Foreword

An Ordinary Life

The story I am about to tell here is that of one of those women who lived an “ordinary” life, that is, a life that would not be included in the official history of the country nor cause a stir in the community, at least not on the surface.

However, when we start questioning people who have lived a so-called ordinary life, one sometimes discovers stories that are far from ordinary. The story of Marie-Louise Bouchard Labelle is such a one. To live an illegitimate love with a priest thirty-three years older than oneself, survive the Great Depression of the early twentieth century as a single parent, and launch into business barely knowing how to read or write, does not correspond with the images that one normally associates with an ordinary life. In her ongoing struggle to survive and to raise her three children, Marie-Louise showed ingenuity, determination, generosity and joie de vivre. Her story is that of an ordinary life of great interest.

Book Methodology

Many challenges confronted me as I embarked on the adventure of writing this biography. First of all, it was the story of a deceased woman that I had never known. Furthermore, since she was practically illiterate, she did not leave behind significant written documents such as a diary or a sustained correspondence with someone. Finally, she had promised her loved one to never speak of their life.
together, with the result that she took to her grave the details of their love story, leaving a great part of her life in the dark. To learn about her story, I interviewed her children, her grandchildren and other family members. Many sketches of Marie-Louise’s personality emerged through these interviews, each person having known her at different periods in her life. Since they are the ones who told me her story, I have chosen to let them speak for themselves. Their words can describe better than mine the mentality of the day, the local humour and the richness of Marie-Louise’s relationships with people in her environment.

A BILINGUAL BOOK

The original French version of this book contained quotes in English because its story stems from a bilingual reality. Marie-Louise was born in the Province of Quebec, therefore in a French-speaking milieu. She lived in a small francophone enclave in northern Ontario where, in the late nineteenth century, economic development was mostly the purview of anglophone masters. Although the father of Marie-Louise’s children was a French Canadian with a true French name, through the whimsies of destiny her children were raised with an English name. The interviews I conducted with Marie-Louise’s immediate and extended family took place sometimes in French, sometimes in English, and sometimes in both languages.

In the original version of the book, I chose to keep in English the parts of the interviews conducted in English so as not to lose the local colour of the language and of the emotions expressed by the interviewees. Another reason motivated me as well: the reality of our country. It is said repeatedly that “two solitudes” are living parallel lives in this country. However, the reality is that francophones and anglophones brush up against each other daily. They work together, exchange ideas, maintain friendships and often
enjoy leisure activities with one another. Intercultural marriages are multiplying. In respecting the language of my interviewees, the original version of the book reflected that reality, that is to say, the bilingual character of one nation where, in its diversity, people can create love bonds that transcend all linguistic barriers.

*Claire Trépanier*

Ottawa, February 2008

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**Editor's notes regarding translations:**

Unless otherwise noted, all translation of the text, quotes, appendixes and notes is by Louise Mantha.

Direct quotes that are set in italics in this book are translated from the French. Direct quotes not in italics indicate text that was in English in the original French version of the book, *C’est le temps d’en parler.*