



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

Reviewed by: Hannah O'Brien, MacEwan University

Patricia Skidmore's book "Marjorie: Her War Years" was written in memory of her mother Marjorie, and her siblings who endured profound suffering when they were selected to take part in the British Child Migration scheme, an attempt to rid Britain of their "gutter children" (p. 24) to improve their economic disparity. For ten-year-old Marjorie, her involuntary journey took place in 1937, when she was taken from her home in Whitley Bay, England, and taken overseas to Prince of Wales Fairbridge Farm School in British Columbia, Canada. Her life was forever changed, as she was one of many young victims of abuse at the Farm school, including two of her younger siblings, Kenny and Audrey. Skidmore rigorously takes a position against the child migration scheme by reiterating its impact on family and generational consequences. Her common themes are family, isolation, loss of identity, fear and resilience. Skidmore's additional use of sources throughout the book allows for a more legitimate understanding of not just the extent of trauma her mother experienced but to fully grasp the reality of many children and families who were impacted as well. This book provokes the reader's acknowledgement of this event in history that is unknown to most, while simultaneously leading the reader to a place of compassion and emotion.

Skidmore's method effectively conveys the enormity of the child migration scheme through an in-depth narration of Marjorie's life and critical examination of the sources she provides. The author states that the British orphans were used as "imperial investments [who were]

treated as if they were expendable” (pp. 9, 20) and much more useful to the colonies if they were sent to Canada. Most of the children sent “were not orphans but had families” (p. 13). Britain advertised child migration as a plan that would benefit the children by offering them a new beginning but failed to take action “in spite of the criticism” (p. 24), the Doyle Report revealed in 1875 after the investigation of the farm school. The author remarks explicitly the Doyle Report to support her position against the child migration scheme, because it revealed proof of mistreatment and poor living conditions, that were ignored completely. Not only does Skidmore cite many sources, but she also goes on to discuss Marjorie’s personal and traumatizing experiences throughout the book. She describes the setting and intense emotions that arise throughout Marjorie’s journey at the farm school, while highlighting the vital role family plays.

Isolation and loss of identity are the main themes throughout the book. Marjorie was forced to “conceal who [she] used to be” and say goodbye to her identity while “a new one was crammed down her throat” (pp. 20, 19). The farm school attempted to erase her previous life and family. She was forced under the care of her cottage mother, who treated her with contempt and cruelty. The author often compares the difference between the bond versus the strain she received from each figure, further outlining how horrible the effects of separation can be for a child, and how a mother’s love is truly irreplaceable. “Isolation was a huge drawback for the children” (p. 29) as they could not express their feelings of distress and confusion. In addition, the author includes Marjorie’s imaginary letters, which she would write in her head to her sister and mother. They would often start with a “Dear Mum, why did you send us away?” (p. 55). The inclusion of Marjorie’s letters, evokes the reader’s attention by putting them inside her head to truly understand her thoughts, and bring to mind feelings of empathy toward her everyday experiences.

Skidmore captures moments from Marjorie's life before, during and after the farm school. She incorporated many photographs throughout the book as well. Many of them are from when Marjorie and her sister, Audrey were at the farm school. Additionally, the author manages to include photographs of the two of them when they returned to Fairbridge Farm School in 2014. In one of the photographs, you see them standing "in front of the second cottage they were placed in: Pennant Cottage" where they spent many sleepless nights together. There is another photograph of them in front of the "old Stone Butter Church in Cowichan Bay, [where they would] have their lunch" (pp. 69, 59), decades earlier. The use of photographs makes the words come to life, and allows the reader to see Marjorie's life in full circle, as she revisits many old memories.

Skidmore reflects in the afterword section how she attempted to "re-create [her mother's] lost childhood" (p. 222). The afterword mentions and concludes the lives of other family members, including Marjorie's first husband, her brother Kenny, her parents, and other siblings. This gives the readers some insight to what happened to the rest of the family, and how the separation affected them all later in their lives. Skidmore's research made room for her own personal self-discovery as she grew up with many missing family pieces. Child deportation does not just cause damaging effects on the child who experienced it, but also the rest of the family, including the generation after them. The author herself lost her own sense of identity because her mother's stories were traded in for her own survival. Marjorie exclaims, "by chopping that part away, I could survive" (p. 214), and for it was her only option. Near the end of the book, the author recalls the time she spent with her mother, and aunt Joyce when they returned home to Whitley Bay in 2007. Marjorie had not returned to Britian because she and many others were reminded "that they were second-class citizens in a country that did not want them in the first place" (p. 29). But when she finally

returned, she was able to share some of her stories with her daughter. Skidmore's work and years of research provided an opening for healing and reconciliation.

There is a limitation to this book, the repetition in the dialogue. The repetition makes it tiresome to read at times and lacks some originality and variety. A lot of the stories carried a similar message. A lot of the major themes were worked into stories that were brought up many times, even though they were previously discussed. Marjorie's hatred for her cottage mothers is expressed when she repeatedly refers to them as "old witch[es]" (p. 56). Many of Marjorie's shenanigans towards her cottage mothers were also brought up frequently because perhaps the number of stories the author got from her mother was scarce, due to her resistance and struggle to sharing too many details.

The book, "Marjorie: Her War Years" is not only an informative piece of literature, but it has paved its way of opportunities for its readers to feel empathy. It has revealed and educated its readers on Britain's and Canada's "hidden history" (p.21). The author's mannerism and voice throughout the book demonstrate her passionate position against the child migration scheme. The audience that would be most interested in this read would be anyone with the means to study the effects of family separation from an interpersonal and intellectual perspective. Readers from all professions would likely learn from and appreciate the nature and artistry of this book. Still, it may particularly strike interest for those in the social sciences, including psychologists, sociologists, historians, and social workers, and even philosophical thinkers, while there is a great deal to acquire from her book, and her family's honourable journey. Skidmore wrote with passion, and intention, and it kept me engaged and interested throughout. I would highly recommend this book, as it was truly a pleasure to read.