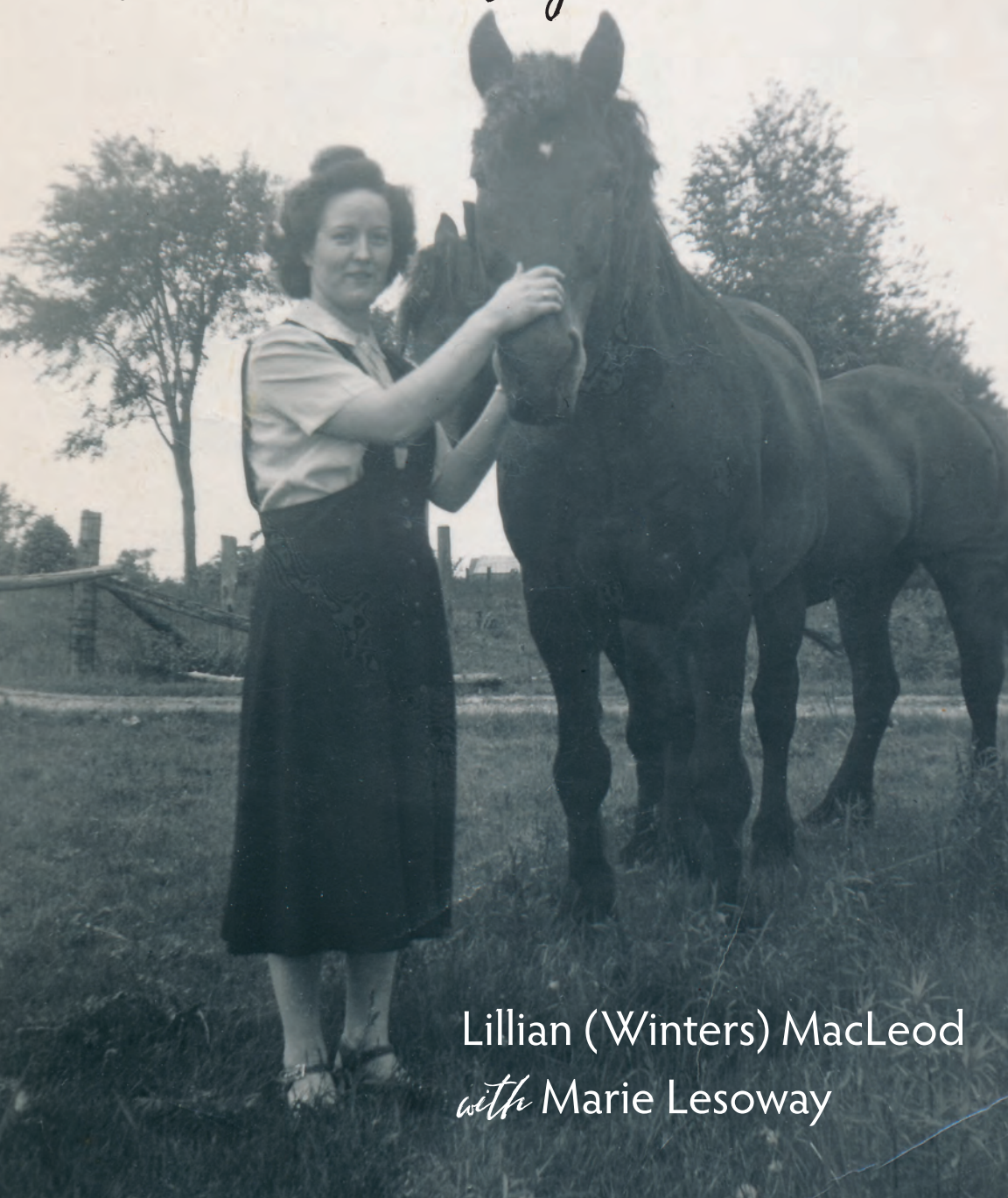


# Looking Back on My Life

*Stories to tell my grandchildren*



Lillian (Winters) MacLeod  
*with* Marie Lesoway

*When the golden sun is setting  
And your mind from care is free,  
When of absent ones you're thinking  
Will you sometimes think of me?*

—Aunt Millie Ross's inscription in Lillian's  
autograph book, October 15, 1941

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Lillian MacLeod  
with  
Marie Lesoway

A production of





Your life. Your story. For the people you love.

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Based on interviews with Lillian MacLeod conducted by Ron MacLeod and Marie Lesoway, Storyphile

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## A Note from Lillian's Collaborator

**L**illian (Winters) MacLeod is my mother-in-law. (I am married to her eldest son, Ron.) And I really lucked out in the mother-in-law department.

It has been a privilege to have had a hand in helping my mother-in-law Lillian capture her life story. But it wasn't always an easy task. For starters, Lillian is a very private person. She might brag about the accomplishments of her kids or her grandkids, but she never blows her own horn. She would never have offered up her stories without a lot of prompting from the sidelines. In fact, she's never really thought that she did anything too special in her life.

This book will tell a different story.

My mother-in-law Lillian was and is a remarkable woman. In the 1930s, she was an outstanding athlete. She could skate and play hockey as well as any boy, and her classmates always picked her as captain and pitcher for their schoolyard ball games. In the 1940s, she was an independent woman of means, with a paying job and her own car in an age when most women had neither. In the 1950s, she had four babies in three-and-a-half years, and kept them all in snowy cloth diapers—without an automatic washer or dryer or any outside help.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, she raised up her kids and adjusted to life with two diabetic sons. Her house always sparkled and her pantry shelves groaned with pies and pickles and preserves. Her flower beds were the most spectacular in Ontario's Three United Counties, and there was never a stray weed in her huge vegetable patch. Except for the rare Sunday when her family lunched on canned beans and toast, Lillian cooked up three huge meals, from scratch, each and every day. (And scalloped potatoes didn't come in a box in those days!) She supported her husband and made the best of things when a bad heart forced his unexpected early retirement, and he had to sell the farm that had been in his family for generations.

In the 1980s, Lillian became a proud grandmother, and in the same decade, survived the loss of her youngest-born, who died at the age of 23. In the 1990s she carried on with strength and courage when she was left a widow, uprooted once again, and faced with building a new home and a new life in a new town. Lillian took up bowling when she moved to Ingleside, and got to be very good at it. She also made scores of new friends.

In the current century, Lillian has survived cancer, broken bones and extended stays in hospitals and rehab centres. But she carries on. No matter what life throws her way, she responds with practical good sense, good grace and good humour. "I'll be dead one way or another," she says. "So I might just as well accept things."

Lillian's approach to life was undoubtedly influenced by the example of her parents, Heber and Ada (Ross) Winters. Her parents lived a love story that could have been written for the silver screen...

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## The Ross Family

My mother—Emily Ada Ross—was born in Mille Roches, Ontario, on November 13, 1897.<sup>7</sup>

Mom's parents were Fred Ross and Christina Jarvo. I think they were both born here—in North America. My grampa Ross was born in Plattsburgh, New York, but he eventually moved his family to Mille Roches.

My gramma and grampa Ross had twelve children, Mary, Ethel, Viola, Freda, Ada (my mom), Alfie, Lloyd, Alledra, Austin, Clare, Vince and Millie.<sup>8</sup>



*My gramma and grampa Fred and Christina (nee Jarvo) Ross.*

My Grampa Ross was the barber in Mille Roches.<sup>9</sup> He died in 1926, the same year I was born. When Grampa came to visit Mom, just after she had me, he brought her a little glass jam jar with a silver lid and spoon.



My Uncle Vince Ross was about 17 when Grampa Ross died. He was probably old enough to take over the barbershop business by then. I know he was a barber later on.

I don't know if Uncle Vince had any training as a barber. He might have just learned from his dad.

I remember that there was a pool table in the Ross barbershop, and one barber's chair. When Uncle Vince was the barber, he mostly cut men's hair, I think. The men would go for to get a haircut and play some pool and make an evening of it.



*The Ross barbershop in Mille Roches is the square-topped brick building in the centre of the photo. The Hickman/Touchette IGA store is left of the barbershop. The Derousie hardware store is at right. The hardware store was moved to Cornwall and converted to apartments before the seaway opened and flooded Mille Roches.*

*Photo courtesy of the Lost Villages Historical Society.*

## My Early Years

I was born on June 5, 1926, and named Lillian Margaret. The Margaret was for my great grandmother Margaret (MacMillan) Jarvo on my mom's side of the family.<sup>11</sup> My family called me Lillian, but some of my friends now call me Lil—and I like that.

I was the fifth of nine children—right in the middle. There were four before me and four behind me. There were a couple of miscarriages somewhere in there, but I grew up with three brothers and five sisters: Harold, Dorothy (who sometimes went by Dot), Maurice, Ruby, Muriel, Garnet, Joan and Jean.

Most of us were born at home, on Post Road. We were delivered by Dr. Messecar, our family doctor, who had a practice at Mille Roches. When Mom was expecting, Dad would hitch up the horse and sleigh—or take the car, in the summer—and go collect the doctor at the first

pain. Only the two youngest, Jean and Joan, were born in a hospital—at Cornwall.



*My sister Dorothy by the lilac bush planted where the stillborn baby was buried, on the west side of our house.*



*There were four years between my sister Ruby and me. Mom had a stillborn baby in between. I'm standing beside the lilac bush planted where the baby was buried.*

**DR. MESSECAR**

Dr. John Messecar (1871–1944) opened his practice in Mille Roches soon after graduating from the University of Toronto in 1898 (Harkness 1946, 463). He was a partner in Bennett & Messecar Co., manufacturing chemists, wholesale druggists and cheese factory suppliers.

These pictures of Dr. Messecar and his Mille Roches house are from H. M. Stiles's 1919 history of the Cornwall Cheese and Butter Board. The Lost Villages Historical Society's Facebook page notes that the Messecar house was moved from Mille Roches to Long Sault. The porches were removed when it was converted into the Royal Canadian Legion Branch #369.



I think the only time anyone in our family ever saw a doctor was when Mom was having her babies. I never remember going to a doctor when we were kids. You didn't go to a doctor unless you were dyin'. Dad never went to a doctor until the week before he died.

When I was 11 or 12 years old, Mom and Dad had gone away somewhere and my brother Maurice was having the thrashers in. Well, it was nothing like the crowd that we used to have on the farm after I was married, but there was enough for a kid my age. I got dinner ready for the thrashing crew. I remember I was the only one there. I imagine the older ones must have been gone from home and the younger ones must've been in school.

I remember making butterscotch instant pudding for dessert. And I got them dinner—potatoes and cooked meat and whatever. And I made fresh butter. I thought I was pretty smart for to do that!

It probably wasn't as good a meal, maybe, as they'd have got somewhere else. But I guess they were full and they were done.



*Our butter churn looked like this one in the T. Eaton Co. 1918–1919 fall and winter catalogue, but it wasn't powered with a motor. Source: Canadian Mail Order Catalogue Collection, Library and Archives. © Sears Canada Inc. Reproduced with the permission of Sears Canada Inc.*



## Appendix 2: Tracing Back

*The following information was researched and compiled by Marie Lesoway. The “Lillian” that is referred to is, of course, Lillian (Winters) MacLeod.*

### Census Secrets

Census records can be a gold mine of genealogical information, but the details can’t always be trusted. The spellings of names in census records definitely cannot be trusted. Census takers wrote down people’s names the way they heard them, so in different census years, the same person might be recorded as Minerva or Manerva, Edna or Edney, or Johiel, Johile or Jehial. Christiann might be written as Christiana or Christina or Christena or Christy Ann. And the surname Bopp might appear as Bobb or Bepp or even Boop.

Census searches themselves can be a challenge. For example, some digitized databases of old census files record the surname Winters as Wintero and Wenters, and the surname Ross as Rose. Such misspellings make it tricky to find people.

It’s often tricky to read the handwriting on old census records too. For example, an old-fashioned handwritten double s often looks like a *p* to a modern reader. And names like Archibald and Robert are sometimes abbreviated with superscripts, so they appear as Arch<sup>d</sup> and Rob<sup>t</sup>.

The following table shows the wide diversity of “facts” that can be found in census records. Finding the real story can be a challenge.

*Fred Ross’s particulars as recorded in census records for 1891, 1901, 1911 and 1921. Fred was Lillian’s grandfather on her mother’s side.*

Census Year	Place of Birth	Racial Origin	Nationality	Mother Tongue	Religion
1891	United States	not asked	not asked	not asked	Baptist
1901	Urban Quebec	French	Canadian	French	Roman Catholic
1911	Quebec	Scotch	Canadian	English	Roman Catholic
1921	United States	French	Canadian	not stated	Roman Catholic