



BOOK REVIEWS

Thomas Muir: Lad O Pairts The life and work of Sir Thomas Muir (1844-1934), Mathematician and Cape Colonial Educationist

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The book provides insights into the life journey of Sir Thomas Muir, his hard work, achievements as a mathematician, as well his dedication and determination in the Cape Colony. Sir Thomas Muir played a pivotal role in the Cape education system and eventually became one of the world's renowned mathematician. The era between 1800-1900, the Cape Colony was characterized by racially segregated amenities and institutions socially, economically and politically. Racial disparities played out on the education front. Resource allocation was largely informed by racial classification. White minority fairly benefitted from the unequal education system amid uneven distribution of resources. The majority of people were farmers and small-scale merchants. The mission of the Cape Colony at the time was to empower white minority educationally and economically.

Thomas Muir: Lad O Pairts, the life and work of Sir Thomas Muir (1844-1934), mathematician and Cape Colonial Educationist, was released in 2021 in two formats namely: An interactive e-book and a hard cover. The review will therefore focus on the structure and layout of the book and navigate the chapters in order to determine among other things, the extent to which visuals were able to capture the interest of the readers.

The book is presented according to different stages of Sir Thomas Muir's life which features the journeys he had undertaken as a mathematician and educationist in the Cape Colony. The opening chapter of the book covers the greater part of his early life and how he

navigated his world of existence through various episodes that finally led to his greatness. One considers this as the most critical part of the book, where the reader is provided with the genesis of the story so they can easily keep track of unfolding events in the entire book. The chapter details Muir's humble beginnings in Scotland where he grew up and the challenges he faced. However, the strategies he devised in order to mitigate his hardships, have not been sufficiently discussed. Taking the reader through the complexities of Muir's early life, would have been welcome. The second stage of the book is premised on his career as an educationist in the Cape Colony. Muir brought about reforms in the education space both as an educationist and mathematician. The following quotation clearly attests to that: *'There is one surviving record of Muir, the teacher, dating back to period only matter of months after he took up the reins of his high office in the Cape Colony. We gain some impression of his qualities as a teacher from his accounts of his visits to the convent in King Williams Town, Eastern Cape, on 8th of November 1892(p22...).'*

One of Muir's most remarkable contributions as an educationist and mathematician in the Cape Colony, was to effect some changes on the education system. *'In a colony with a predominantly conservative rural population, Muir had to pursue a policy of evolution rather than revolution (p25...).* *Muir's work on planning the reform of the School system resulted in a number of education bills which one of them was through the School board act of 1905(p28)'* Muir's wealth of teaching experience accumulated while in Scotland, enabled him to maintain a long and tactful planning in an endeavour to achieve educational goals that he had already set himself. He was the brain behind the architecture and state of the art of some school buildings within the Cape Colony. Rondebosch High School is one such school. The inclusion of visuals and photographs in this part of the book, paints a clear picture of his mammoth contribution to education.

Navigating through the chapters of the book has been made easier by the thematic guidelines provided. In the first chapter the writer details Sir Thomas Muir's early life in Scotland where he grew up. The genesis of his passion for a teaching profession and the odds he fought against in order to achieve greatness as a Cape colonial educationist and mathematician. Furthermore, the themes also provide insights into his family life, values and principles that he subscribed to. *'By a deed of gift, drawn up in 1920, Muir bequeathed his mathematical serials and books to the South African public library. He was a huge enthusiast of mathematical journals, which he felt encouraged and promoted original investigation. He said that they keep alive young students of mathematical journals in every University in town (p89...).'*

The visuals make better sense of the book from the family photos to the School

buildings as well as the tours he undertook. Muir learnt a lot from his travels and that helped him broaden his horizons. He also got the opportunity to interact with people from different backgrounds. Music was also one of his passions. *'Muir was also an enthusiastic singer himself, combining song with liberal quantities of alcohol (p.71)'*. The book succeeds in capturing the essence of Sir Thomas Muir's history and how he managed to reach the pinnacle of his success as an educationist in general and mathematician in particular.

The book comes across as a life story of shared memories of Sir Thomas Muir both in academic and historical contexts. It also provides incisive accounts on the tours that Muir undertook and the people he came into contact with. The practical lessons learnt from such interactions were covered extensively across themes in various chapters. It presents itself as a viable source primarily for researchers, academics, teachers and learners who are keen on tapping into the history of academic excellence in various fields of expertise. It would also be a valuable asset to schools, community, college and university libraries both locally and internationally.

Although the book did not say much about the reforms of the mixed race and blacks in the Cape Colony, it would have been more interesting to get a sense of how they would have been impacted by these reforms. A multi-perspective approach would have served the purpose in that regard.

Portraits of Survival – Volume 1: The Holocaust

South African Holocaust & Genocide Foundation (2021)

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The recent online publication by the South African Holocaust and Genocide Foundation (SAHGF), *Portraits of Survival Volume 1: The Holocaust* is a digital record of the experiences of thirty-four of Holocaust survivors who found refuge in South Africa. It documents their lives prior to the Holocaust, their experiences during the Holocaust, and their struggles and triumphs in rebuilding their lives in South Africa in the aftermath of the Holocaust.

For those readers who may be unfamiliar with Holocaust history, the Holocaust took place between 1933 and 1945 when the Nazis under Adolf Hitler and their collaborators co-ordinated and systematically carried out the state-sponsored murder of six million European Jews, as well as the Roma and Sinti, Black people, Jehovah's Witnesses, political prisoners, members of the LGBTQIA+ community, and ill or disabled people. However, the Jews were the primary target. The Nazis wished to annihilate them and came up with a plan that they called the Final Solution. The Holocaust wrought fear, trauma and havoc on European Jewry and many Jewish communities were decimated. Those people who survived faced further trauma as they tried to navigate their way forward after liberation, with many having lost their homes, families and friends, assets, and even the countries of their birth. Their plight also culminated in health issues to which many of them succumbed. One of the options to begin life anew was to travel abroad and this volume relates the stories of Jewish Holocaust survivors who came and settled in South Africa.

As the book reveals, from the depths of this tragedy have come lessons, reflection and connection and this is, in part, the purpose of *Portraits of Survival Volume 1: The Holocaust*. Peering back into the not-so-distant past through the lens personal stories of these South African Holocaust survivors, future generations of all races and religions are encouraged to move beyond the number six million and to understand that this number is not unitary. It is made up of ones – single people, single families and single communities. Also, as Stephen Smith, Executive Director of the University of Southern California's (USC) Shoah

Foundation notes in the foreword, ‘each story in this volume is also a story of survival that was enabled through connection and friendship’ (p. 6). The power of community and family to sustain the survivors, both then and now, is attested to in many of the personal stories. The book’s other purpose is to serve as a store of memory.

Portraits of Survival Volume 1: The Holocaust was released online in early 2021 in three formats: as an interactive e-book; as an epub for Apple users; and as a .pdf. A hardcover version is to follow. The advantage of reading the book online is that the technology used enables the reader to take advantage of the magic of digital manipulation, which I will discuss later in the review. Also, the book being available on the websites of the three South African Holocaust centres, provides access to a wider audience. Shortly after the release of Volume 1, *Portraits of Survival Volume 11: The genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda* was also released – again online – and I will cover this book in a separate review.

Before delving into the aims, assumptions, insights and conclusions that the book offers, I will briefly examine the structure of the book and why it is presented this way.

There are numerous ways in which narratives and testimonies of survivors have been chronicled, such as books, podcasts, videos and on websites. For example, individual survivor stories are told as part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum’s (USHMM) ‘Behind Every Name there’s a Story’ project on their website. However, this format was not an option for the SAHGF as it does not have its own website; rather, each museum has its own website. The stories of the survivors from each region were therefore brought together in this publication. The format of the narratives is, nonetheless, similar to the USHMM’s with the narrative texts enhanced by images.

In terms of its place in the broader body of similar works, *Portraits of Survival Volume 1: The Holocaust* (2021) is produced in the tradition of books such as *Survivor: A portrait of the survivors of the Holocaust* (Borden, 2017) and *Written in memory: Portraits of the Holocaust* (Wolin, 1997). Borden’s (2017) book focuses on contemporary photographs of survivors, accompanied by a few written thoughts or memories. At the end of the book, there is a short biography of each of the photographed survivors. *Written in memory: Portraits of the Holocaust* (Wolin, 1997) also focuses on the visual, with the words of Holocaust survivors being imprinted on the images. Written narratives of Holocaust survivors can be found in *We must not forget: Holocaust stories of survival and resistance* (Hopkinson, 2021). In the latter, the stories of Holocaust survivors are first presented in the form of very short vignettes and then more broadly integrated into the wider history of the Holocaust as a historical text.

Portraits of Survival Volume 1: The Holocaust (2021) opens with a poignant foreword

by Stephen Smith which sets a reverential but informal tone. To contextualise the stories, the foreword is followed by a precis of events of the Holocaust for readers who might not be familiar with it. The stories, which comprise the body of the book, are divided into four themes and neatly echo the layout of the local Holocaust museums.

The first seven stories in the section titled 'Seeking Refuge' detail the experiences of survivors who sought refuge in South Africa during the early stages of the Holocaust when escape was difficult and dangerous but still possible, albeit limited by immigration quotas for Jews worldwide. The editorial on page 12 notes that in 1930, prior to the outbreak of World War II, 3 621 German Jews were allowed to enter South Africa but, by 1937, during the height of the Final Solution and transports to the death camps, only 220 Jewish immigrants were able to enter the country. Claire Lampel (p. 13) and Martha Levi (p. 19) were amongst the group of travellers who arrived on the liner, the *SS Stuttgart*. Gerde Goedecke (p. 34), on the other hand, undertook a circuitous journey through various European countries before settling in South Africa. While the stories are all very different in texture, the narratives in this section speak particularly to the trauma that the survivors faced when leaving their families behind and how they established new lives in South Africa.

In the challenging second section, 'Life & Death in the Shadow of the Holocaust', which consists of ten vignettes, the survivors describe their harrowing experiences in ghettos, concentration camps and killing centres such as Auschwitz. For Ella Blumenthal (p. 63), life in the Warsaw Ghetto was marked by starvation, malnutrition and disease. She describes how she and her sister, Roma, 'endured horrific experiences in Majdanek while working as "human horses"' (p. 67), being sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau to build roads, and finally being taken to Bergen-Belsen concentration camp where they were ultimately liberated. The survivors share their memories of the traumatic experiences. They do so in a factual and un-sensationalised manner, yet their horrifying accounts expose the reality of their situations – starvation, disease, terror, and trauma. The writer of Judy Diamond (nee Riff)'s story (p. 83), for example, relates:

Judy remembered the children's dormitory rooms filled with three-tier bunk beds so as to squeeze 32 children into a single room. She endured terrible suffering in the children's home. Illness was rampant, in particular typhus, and she was sick much of the time; their food rations were almost inedible and wholly insufficient. (p. 88).

Judy was 13 years old when she arrived at Theresienstadt ghetto.

Those living under these circumstances realised that there was no escape from this world in which Jews were dehumanised, tortured, and murdered on a daily basis and denied basic human rights. Even today, the telling of their experiences remains a difficult

task for many, such as Ervin Schlesinger (p. 90) who confessed that he remained silent for many years after the Holocaust as he found it very difficult to tell even his children about what he had endured. But as guides at the various Holocaust centres, some of the South African Holocaust survivors, share their stories with thousands of learners annually. For these guides, contributing to furthering an understanding of racism, discrimination and ultimately genocide provides meaning for them. Unfortunately, stories of pain, trauma, and loss through the horror of genocide are not unique to the Holocaust, a fact shown all too clearly in Volume II about the post-Holocaust genocide in Rwanda.

Changing the theme from death, darkness and destruction to that of hope and resilience are the next sections, 'Kindness and Courage' (nine stories) and 'Honouring the Past' (eight stories). 'Kindness and Courage' chronicles the survivors' encounters with people from various nationalities and religions who reached out to them, enabling them to survive. The rescuers hid or adopted Jewish children, smuggled people across dangerous borders with forged documents, defied the Nazis by producing anti-Nazi newspapers, bombed railway lines, generally exhibited civil disobedience at the risk of their own lives, or committed acts of bravery, such as taking part in acts of resistance. Illustrating one such instance is the story of Irene Groll (nee Kayem) (p. 126). She was rescued by a French family and her narrative account details how she found herself transformed from a Jewish German girl to a non-Jewish French one by her rescuers and the consequences of that decision on the rest of her life.

Finally, the fourth section, Honouring the Past, directs the reader to examine themes of renewal, perseverance and bearing witness, themes that document the manner in which many of the survivors chose to define their post-war lives. Giuseppe Cone, for example, despite his traumatic experiences, chose not to live the rest of his life as a victim, instead choosing 'optimism and resilience' (p. 189), thereby honouring his past. This is also true of Irene Klaas (p. 191), who did not to speak of her personal experiences during the Holocaust for forty years because she did not want people to pity her – she simply wanted to be 'like everybody else' (p. 196) while Pinchas Gutter (p. 229) found meaning in sharing his story for the purpose of 'improving humanity' (p. 230). Revenge was not on the minds of the survivors in this volume. They were too busy forging new lives and building new families in their post-war endeavours. Yet the past lingers and for some survivors, regret, longing, pain and unfinished business is also part of their ongoing Holocaust journeys, as Carmela Heilbron's story (p. 223) illustrates.

For many readers, their first instinct on opening the book might be to navigate the stories of people that they know personally or about whom they have heard, as I did. Some

portraits are relatively short and succinct, while others offer an in-depth exploration of the survivors' lived experiences.

The four category headings provide thematic guidelines as to the nature of the stories in each section. Furthermore, to assist readers to find key words or phrases, an editorial device is used whereby some of the text is highlighted in bold and in colour. This is attention-grabbing, which is useful for a reader browsing through the book, but ultimately, I found them somewhat distracting when I was trying to scan for other themes.

Also, while the four category headings certainly describe one aspect of the stories, because of the complex, diverse nature of the survivors' personal experiences, even when they experienced the same event, results in a great deal of cross-pollination of themes, making classification difficult. For example, Giuseppe Cone's story relates his traumatic experiences at Auschwitz (p. 186). Yet his story has been placed under the heading 'Honouring the Past' because of his 'huge propensity for positivity' (p. 189). This web of interconnected, cross-story themes makes categorisation difficult, so an index at the end of the book might assist researchers or students looking for particular themes. Also, there could be a final rounding off chapter as, for me, the book ended quite abruptly.

For me, some of the other themes that resonated throughout the book included: the advantage of having family members, friends or fellow travellers as a means of survival; the power of the desire to live; the sense of a lucky escape; and the deep insight gained by the survivors into the meaning of the lives in the shadow of the Holocaust.

The narrative of each story is supported by photographs illustrating events from the storytellers' lives. Many of the vignettes begin with a childhood photograph of the protagonists and end with a present-day one, often with the survivor surrounded by family, which almost serves as a moment of triumph. As in the museum experience, the accompanying photographs are linked to the theme of the text, but the book's portraits allow the reader to delve into the survivors' personal lived experiences in greater depth.

In addition to the interesting narrative text, the book is visually engaging. Original black and white images often appear to be frozen in time but some of the photographs are given a special colour treatment to bring the narrative to 'life' and draw them into the present. Readers of the digital version can switch between the treated and untreated images. This juxtaposition of past and present, digital versus old-school images, adds further depth to the texture of the narratives. Instructions on how to work with the images are clear, as are the narrative explanations in the images, captions and credits.

Through these deeply personal narratives, this volume draws together themes and images that highlight the complexity of Jewish experience during the Holocaust and are

part of the greater body of recorded Holocaust survivor narratives that contribute to teaching and learning about the Holocaust. For many of the narrators, the goal of revealing their intimate and painful experiences is not simply to relate what happened to them but to seek catharsis (Kearney, 2007:61), record their stories for posterity, honour those who perished or give greater social meaning to their experiences. As Donald Kraus's portrait reveals:

Don believed that, as a survivor, he was obligated not to forget, to bear witness, and to testify to what he saw and experienced. 'We and we alone know what really happened; it is we who must speak for those millions of men, women and children who are no more and whose voices will never be heard again.' (p. 202)

On this and many other levels, the book succeeds. The narratives, intertwined with historical first-hand accounts, peel back the layers of the personal lived experiences of the Holocaust survivors who came to live in South Africa.

However, despite my deep interest in the topic, fatigue eventually set in and the weight of the stories sometimes became overwhelming the further I delved into the book. This is not a book to be read from cover to cover as you would with a novel. While the reader wants nothing more than to linger and empathise with each storyteller, simply reading from story to story can be challenging. With thirty-four portraits to choose from, reading a few vignettes at a time might be easier than trying to read through the book from cover to cover as I did. It is understandable that the editors wanted to include as many stories as possible – each is a unique record of the Holocaust survivors' experiences from across South Africa – and which could be omitted?

Portraits of Survival Volume 1: The Holocaust provides a South African perspective of Holocaust history through the lens of the wide-ranging, personal lived experiences of Holocaust survivors who came to South Africa. As I ventured through the book, it felt like I was turning the pages of a family album with the storyteller standing next to me and guiding me through what had happened to them during Holocaust and beyond. This volume is like a family or community album of shared memories rather than an academic, historical text. Yet it provides a rich primary source for learners, teachers and researchers and is a valuable addition to the libraries of the local Holocaust museums as well as contributing to the now vast collection of Holocaust personal stories and testimonies worldwide.

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CHILDREN OF HOPE: The Odyssey of the Oromo Slaves from Ethiopia to South Africa

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The book titled *Children of Hope: The Odyssey of the Oromo Slaves from Ethiopia to South Africa*, explores and sheds some light on the experiences of the sixty-four Oromo slaves who were taken from Ethiopia to South Africa. The book highlights the liberation of Oromo slaves by the British Navy and taken to Lovedale institution championed by the Scottish Missionaries. This great compilation comprises five different parts and eleven descriptive chapters. Each chapter covers significant aspects such as geography; topography; Ethiopian population; demographics; family structures; routes from capture to the coast; education at Lovedale as well as the dilemma regarding returning home of slaves amid political unrests. Shell's experience as a librarian gave her direct access to the manuscripts that capture the experiences of slavery by Oromo slaves which included their narratives. Furthermore, the author was able to get in touch with the grandson of one of the rescued Oromo slaves, who provided incisive accounts about the experiences of slavery by his ancestors. The geographical influence of Ethiopia and the *Horn of Africa*, as well as the political and socio-economic impact on the Oromo captives and their families, will be further explored in the review.

In the four chapters which make up the first part of the book subtitled roots: Memories of Home, Shell provides a strong description and understanding of the horn of Africa. This part of the book indicates that there are eighty groups that make up the population in Ethiopia, and that the Oromo people (who were called the *Galla* which meant "uncultured" people until the 1970s) amount to a larger percentage of the Ethiopian population. Shell argues that the history of Ethiopia has not been adequately explored, it tends to focus on those who were in power at the expense of those who were marginalized, such as the Oromo people. Parallels are drawn between Ethiopian slavery and Apartheid South Africa. The Tigrayans for example, make up only 6 percent of the Ethiopian population, but managed

to occupy positions of power. This comparison enables South Africans to understand the commonalities between the political dynamics of the two countries. The writer further explains that although there are eighty-four languages in Ethiopia, Ethiopians are united by one language which is the Oromo language (Afaan Oromoo) that is spoken in other parts of Africa like Kenya, Sudan and Somalia. In terms of religion, Shell explains that the Oromo's traditional religion is centered around *Waaqa* who is defined as the "Sky God" and that they also worship the big tree on the mountain. The writer also takes us through the myths surrounding the origin of the Oromo people, which include among other things the claim that they were not the first inhabitants of Ethiopia. In the second chapter, the writer deals with the Oromo family structures and the recruitment strategies on the basis of the accounts by sixty-four Oromo slave children. It turns out that some of these children were already orphans when they were taken in as slaves, while others were separated from their parents, ranging between the ages of seven and fourteen. The first part of the book profoundly provides the reader with the context within which slavery and slave trade particularly in the *Horn of Africa* thrived.

The second part of the book comprises two chapters and explores the slave trading routes from the point of capture to the coast, as well as from the moment of capture right up to the experiences of the road by the Oromo slave children. The writer narrates the process of enslavement of these children amongst other issues and highlights the involvement of the state, capture of children while they were heading livestock, night house break-ins, ambushes, and debt redemption. There is also reference to literature from the travellers who have studied this enslavement which indicates that some parents sold their children using tricks and deception. Significantly this part of the book answers the most fundamental question: Who captured the children? The varied ways through which the children were captured shows that some of the enslavement was forceful and violent, while some did not experience violence from their captors at all. The literature goes a little further to identify the instigators of *Horn of Africa* slave-trade to be the "Arabs," although at the point of capture, there were different agents including the local people whom the Oromo children were able to recognize as their captors. Gender dynamics are also discussed with some interesting revelation that 93 percent of the captors were male and only 7 percent were female, who often used trickery such as luring children away from their homes.

The third part of the book comprises four chapters which cover the journey of Oromo slave-children to Lovedale in South Africa and their settlement there. In this part of the book, the writer included records of Reverend William J. B Moir who welcomed and took care of the rescued Oromo children. These records reveal that the Oromo children

experienced culture shock at Lovedale, although they were familiar with some of the things from their country such as herding cattle, nature of houses and the geographical make-up of South Africa including its environmental layout, which enabled them to relate to some degree. Processes that were undertaken to help these children settle in, including building accommodation for them upon arrival, were also covered extensively in this part of the book. On the education front, the Oromo children had to adapt to the South African curriculum, which obligated the school to find people who were conversant with Oromo language to translate teaching and learning material. Significantly, the writer delved a little deeper into what the Oromo children were taught, who taught them, and their academic progress. It is also revealed in this part of the book that some of the challenges that these children were confronted with were dire, culminating in the death of at least 13 in the first ten years of their settlement in Lovedale.

The fourth part of the book captures significant aspects of the Oromo children's experiences in South Africa. They grew to become literate adults who were at liberty to determine their future and make independent choices including returning home. The parties involved in making such determination, were also identified in this section of the book.

In the very last part of the book, Sandra Shell reflects and interprets data from the entire book. All the aspects covered in this book which include among others; exploring Ethiopia, the capture of Oromo children, their rescue and lived experiences at Lovedale with the missionaries and their eventual return home, are quite significant and represent the crucial part of African history. Furthermore, they enhance the book's usefulness to both historians and readers who are keen on tapping into themes from African history, particularly slavery. The use of primary evidence in the form of graphs, pictures, maps, tables, interviews and letters of the Oromo slaves, strengthen the credibility of the book, in its contribution to the development of historical knowledge and understanding. Although the book is presented as a well-thought out piece of academic writing, it is however less accommodating to readers who are not familiar with historical concepts and who do not have a good background in geography. Some of the illustrations used require knowledge of social sciences particularly the geographical component.

MARJORIE'S JOURNEY - ON A MISSION OF HER OWN

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This book is marketed as a 140-page WWII biographical memoir – an easy and interesting read especially for teachers and historians. Told with pathos, off-set by humour, it documents an unusual wartime story.

The author - Ailie Clegghorn - had close familial ties with the key character – Marjorie Marnoch – a young Scottish woman of remarkable resilience and resourcefulness. The trigger for penning this memoir was a 28-page letter Ailie stumbled upon in some forgotten family files.

This letter written by Marjorie in 1980 had been a response to Sandy's request as an adult for the story of their wartime experiences in South Africa. At the time of their sailing from Glasgow to Cape Town aboard the *Winchester Castle*, Sandy had been a tiny nine-month-old infant.

Using several voices, diary entries, personal interviews, letters, telegrams and photographs, the reader is provided with an astonishing account of how Marjorie took 10 children, all younger than six, – at the agreement of their parents - through the treacherous U-boat infested waters to safety in South Africa in 1941.

The opening chapters provide context for how Marjorie came to be part of the author's family history. Marjorie did not have a happy childhood – her mother died when she was barely three and her father left her in the care of the author's grandparents in Aberdeen for twenty-six years while he served the Empire in Canada. This most difficult period in Marjorie's life was characterized by rejection, resentment, and dislike particularly on the part of Lady M who wielded strange control over Marjorie's decisions including the termination of a relationship with a beau. Upon finally being permitted to leave the household in 1936, she was told as she walked down the steps: "You haven't tipped the

servants”! suggesting that she had been considered an unwelcome guest all those years.

Marjorie soon set in motion her plans to provide young children with happier circumstances than her own and as a trained Montessori teacher she set up a pre-school and home for children whose parents were mostly working in West African colonies. Her natural affinity for young children and her loving, motherly nature ensured that parents confidently entrusted their children to Marjorie who thrived in her care.

At the outbreak of the war, all families were sorely disrupted by absent fathers and evacuee children. Late in June 1940, Marjorie received a call from a British Brigadier General with a surprising request: to take his daughter and all the other children in her care “away from the war”. Marjorie was given only a few hours to consider “this enormous responsibly and frighteningly dangerous mission”.

A fascinating and detailed description of the journey undertaken from Bournemouth up to London then on to Glasgow and finally the three-week voyage to Cape Town follows. From there again, a new place to stay needed to be sought as already two more children had joined Marjorie’s’ troupe. The search for such a place and the fortuitous culmination of various events and persons, allowed Marjorie to sign a lease for a spacious, most suitable house in Robertson, a small town near the Breede River some 200 km inland from the South African harbour they had docked in several weeks earlier.

The house was aptly named *Bairnshaven*; bairn being the Scottish word for young child and haven a place of peace and safety. The children now as adults recall with great nostalgia their happy times spent together over several years.

Marjorie’s children did indeed escape the horrors of war and lived a care-free, idyllic life filled with love, companionship, a large menagerie of pets, loving domestic help, Afrikaans-speaking school friends all crowned by many adventures in a sun-filled pastoral environment. They were even presented to the Royal Family on their first post-war trip out of England after receiving a letter written “at her Majesty’s command” requesting to meet Marjorie and the children.

This true story throws new light on how early childhood hardships may foster the tenacity and purpose in some for becoming accomplished, confident adults. It certainly highlights – in particular – how severed parental relationships affected families. A poignant remark by Sandy when asked by the Queen whether he missed his mother suffices: I don’t remember Mummy.

The book closes with tales of many of the children’s lives after returning to England. Their tributes to Marjorie having given them the “best possible childhood” testify to their enduring and endearing relationship with her and each other. Marjorie’s own

story culminates in her establishing another school, *Fledglings*, in Richmond. This school accepted children from all walks of life sans discrimination on the basis of appearance, parental wealth or intellectual capability. Here too, she continued the caring, encouraging ethos until the school closed in 1974 upon her retirement. Her mission accomplished in more ways than one.

The cultural cameos provide insight into the societal mores and pretensions as well as class divisions of urban, 20th century Scotland, the stark social and environmental differences found in rural South Africa and the unrecognized role that women played in this war. I was intrigued at how – with apparent ease – the young ones adapted to being taught “that awful stuff” (Afrikaans). I marvel at how one, single woman could offer so many children hope, and unconditional kindness. Her physical strength, fortitude, and ability to adjust and surmount challenges are the hallmarks of a true teacher whose passion is her calling.

I had the privilege of seeing the gold pocket watch returned to Sandy as well as facsimiles of the correspondence Marjorie shared. The author has painstakingly traced the various historic and familial threads and enriched her research with exquisitely clear watercoloured photographs. The book has all the makings of being turned into a riveting film.

Perhaps the family secret related to Lady M’s disdainful treatment of Marjorie may yet be revealed some day!