, what happened?” cried MaMa.

“We were going to skip some stones by the pond when suddenly—” began Pei.

"A big, ugly, stinky thing came running at us. He would have eaten us, too, if Pei hadn't saved us," Ling added, with a huge smile on her face.

"Well, thank God he didn't! I can't even imagine losing you girls." MaMa hugged them, and said with tears in her eyes, "I am just so happy and grateful to God for keeping you safe. Tonight we will pray in thanksgiving as a family."

After Pei and Ling's older brother, Min, and BaBa, their father, came home, Ling retold the whole story. This time she pounded her feet on the floor to make the thundering sound and put her hands near her mouth to look like long tusks.

"And he was so ugly!" she said. "I was brave, though. Pei said so."

"I'm sure you were," said Min, "but it was Pei who saved the day."

"No," Pei put in quietly. "Jesus saved us both."

"You're right, of course," BaBa said, "but your quick thinking helped. You're a very brave girl, Pei," he said, patting the top of her head. "But we have more dangerous things to discuss."

"*More danger?*" asked MaMa, her face lined with worry.

"I'm afraid so. A couple arrived from Shanghai today and told some of us about the ongoing civil war between the Nationalist Party and the Communist Party."

"What did they say?" asked MaMa.

"They said the Communists are winning the battle for control of the country."

"I'm glad we don't live closer to Shanghai!" Min exclaimed.

"The fighting doesn't just involve those who live in Shanghai, son. We're all affected by it, or will be," explained BaBa.

"Everyone at church is so frightened about what might happen," MaMa added. "Some of the women said the Communist army even evacuated a few villages near the Basilica of Our Lady of Sheshan (Sheh-shahn). They think they can stop people from going there to pray."

Pei remembered her parents telling her how the Chinese people in the area of Shanghai gave the Virgin Mary the title of Our Lady of Sheshan because the basilica built in her honor was near Mount Sheshan. As Pei listened to her mother, she felt sadness wash over her. She knew that the basilica was special to the people; they trusted in Mary to pray for them.

"The Communists don't believe in God, and they don't want anyone else to believe either. A lot of people will probably stop visiting the basilica. They may be so afraid that they'll even stop going to church altogether," BaBa said, somberly.

“BaBa,” began Pei, “do you really think things are going to change that much?”

“Yes, Pei, I do. People are desperate for a better life,” BaBa answered. “Just look at our little village. No one has money to buy clothes or fix their houses. We certainly don’t have much, but there are many families with even less.”

“The Communists have promised food and work and other good things. Many people believe them,” said MaMa, wringing her hands. “But people don’t realize what the Communists will take. There may be no place for freedom or faith in China anymore.”

“I hope they forget about our little village,” said Min.

Shrugging her shoulders, Ling reasoned, “Maybe we’re so small they won’t find us.”

Smiling at the youngest child in the family, BaBa said, “I don’t think the size of our village will matter much to them. Mr. Liang has a sister who lives in Shanghai with her family. She told him that the Communists are mistreating Christians, and they’re closing churches because they reject the existence of God.”

“How can they not believe in God?” asked Pei. “Don’t they know that God loves them?”

BaBa looked at her and nodded, “That’s just it, Pei. They don’t believe in God.”

"That's so sad, BaBa. I'm afraid of what will happen if they come here," added Pei.

"Children, we trust God. We can ask him to help us and all our neighbors. We can also ask God to show the Communists his truth," BaBa said, confidently.

"Let's ask Our Lady of Sheshan to pray with us and for us," MaMa suggested.

Ling went to sit on MaMa's lap, and together the family prayed the Rosary. They prayed in thanksgiving for Pei and Ling having survived the boar attack. They also prayed for their fellow villagers and that the Communists would stop hurting Christians.

After praying, Pei and Ling went to sleep on the bed they shared. The thin mattress, on top of a wooden plank and low to the ground, was covered with warm blankets. Ling fell asleep right away, but Pei's mind would not rest.

What will the Communists do to us if they come here? Pei wondered. Will they take our food? Will they close our church?