



Skidmore, Patricia. (2018). Marjorie: Her War Years, A British Home Child in Canada. Toronto: Dundurn Press.

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Patricia Skidmore's compelling book, "Marjorie: Her War Years" recounts her mother's life and harrowing experiences as an involuntary participant in the British Home Child program; this practice consisted of removing the children of England's poor "from the streets" and deporting them to the colonies under the guise of improving their prospects (p. 24). Much of the book focuses on the hardship and abuse the author's mother, Marjorie, experienced as she was removed from her home at the age of ten and sent to the Fairbridge Farm School in British Columbia. Skidmore thoroughly conveys the repercussions of child deportation as the book covers the span of Marjorie's life and explores themes of family, resiliency, and intergenerational trauma. Skidmore's judicious use of primary sources, combined with her expressive tone and diction, underlines her criticism of child deportation and evokes reader empathy.

The author convincingly portrays the gravity of child deportation through her comprehensive analysis and depiction of the matter. Skidmore establishes the book's premise by describing her motive and method for her work, the rationale behind child deportation and her rebuttal for the practice. The reasoning behind the deportation of poor British children essentially was that their lives were worth more as an "imperial investment" to the colonies, to be trained as

skilled labourers “in a country where they were wanted,” and that by doing so they would have a better life (pp. 9, 12). However, Skidmore resolutely disproves this claim in that “95 percent of the 329 children sent [to Fairbridge] were not orphans,” as the British government claimed, but “had families from whom they were cut off” (p. 20). She later describes the austere environment Marjorie grew up in at the farm school, which was undoubtedly worse than her working-class family life. The author also cites the Doyle Report, an investigation which found that deportation did not benefit the children “but simply [was a way] of getting rid of them at a cheap rate” (p. 23). Skidmore portrays the full scope of child deportation by discussing Marjorie’s life before, during, and after her time at the Fairbridge Farm School, concluding with an afterword which outlines the pervasive and detrimental intergenerational impact. From beginning to end, Skidmore convinces the reader of the harm of the British child migration scheme, all while highlighting the importance and protective factors of a family bond.

The importance of family, specifically the sense of care, protection and belonging they offer, is a prominent theme throughout “Marjorie: Her War Years.” Skidmore highlights the stark differences between the quality of care her mother, Marjorie, received from her family and the caretakers at Fairbridge, which further convinces the reader of the damage caused by child deportation. The author states that before her emigration, Marjorie had “the love of her mother” and siblings, and more, she had a “family,” “identity,” and “community” (p. 19). However, her family was “torn apart” when she was sent to a place where her “new ‘mothers’” continually declared that she was a “wretched British orphan... barely worth the effort it took to take care of her” (pp. 19, 20). Marjorie’s guardians showed little affection for their wards. They would fre-

quently verbally abuse them and subjugate them to humiliating punishments for misdeeds such as wetting their beds by calling the offender “Miss Pissy Pants” and forcing the girl to put her soiled underwear “on [her] head and march around [the] room” (p. 86). The love Marjorie initially received from her mother was “never replaced;” instead, her experiences at the farm marked her childhood with “loneliness mixed with fear and confusion” (p. 20). Skidmore develops a compelling case for the importance of family and the harm caused by Marjorie’s deportation, one she also convinces her readers of through her persuasive appeal to pathos.

Patricia Skidmore’s narrative, along with her tone and diction, effectively appeals to pathos and evokes empathy in the readers. The variance in the author’s tone between her earnest and impassioned description of her mother’s resilience and her acerbic and frank discussion of the disastrous British Home Child program clearly exhibits her perspective. Further, the simple yet emotional diction used in the narrative of Marjorie’s life, one replete with stories of injustice, cruelty, and despair, powerfully elicits compassion in the reader. One particularly upsetting element of Marjorie’s story is the complete vulnerability she and the other children experienced at Fairbridge; in a letter which she wrote shortly after arriving at the school, Marjorie describes the relentless bullying, her cruel and preferential cottage mother, and her fear of sexual abuse (pp. 55-57). Skidmore also describes the bullying and mistreatment Marjorie’s brother, Kenny, experienced and his fear of sexual abuse from older boys and duty masters, compounding the overall lack of safety (pp. 90, 184-185). Skidmore effectively persuades the reader of the horrors of child deportation through her appeal to pathos, a position she further supports with credible evidence.

Skidmore supports her unrestrained criticism of child deportation through a compelling appeal to logos. She presents significant evidence of the harm of the British child migration scheme throughout her book in the form of correspondence, newspaper excerpts, pamphlets, and quotes (pp. 9, 10, 12, 18, 25, 60, 125). One of Marjorie and her sister, Audrey's, bi-annual progress reports are included, as well as photos, verifying the narrative of their time at Fairbridge (pp. 44, 74, 101). The author also cites the 2018 Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, which revealed that "the Fairbridge Society in England knew of the alleged sexual abuse of child migrants" but failed to remove the perpetrators, stating the "difficulties in obtaining trained staff" and not wanting to "besmirch" the "good name of Fairbridge" (pp. 32-33). Skidmore further eliminates any doubt regarding the impact of child deportation by citing the "public apologies given to Britain's child migrants" by the Australian and British governments in 2009 and 2010, respectively; additionally, in 2018, September 28 was declared "British Home Child Day across Canada" in "recognition of the contributions made by the British home children" (p. 30). The author's presentation of factual evidence appeals to logos and rationally convinces the reader of the adversity caused by child deportation.

A minor weakness of Skidmore's book is the children's dialogue, along with some unnecessary repetition. While the author aimed to orient the reader toward the children's perspective, their dialogue and internal monologue lacked a sense of authenticity at times. Additionally, some of Skidmore's points feel repetitive. For instance, Marjorie and the other children call their cottage mothers "old witches" or a "bitch" repeatedly throughout the book, and many of the stories, such as the punishment for bedwetters, convey the same message that their

guardians were cruel (pp. 52, 86, 111, 121, 132, 169, 187). Similar stories of Marjorie's mischief, such as how she made "the cottage mum's tea with the water that was used to boil her eggs" in hopes of poisoning her, also recur throughout the book (pp. 113, 176). While they were a reaction to her mistreatment, the repeated stories of Marjorie's antics lessen the reader's sympathy for her to a degree (pp. 79, 98, 102-103, 105, 124). The author reflects in the afterword that she struggled to gather information about her mother's early experiences, possibly explaining the lack of variety in the story and dialogue midway through the book. Nonetheless, Skidmore still presents a compelling and much-needed book about the untold history of British Home Children.

Skidmore's informative "Marjorie: Her War Years" provides a necessary account of the history of the British Home Child program as the author states that "too few Canadians are aware of [its] existence, let alone the horrific treatment so many of them endured" (p. 31). Her work also provided an outlet for healing and self-discovery for her and her mother as the author explains how by taking "the child migrants roots away... these roots, the sense of family and identity, [were denied] to the next generation," an identity they uncovered in the writing and research process (p. 21). Further, Skidmore explains how the writing process "helped dissipate" her mother's fear and unravel ingrained patterns of silence and self-protection (p. 21). She describes how they were able to break a cycle of rejection and estrangement "by finally talking and then writing about her [mother's] life" (p. 239). Consequently, "Marjorie: Her War Years" has the potential to spark hope in other survivors of child deportation and their families by demonstrating that reunification and healing are possible. Her book may also ignite conversations about the truth of the British child

migration scheme and encourage compassion, understanding, and reconciliation in communities across Canada and England. Its subject nature would also interest social workers, sociologists, historians, therapists, and psychologists, as much can be learned from Skidmore's discussion of the intergenerational impact of child deportation.