

**Most Treasured Things: A Hybrid Theorizing-Inquiry Project**

Roseanne Harvey

Master of Arts - Interdisciplinary Studies, Athabasca University

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Dr. Russell Wilde

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### **How It All Began: Grounding in My Story**

I am the reluctant steward of three generations worth of family archives stored in my basement. I inherited these items and the house they are stored in after my great aunt, known to everyone as Auntie Kay, died. My basement is full of photo albums, notebooks, letters, and other documents from the lives of my great aunt and uncle, my great grandmother and grandfather, and beyond.

I have been overwhelmed by the weight of previous generations and have made many attempts at bringing order to the things. I cleared out the detritus in the basement during a pandemic winter a few years after I moved into the house, hauling truckloads of stuff to second-hand stores and the local landfill. I pared the things down to what was essential, making it feel more manageable.

I decided to go to grad school to process what to do with the things. I figured this would give me structure, deadlines, and accountability. I applied for AU's Interdisciplinary Studies because it has a humanities focus and would give me the flexibility to explore areas related to these things. I've ended up focusing on narrative research, life history, memoir writing, and digital storytelling, and the materials in my basement have been the basis of my research.

I feel motivated to explore and honour what's been left behind by my ancestors because I have debts I can never repay. I have received a lot from those who came before me, and I feel it's my responsibility to steward, with care and integrity, these materials.

I was initially overwhelmed by the task. After I had cleared out the basement, with just the essential family pieces remaining, I didn't know how to enter the archives. I was paralyzed

by the quantity and chaos. I would sit in the basement and stare at bins in front of me, uncertain how to start.

Grounded theory and its ability to make research a hands-on practice turned out to be the perfect vehicle to drive into the archives. I had to enter, get comfortable with, and spend time with the materials in order to code them. I allowed myself to follow my curiosity. While practising my new coding skills on a box of assorted paperwork, I stumbled upon a few copies of my great-grandmother Marjorie Field's collection of poems. I've known this book for my whole life, as it was often pulled out when I was visiting Auntie Kay and shared with an air of reverence and devotion, but in coding it I saw the poems with fresh eyes.

This discovery spurred many questions about my great-grandmother's life, not supported by the stories that had been handed down to me by previous generations. Marjorie was revered by her daughters, who were in their early 20s when she died. I grew up with stories about their sensitive, artistic mother who retreated to a cottage on the family property to write and paint, who was burdened by poor health. But as I read her journals and reflected on her writing, I wondered if her health troubles were actually depression.

In this paper, I will present the following theory about my great-grandmother Marjorie Field: that the illness that she experienced was depression; her health issues and mental illness prevented her from living her life fully, reaching her potential as an artist, and being present with her family.

I will use examples from her poetry and journals to support this theory, using grounded theory methodology to "read between the lines" of her writing. I will fill out the details of Marjorie's life and document my own curiosity about her life using narrative inquiry. Finally, I

respond to her work with an arts-based inquiry, integrating some pieces from a cycle of poems that I wrote while I conducted my research into her work.

## **Research Methods**

After being introduced to what grounded theory offers, I found that it was a good methodology to explore my family archives. Kathy Charmaz (2014) describes grounded theory as a method of focus and flexibility (p. 3). For the open-minded researcher, grounded theory can bring surprises, spark ideas, and hone analytic skills. Grounded theory encourages starting with data, whether it's studied scenes, interviews, documents, or a combination.

Given that my archives are primarily notebooks, letters, and photos, I was interested in Charmaz's approach to documents – including written texts, visual images, government documents, and more – as data. She asserts their overlooked potential for theorizing and encourages researchers to “think of documents as texts” (p. 45).

Other grounded theory thinkers have noted the characteristics of documents that made them worthy of inquiry and analysis. Glaser and Strauss recognized documents as being useful for "social science inquiry, qualitative research, and developing grounded theories" (as cited in Charmaz, 2014, p. 45). Social science researcher Lindsay Prior is noted for his work in shifting the view of documents from what they contain to what they can do. Documents are not objective facts, even if the authors assumed so, and they have been created for specific purposes within "social, economic, historical, cultural and situational contexts" (p. 45).

Charmaz also provides strategies for studying documents (p. 52) for the purpose of situating the data within appropriate contexts. Finally, and most useful for my research direction, Charmaz provides a list of questions (p. 53) for researchers as they dive into documents as a data

source. She encourages asking about the purpose, assumptions, and structure of documents, and digging into “unintended information and meanings... what is glossed over or left out.” I used these questions as I started wading into my things, which I started to view as my “body of data.”

For the purposes of my grounded theory research, I coded 20 poems, 10 photos of Marjorie (from infancy to motherhood), dozens of journal entries from 1934 to her death in 1940, and a letter from Marjorie to her daughter Dorie (my grandmother) on her nineteenth birthday. This data provides the structure for the arc of Marjorie’s life.

This is a story about my great-grandmother and myself, about her efforts to make herself known to me, and how I conversed with her through poetry while I was digging up her life’s work in my musty old basement.

However, there are many missing pieces, especially from her inner world. In attempting to craft Marjorie’s life history, I’ve turned to other methodologies, particularly narrative and arts-based inquiries. Narrative inquiry “records the experiences of an individual or small group, revealing the lived experience or particular perspective of that individual, usually primarily through interview which is then recorded and ordered into a chronological narrative” (Qualitative Study Design: Narrative Inquiry, n.d.). Since my subjects are long-deceased and I’m not able to conduct interviews, I’ve turned to arts-based methods, in particular poetry, for my research and inquiry. Woods and Sikes (2022) highlight poetry as a strategy “for arranging familiar elements in an unfamiliar way” (Hewitt, as quoted in Woods and Sikes, p. 101).

As part of my arts-based inquiry, I have incorporated my own poetry into this paper. While conducting research, I wrote a series of poems to “dialogue” with Marjorie and explore my feelings around ancestry, legacy, and a person whom I’ve only known through stories and

words. Researcher and educator James Heywood Rolling, Jr. (2010) describes arts-based inquiry as practice-based research in which “[q]uestions are addressed and new ones arise in the doing of the writing” (p. 188).

Writing poems is my practice. Organizing and honouring the materials in my basement from previous generations is an act of addressing questions that allows me to build and understand my life. This is my narrative inheritance (Goodall, 2005), holding the life stories of those who came before me. Family archives can function as a form of meaning making, and narrative inheritance offers an opportunity for intergenerational research into personal identity and family stories (Herrmann, 2014).

I acknowledge the risk and responsibility of this approach. Bathmaker and Harnett (2010) speak to the role of the researcher in interpreting life stories (p. 16). It’s not unusual for researchers to use pictures and artifacts as records of lived lives, but there is a sensitivity in making claims about people’s lives. Bathmaker and Harnett remind me that it’s a privilege to analyze and critique another person’s life. I don’t take this responsibility lightly and I’m approaching this project as a way to understand my ancestry and my life.

My first poem is an incantation to Marjorie, an invitation to her as I make my research and writing an offering to her memory.

### **For Marjorie**

You are my mother’s mother’s mother.  
Almost six decades ago  
your daughters gathered your writing  
and bound it into a small book.

Your words have found their way  
into my hands.  
A thread between you and me stretches

across decades, generations, lands.  
 I have landed  
 near your final home  
 on the west coast,  
 among Douglas firs and Garry oaks.

A bright bud curled up within each of us.  
 You escaped to your studio  
 in the garden, hid in your imagination.  
 A world where you could create and dream  
 beyond your family and the farm.

I am your daughter's daughter's daughter.  
 My world is the world,  
 which I move freely around.  
 I escaped family and farm  
 to follow the desires  
 that tug at my heart.  
 Your creativity and curiosity  
 pulse through me.

### **How Marjorie Made Herself Known: Grounding in Narrative Inquiry**

Marjorie slowly revealed herself to me over a few years. During the first phase of the basement cleanout, I packed up a handmade dollhouse (one of Auntie Kay and her husband Uncle Gordie's many hobbies) and discovered that the walls were adorned with tiny, framed photos of family. These included a one-centimeter square photo of a face that I recognized as Marjorie. I donated the dollhouse and all of its contents to Miniature World, a tourist attraction in downtown Victoria that already had a few of Kay and Gordie's creations in their collection. But I kept the little framed black and white photos. These are my ancestors, in miniature form.

Marjorie also made herself known from my parents' basement in the BC Interior, which I cleaned out along with the rest of the family home in the spring of 2023. I found a box labeled "Treasures - EVA" and knew instantly it was something that my mom (Eva) had received from

my grandmother, Dorothy (also known as Dorie). She died in 2007, so my mom would have likely received the box a few years prior, before my grandmother developed dementia and was moved into a care facility. I'm certain that before Dorie felt her faculties slip away, she would have ensured that she had transferred her most precious treasures to her oldest and most reliable daughter.

I opened the cardboard box to find two wooden jewelry boxes containing baby hair clippings, jewelry, and coins. I lifted out the compartmentalized removable tray, lined in decaying purple silk, to discover in the bottom of the box a handwritten letter from Marjorie to Dorie, dated February 25, 1938, my grandmother's nineteenth birthday. Marjorie congratulated Dorie on a new job and wished her success, in a tone that is formal yet warm. Her handwriting is round, with loops and flourishes. Marjorie shared the story of the "work box," a type of functional box common in English society in the nineteenth century.

"The work box is quite old," Marjorie wrote. "It must be 41 years old as Grandma Winter's mother bought it for her when she was 12 & she gave it to me when I was 12. It goes to the eldest girl in the family. I don't know what kind of wood it is. I cleaned it with Liquid Veneer and it looks better. It should be done fairly often to keep it nice – you will find it a good place to keep your valuables and most treasured things."

Dorie held on to the box for decades until she passed it on to her oldest daughter, my mom, who would have been in her sixties when she received it, a move that is characteristically selfish of my grandmother. But I also understand why she would have held on to it – Marjorie died two years after gifting the work box to her daughter. It makes perfect sense that Dorie would have kept this piece of her mother close to her for as long as she could.

Eventually the work box made its way to me, the eldest girl of my generation.

The work box and all of the other materials in my basement make up my family's personal cultural memory. Media theorist José van Dijck (2007) uses the image of the "personal shoebox," where fragments of memories and notes from the minutia of experiences are stored. These mediated memories turn the items in our personal shoeboxes into objects for cultural analysis, forming "sites where the personal and collective meet, intersect, and clash" (p. 2). I found her concept of "intergenerational continuity" affirming, as I've accepted that I'm more storyteller than archivist and I've had to construct my ancestors' narratives. What I find fascinating about van Dijck's work is how she posits that memory is not simply an individual experience that lives only in our minds, but a force that spans identity, relationship, and time, and ultimately connects us with other people (p. 8).

### **How I Know What I Know About Marjorie: Grounding in Family Stories**

Most of what I knew of Marjorie was what I remember hearing from Auntie Kay and what I learned in the short bio in her book of poetry, *Petals from God's Garden*. She was born in Derby, England in 1892 and her family moved to Victoria, BC in 1909, when she was 17 years old. I don't know why the family left their successful photography business in England for the remote west coast of Canada, although I gleaned from her poems that she was happy in her new country:

In the Land of the West I found my Place,  
 When led by a Guiding Hand;  
 And the Way illumed by His shining Face,  
 He brought me to the fair Land. (Field, 1966, p. 89)

When Marjorie was 25, she married Lee Llewellyn Field, a farmer ten years her senior who lived in the rural community of Metchosin, and shortly thereafter they had three daughters, Dorothy (my grandmother), Kathleen (Kay, and known for my whole life as Auntie Kay), and Muriel. Marjorie played piano and taught Sunday school. From her poetry, I learned that her faith and relationship with nature played a central role in her life. But I wanted to know more.

I revisited the jumble of archives to see what I could discover and was astounded to find the diaries from the last seven years of her life. I read them in hopes of learning more about her poetry and creative process. What I found instead were short but detailed records on her daily life. Her diary entries revolved around her health; she wrote often about staying in bed all day, debilitating symptoms such as headaches and stomach pain, and extended hospital stays.

This is what I know. There is much more that I don't know. I wish I could have a conversation with Marjorie, that we could sit together with tea and talk about life. Instead, I communicate with her through poems. In this poem, I imagine her on the family farm outside of Victoria, in Metchosin, and I ask her some of the questions I'd been wanting to ask.

### **Spring Equinox**

On the first day of spring  
I imagine you among the apple blossoms  
on the farm in Metchosin,  
walking through the orchard  
seeing god in everything around you.

With the longer days and brighter light,  
the warming earth,  
you feel lighter and happier than usual.  
Your spirits are sparked  
by the birth of lambs  
and burst of chicks on the farm.

Is spring your favourite?  
 Does your melancholy lift  
 with more sun on your face?  
 Do you feel the balance of the earth,  
 poised on the edge  
 of a new season?

### **Constructing My Theory and Building a Life Story**

This is the theory I am attempting to build here: the illness that my great-grandmother Marjorie experienced was depression. Her health issues and mental illness prevented her from living her life fully, reaching her potential as an artist, and being present with her family.

In this section, I construct a timeline of events in Marjorie's life based on the materials I've found. I present the data, the mental-health indicators I observed in her diaries, and my analysis of it. I also found references to her mental health in her poems, although they dealt mostly with her faith and love of nature.

A timeline of significant events in Marjorie's life:

- 1892: Marjorie was born in Derby, England.
- 1909: Left England to relocate to Canada with her family (age 17)
- 1917: September 12, Annie Marjorie Winter (25) and Lee Llewellyn Field (35) marry at St. Andrew's Church, Victoria, BC
- 1919: birth of first daughter, Dorothy. Second daughter, Kathleen, born in 1920.  
Youngest daughter, Muriel, born 1926
- 1935: two-month stay in hospital (Feb 26 – May 8) after earlier diagnosis of flu and bronchitis
- 1935-37: recurring health problems

- 1938: Marjorie's eldest daughter Dorie turns 19 and leaves home. Marjorie writes her a letter and gives her the family heirloom work box
- 1940: Marjorie dies on December 29, at home with her family

### **Data and Analysis**

The most reliable support for my theory comes from Marjorie's journals, where there are recurring mentions of low energy, feeling unwell, and staying in bed all day. I copied and coded discovered dozens of mentions of each of these categories. Here are some examples from over a two-year period, 1935 to 1936.

On January 17, 1935 Marjorie wrote, "D. [likely Dorothy, her daughter] stayed home. I stayed in bed till after dinner. Sally ironed & fresh cream cake. She left at 6. I sewed on M.'s [likely her youngest daughter, Muriel] gray coat." She followed this up January 28, 1935 with, "Still a little temp. Took Sally downtown when I went to Dr. He says I have 'flu' & bronchitis." The next day, January 29, 1935, Marjorie further documented her fever: "A.m. in bed. Temp going up - 101° at night. Lee came in evening. S. helped me take a bath." The following week, on February 6, 1935, she noted, "Sick in bed. Very bad headache. D. & K. stayed after school to watch Baseball match. S. washed woolens."

Later in February, Marjorie was admitted to hospital and stayed for over two months. She doesn't reveal the reason for her admission, although it likely had something to do with her persistent health problems over the preceding month and the diagnosis of "'flu' and bronchitis" (the quotation marks around flu are hers). She recorded a temperature of 101° the day before she was taken to the hospital.

Marjorie maintained her daily diary practice during this hospital stay between February 26 and May 8, 1935. Some excerpts:

- February 26, 1935 “Busy all day sorting out things & mending. Dorothy Selden called in afternoon. Miss Bowes came at 5.45 & brought me to hospital.”
- March 1, 1935 “Had bad night. Stomach hurt. Feeling pretty poorly. Had sleep in afternoon & feeling better. Dr. put me on milk.”
- March 26, 1935 “Feeling rather shaky this morning. Slept till 4.30. Talked things over with Dr. Baillie. Went on sun porch. Lee came. Woke with trembling.
- May 7, 1935 “Woke up sweating & slept till 5.45. Beautiful day. Had bath. Feeling blue. Lee came & Muriel & Uncle Dan. Dr. \_\_\_\_ called. Miss Rendel rubbed me.”

The hospital stay may have offered some temporary relief from her ailments, but within months she resumed documenting her symptoms throughout 1935 and into 1936:

- September 15, 1935 “I had good sleep, no roosters crowing. Feeling much better. Nice day. Stayed in bed all day.”
- September 16, 1935 “Woke up early, could not sleep again. In bed all day. Lee butchering. Very miserable.”
- October 6, 1935 “Slept from 1 to 4 but not much after. Cloudy today. Bad headache, better later. Stayed in bed all day. Ches & M. [Chester and Muriel] went to church. Flowers from Aunt Minnie.”
- October 7, 1935 “Slept 8 hours solid. Got up and dressed about 11. Feeling much better in morning. Laid outside & went to \_\_\_\_\_. Letter from C. Haltie. Wrote to Mrs. Kirk.”

- January 9, 1936 “Lee went up bush all day. Rained some. I stayed in bed. Slept all a.m., had dinner about 3. Read & did some embroidery.”
- January 10, 1936 “In bed today. Getting up to get meals.”
- January 11, 1936 “In bed today.”
- January 12, 1936 “Lee swept floors for me, washed dishes. I got up & dressed in afternoon. M. went to S.S.”
- January 13, 1936 “Feeling better. Got up in a.m.”
- August 19, 1936 “Mrs. Clapham’s birthday. Gave her a pink-leaved coleus. In bed.”
- August 20, 1936 “Lee went to town with D & K. K got white sandals. Decided to \_\_\_\_ to Mrs. Howard’s. They attended \_\_\_\_ funeral on way home. Still in bed.”
- August 21, 1936 “Lee & Chester went to \_\_\_\_\_ for 2600 lbs wheat in afternoon. Still in bed. Bad headache all day.”

This pattern continued through the rest of the year. 1937 started with continued health concerns, with fewer references to staying in bed and ill health as the year progressed:

- January 10, 1937 “In bed on milk. M. over at grandma’s all afternoon – Lee came over.”
- January 11, 1937 “M. started back to school. I am in bed on milk. Lee put milk in thermos for me.”
- January 12, 1937 “Snowed a little. M.to school \_\_\_\_ at Bell’s. In bed all day, still on milk. Not strong enough to help at all. Ch. sold last lot of \_\_\_\_.”

It appears she was recovering from her illness over the course of 1937, but she didn’t qualify how in her diaries. By 1938, Marjorie recorded fewer details about her health and observed more activities from her daily life.

Marjorie started off 1939 with a burst of social and domestic activity. On January 2, she wrote, "Alan came out on 11.0 stage. He & Chester working at the wiring. Mr. & Mrs. Grubb & child came out. Geo, John, & friend called. Girls went in evening. I cleaned sitting room floor." Her February 23 entry reflects a similar external focus: "Frogs croaking. Lovely day. Did large wash of silks & woollens. Lee packing apples. I swept 3 lower rooms. Did some mending. Phoned K. in even."

She maintained this focus on domestic activities and her daughters' social life until October 1939, when her entries became sparse, with longer gaps between them. 1940 started with another burst of activity, as she noted on January 1, "M. & I went to supper at Seabrook's. Gordie fetched & brought us back. Kay there, stayed last night." On January 3: "Holman's called about 3.30. Gave them afternoon tea." This was not sustained, as there were no more entries until the end of January.

The absence of diary entries may be noteworthy in itself during Marjorie's final year. In 1940, there were regular entries until April, then sporadic entries in late April and May. She wrote regularly between June and early November, then made only a few entries for the rest of the year. Unfortunately, she did not write about why she wasn't writing, and it's beyond my scope as a researcher to build a theory on data that isn't available.

Marjorie wrote her last entry on December 18, 1940: "Lee & Bill worked all day up bush, felled a tree & brought down bark. M. in bed. I swept upstairs in a.m., swept sitting & kitchen in p.m. Working on his pyjamas."

The final diary entry was on December 29, 1940, written in her daughter Kay's handwriting. "My mother Marjorie Field passed away suddenly around noontime. Dad & I with her (she asked him to kiss her just before she died.)"

I do not know the details of her health between December 18 and 29. I maintain my theory that Marjorie's frequent illnesses were depression, but I am not theorizing that depression was related to the cause of her death.

### **Further Data: Marjorie's Poems and Photos**

Marjorie's diaries had frequent references to her health and family life. Her poems, published by her daughters in a collection called *Petals from God's Garden* 26 years after her death, are concerned with her faith, nature, and general observations on life. Her family comes up in a few poems. She never wrote poems about the physical ailments that she recorded in her diaries. While she didn't explicitly write about her emotional state, it came up occasionally in her poetry.

For example, the fourth poem in her collection (Field, 1966), "Life," hints at the "discord" that life can hold and how this can be brought into balance by faith:

Life is a song we sometimes sing  
 In discord, or minor key:  
 But the soul in tune with the Infinite  
 Gives forth a sweet harmony. (Field, 1966, p. 4)

Marjorie alludes to her emotional state and inner world in "Thank God for Discontent" (#16). Writing that in a "battle with the tides, new conquests make," Marjorie notes that unhappiness can give motivation to fight adversity. She states that sadness inspires one to try

harder (“test our spirit’s strength”) and look at challenges “with wonder and keen-edged desire.” The poem argues that feelings of unhappiness have the power to counter fear (“we spread our wings / That once were clipped”) and learn “how to live.” The clarity and emphasis throughout the poem suggest that these lessons were learned through lived experience.

I gathered and coded other artifacts of Marjorie’s life, including photos and letters, to build a sense of her as a person. These artifacts are not related to my theorizing about her depression and it would be pointless to scrutinize images of her looking for hints of her emotional state. The photos of Marjorie as a child and teenager were professional photos taken at her father’s photo studio in England. I could not find many photos of Marjorie in adulthood, besides several of her with her husband, Lee.

Before I was clear about what theory I wanted to build about Marjorie’s life, I coded the letter that she wrote to her daughter Dorothy for her nineteenth birthday, to “commemorate your starting out in the world to make your living & I hope a place for yourself.” While it doesn’t relate to my theory about Marjorie’s mental health, the letter holds much significance for me. It was a powerful experience to find this heirloom and letter and to feel the thread of lineage between my great-grandmother, my grandmother, and my mother (who was never gifted the box although she did end up with it late in her life). I explored this lineage in a poem:

### **Treasures**

I found the wooden box  
inside of a cardboard box  
labeled with my mother’s name.

In the bottom of the box was a letter  
written by Marjorie, in the handwriting  
I’m now able to recognize as hers.

That's how I know the box is a "work box"  
and not a jewelry box.

She wrote the letter to my mother's mother  
in 1938, blessing her  
new job and new life  
as she started out in the world.

Marjorie's mother gave the box to her,  
the eldest daughter,  
and she passed it on  
to her eldest daughter,  
who held on to it  
until her eldest daughter  
was in her 50s.

The work box found its way to me,  
also an eldest daughter  
in this lineage.  
I'm the end of the line  
having no eldest daughter  
of my own.  
The work box  
will stay with me  
until the end.

I will repair the silk lining,  
polish the mahogany exterior,  
place my jewelry  
and other treasures  
within its safe interior.

### **Limitations**

While I have a breadth of data from Marjorie's life, there are still missing pieces and things I will never know. She did not write about her inner world in her diaries. I do not know the events leading up to her death in 1940. Most importantly, I do not have medical verification of the reason for her hospital stay in 1935 or a formal diagnosis of her reported illness.

I am also limited in my ability to research and include in this report the societal context in which Marjorie lived during the interwar years in Canada. This is partly in response to the content of Marjorie's diaries and poems, which were concerned with her immediate world and relationships, and partly due to time and capacity constraints. The years between the end of World War 1 in 1918 and the beginning of World War 2 in 1939 were a time of geopolitical upheaval and turmoil, including recovery from a global pandemic and the Great Depression. As historian Veronica Strong-Boag notes, "anti-feminism, misogyny, and fascism... posed a terrible danger to free women everywhere" (p. 30).

I have also not dedicated time to researching medical attitudes towards women and mental health in this societal context. I am generally aware that mental health would have been overlooked and misunderstood, and there would not have been much formal understanding of depression in the medical system. I have observed in my family that previous generations have codes of silence around mental illness and often criticize younger generations as being too soft or "navel gazing."

### **How It All Ends: An Inconclusive Conclusion**

I've gathered enough data to support my theory, although I acknowledge it is not conclusive. In the absence of medical records, it can never be conclusive. Grounded theory makes it possible to analyze my data and build a theory. Narrative inquiry allows me to construct the story of my journey and make meaning out of the materials left behind by previous generations. An arts-based inquiry allows for creative theory building, as I let my imagination fill in the details and have conversations across time and distance.

Writing, whether it's a research report or poetry, has a therapeutic power. As Gillie Bolton (2006) notes, the initial act of writing is cathartic, but the value is gained in the act of reworking which brings insight and consolidation. It is a "powerful, deeply thoughtful process" (p. 120) to capture something in poetic words and images.

I emerge from this project with a better understanding of my great-grandmother and the other women in my lineage. It is a gift and a privilege to have the resources to contemplate lives from the past and observe how they have impacted my own life. While I am not as dedicated to the poetic arts as Marjorie (my practice is sporadic and I don't expect to leave behind enough poems for a posthumous manuscript), writing and storytelling are a large part of my personal and professional life. I have enjoyed many freedoms and have been able to follow my passions and curiosities, thanks to the work and sacrifices of the generations before me.

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Routledge.

## Appendix

### Data Coding and Memos Samples

#### Example of Initial Coding

To begin my coding process, I created a colour system to apply to the poems and journals. Through the colour coding, I determined the categories for my data:

Faith – blue  
 Creativity – green  
 Nature – yellow  
 Emotional state – grey  
 Intellectual pursuits – pink  
 Family - red

Samples of coded poems:

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| <p>Title: sets up for big ideas, affirmation</p> <p>Life can be depressing but faith makes it worth living<br/>         ABCB rhyme pattern</p> <p>People create their own life and even when it gets messy, God cares</p> <p>New way of phrasing previous stanza, with personal will (character) in place of God</p> <p>Garden = growth, creative potential (following song, book, and picture in preceding stanzas)<br/>         Flowers or weeds = choice<br/>         Having faith in God supports life until the end</p> | <p><b>4.<br/>Life</b></p> <p>Life is a song we sometimes sing<br/>         In discord, or minor key:<br/>         But the soul in tune with the Infinite<br/>         Gives forth a sweet harmony.</p> <p>Life is a book in which each writes<br/>         With strong purpose or listless hands:<br/>         Though the ink gets smudges and blots are made<br/>         God reads it and understands.</p> <p>Life is a picture, we paint each day<br/>         Some detail of shade and light:<br/>         The brush of character blends the whole<br/>         In results that are dull or bright.</p> <p>Life is a garden, where all plant<br/>         Beautiful flowers or noxious weeds:<br/>         We gather each day as well as sow,<br/>         Till God harvests the ripened seeds.</p> |
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| <p>Title: directing thanks to God for an emotional state</p> <p>Being unhappy can give motivation to fight for life</p> <p>Having energy to heal and start again</p> <p>Repeating the title in each stanza emphasizes thankfulness to God</p> <p>Having a strong spirit gives wonder and hope</p> <p>Overcoming limitations and not fearing failure</p> <p>Trying to win is better than not attempting</p> <p>Emerging victorious over unhappiness helps us value life</p> <p>Capitalizing “how to live” emphasizes its importance</p> <p>POV: universal “we” rather than first person</p> | <p><b>16.</b><br/><b>Thank God for Discontent</b></p> <p>Thank God for discontent; it spurs us on<br/>To battle with the tides, new conquests make;<br/>It gives us zest to start our life anew,<br/>To gather up the strands, and mend the break.</p> <p>Thank God for discontent; we try once more<br/>To test our spirit’s strength; at that far height<br/>We gaze with wonder and keen-edged desire,<br/>For oh, the summit’s bathed in shining light!</p> <p>Thank God for discontent; we spread our wings<br/>That once were clipped, but now we fear no fall;<br/>The runner’s urge is ours – desire to win –<br/>‘Twere better to fail, than not try at all.</p> <p>Thank God for discontent; before us lies<br/>A greater trophy than the world can give;<br/>But slowly do we rise and gain the heights<br/>In learning well the lesson HOW TO LIVE!</p> |
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Samples of accompanying memos:

*From Aug 7 Memo (on “Thank God for Discontent”)*

One of the few poems that alludes to Marjorie’s emotional state (discontent – unhappiness, dissatisfaction) and inner world. It supports my personal theory that Marjorie’s mysterious two-year illness was a depressive episode – I don’t have any evidence of this, it’s something that I’ve suspected. Mental illness was not discussed or understood in the 1920s and ‘30s. A product of their times, my parents and grandparents didn’t talk about mental illness.

*Sept 27 Integrated Memo (after coding/categorizing poems)*

After going through all the coded poems and highlighting emergent themes, I have a visual reference for the themes that Marjorie explores in her poems. The poems tend to be

homogenous. For example, in “Thy Kingdom Come” the codes are highlighted in blue for faith; “Caprice” is highlighted in yellow for nature.

Poems with variety of colours: “Thank God for Discontent” (emotional state and faith), “To My Husband” (family and nature), “How Poems Come” (creativity, emotional state, faith).

### **Example of Focused Coding**

Once I had coded a large selection of Marjorie’s poems and journals, I was able to visualize my data categories. The journals had much more content that was coded in grey (emotional state), while the poems had less grey content. This led me to see that the journals provided better support of my emerging theory. After my initial coding, I took a more focused approach and integrated the coded journal entries, along with applicable memos and notes, into a timeline of Marjorie’s life.

Journals with grey codes extracted and organized chronologically:

- 1934: January 1, Marjorie starts a new five-year diary. “Monday, New Year’s Day. Lee & I went to dinner at Mrs. Parves-Smith’s. Claphams & Youngs were there.”
- 1935: Marjorie documents her health
  - o January 17, 1935 “D. stayed home. I stayed in bed till after dinner. Sally ironed & fresh cream cake. She left at 6. I sewed on M.’s gray coat.”
  - o January 28, 1935 “Still a little temp. Took Sally downtown when I went to Dr. He says I have ‘flu’ & bronchitis.”
  - o January 29, 1935 “A.m. in bed. Temp going up - 101° at night. Lee came in evening. S. helped me take a bath.”

- o February 6, 1935 "Sick in bed. Very bad headache. D. & K. stayed after school to watch Baseball match. S. washed woolens."
- o February 26, 1935 – **beginning of two-month stay in hospital**: "Busy all day sorting out things & mending. Dorothy Selden called in afternoon. Miss Bowes came at 5.45 & brought me to hospital."
- o February 27, 1935 "Had terrible night. Slept 1 hr, had small breakfast, good dinner & supper. Moved into A ward after dinner."
- o February 28, 1935 "Much nicer in A ward. Had good sleep in afternoon. Eating good meals now. Feeling more rested. Last night a lot going on so could not sleep much."
- o March 27, 1935 "Muriel's 9<sup>th</sup> Birthday. She had a party. I left the Hospital. Lee brought me to Fairfield Nursing Home. Feeling much better, nerves quieted."
- o May 8, 1935 "Fair night. Dr. called in morning. Lee came about 2, helped me pack & moved me to Denman St. Glad to be home!"
- 1936: Marjorie has continued health problems (possible depression?) and works on poems
  - o January 9, 1936 "Lee went up bush all day. Rained some. I stayed in bed. Slept all a.m., had dinner about 3. Read & dd some embroidery."
  - o January 10, 1936 "In bed today. Getting up to get meals."
  - o January 11, 1936 "In bed today."
  - o January 12, 1936 "Lee swept floors for me, washed dishes. I got up & dressed in afternoon. M. went to S.S."
  - o January 13, 1936 "Feeling better. Got up in a.m."

- o February 26, 1936 “Wrote to Mrs. LeFevre & sent poems. Letter from Mrs. Fields. Rainy today.”
- o March 3, 1936 “Nice day. Foggy this a.m. Wrote 2 poems after breakfast. Got up about 11. Had sleep after dinner. Mr. Clapham called.”
- o March 12, 1936 “Tired today so didn’t do much. Wrote out 6 poems in afternoon.”
- o March 16, 1936 “Rained in a.m. Dull & raw wind. Got up and had dinner in kitchen. Wrote out a lot of poems. Went over to Ina’s. Lee packing apples. Writing in evening. Lee sleeps at Ina’s.”
- 1937: continued health problems
  - o January 10, 1937 “In bed on milk. M. over at grandma’s all afternoon – Lee came over.”
  - o January 11, 1937 “M. started back to school. I am in bed on milk. Lee put milk in thermos for me.”
  - o January 12, 1937 “Snowed a little. M.to school \_\_\_\_ at Bell’s. In bed all day, still on milk. Not strong enough to help at all. Ch. sold last lot of \_\_\_\_.”
  - o January 19, 1937 “Very tired today. Lee sold sheep pelts.”
    - **What was her recovery journey? When and how did she regain her health between 1937 and 1938?**
- 1938: apparent recovery from health problems and continued work on poems
  - o January 1, 1938 “Weather good. Snow all gone. I ironed in a.m. Kay & M. did some washing here. Cleaned kitchen. I went up Sooke Rd. with Lee & \_\_\_\_\_. Had supper at Seabrook’s.”

- o February 4, 1938 "Slept fine, sunny and a bit windy. I went to mail, no mail. I sent letters & poems to Mrs. Clapham. I swept & dusted sitting room. Lee & Alex went up bush."
- o February 24, 1938 "Dorothy's birthday. Beautiful Spring Day. Rested most of a.m. M. & I did some ironing. \_\_\_\_\_ phoned & \_\_\_\_\_. Lee went up bush. M. started work on garden. Sowing wheat. Made soup. Phoned Dorothy, giving her Work Box."
- o Marjorie's daughter Dorie turns 19 and leaves home. Marjorie writes her a letter to "commemorate your starting out in the world to make your living & I hope a place for yourself." She also gives Dorie a family heirloom work-box: "Grandma Winter's mother bought it for her when she was 12 & she gave it to me when I was 12. It goes to the eldest girl in the family."
- 1939: starts new five-year diary. Apparent improved health, more vitality and interest in daughters' activities
  - o January 1, 1939 "New Year's Day. Weather showers. Lee, I & 3 girls went to Seabrook for supper at 5.30. We went to Langford Church. M. went to stay with auntie."
  - o January 4, 1939 "Baked bread. Lee fetched M. home in evening from Seabrooks. K. went with him. Lee killed calf 168lbs for Fisher."
  - o January 5, 1939 "Muriel started back to school one day late. Fisher came for calf. Did a good ironing."
  - o January 6, 1939 "Lee went to town in a.m. Took Kathleen to Grubbs. Fairly fine. M. helped with ironing."

- o February 23, 1939 “Frogs croaking. Lovely day. Did large wash of silks & woolens. Lee packing apples. I swept 3 lower rooms. Did some mending. Phoned K. in even.”
- o February 24, 1939 “D.’s birthday, gave her satin nightie. Rained all day. I went in town with Mrs. Johnson. Had lunch at Grubbs. Kay came home in truck with us.”
  - **Memo:** consistent entries until early October, then very sparse entries until the end of the year.
- 1940: Marjorie’s entries have outward focus, strong interest in activities and social life of daughters. Many large gaps between entries.
  - o January 1, 1940 “M. & I went to supper at Seabrook’s. Gordie fetched & brought us back. Kay there, stayed last night.”
  - o February 1, 1940 “Mrs. Riseley called in afternoon. Gordie took Kay to dance at Saanich. Dorie & Fred went & Frank Crystal.”
    - **Memo:** this entry has an annotation by Marjorie’s daughter, Kathleen (Kay): “Gordie took me Dorie & Fred to dance in Saanich.” There are a number of Kay's annotations throughout the diary, as though she studied it looking for clues about her mother (or correcting her mistakes).
  - o February 24, 1940 “Dorie’s 21<sup>st</sup> Birthday. We gave her a wristwatch. Phoned Dorie in evening.” [Annotation by Kathleen: “Dorie & Fred Gordie Daisy & John came to farm for Dorie’s 21<sup>st</sup> birthday”]
  - o December 18, 1940 “Lee & Bill worked all day up bush, felled a tree & brought down bark. M. in bed. I swept upstairs in a.m., swept sitting & kitchen in p.m. Working on his pyjamas.” [Annotation by Kathleen: “Mom’s last entry”]

- o December 29, 1940 [*entry in Auntie Kay's handwriting*] “My mother Marjorie Field passed away suddenly around noontime. Dad & I with her (she asked him to kiss her just before she died.)”
  - **Memo:** Marjorie’s health seems to play less of a central role in her diary.

I’m curious about the less frequent entries – does this mean that she was fading away, subconsciously preparing for her death? Or did she have less interest in writing in her diary once she was over the worst of her illness?

I’m struck by the profound banality of her final entry. We never do know what day will be our last. It’s touching that her daughter was compelled to complete Marjorie’s journal and write down the details of her death.