

local history projects. It most certainly is a good book for the general reading public who want first rate overviews of historical periods for home libraries. It is especially valuable for Canadians who want to appreciate Canada's early years.

P.B. Waite's book, *Macdonald His Life and World*, gives weight to its period. It deserves your full consideration for purchase.

William Goddard is Chairman of the English Department at St. Charles College, Sudbury, and teaches English, History and Classics.

Joy and Rediscovered Values: A Pioneer Woman of Labrador

SANDRA ESCHÉ

Woman of Labrador, Elizabeth Goudie. Peter Martin Associates Limited, 1973. Paperback edition, 1975. 166 pp. \$4.95 paper.

I expected to be bored by *Woman of Labrador*. "You can't judge a book by . . ." the saying goes, but I disagree; you usually can, and the cover of this book holds all the promise of a government report. I was mistaken.

Woman of Labrador is the life account, the autobiography of Elizabeth Goudie; born 1902 in Mud Lake, Labrador; trapper's wife; mother of eight. The bare facts are not nearly bare enough; the life she describes is as elemental as the rocky terrain of Labrador. Her recollections are detailed and vivid, her story related in a factual, understated way which gives it power.

Having had four years of schooling, Elizabeth Goudie started work at 14. In four years she had saved enough money to buy a washboard when she married. From that point it is a story of moving each year in search of a trapping ground that would, at the very least, provide flour for bread through the winter. A move in Labrador meant long treks into the wilderness, building a log cabin in one month under the threat of the impending winter, covering the infants well and protecting them by a smoking fire from the killer flies and mosquitoes. Barely moved in, it would be time for her husband, Jim Goudie, to go inland; he

would be gone, without the benefit of even a "Wish you were here" postcard, for three long months. Elizabeth Goudie, a young mother of an ever-growing number of infants, had to live with the responsibility of total isolation. On this she does not mince words: "*It was the most dreadful thing being a trapper's wife.*"

Other hardships paled by comparison. At eighteen she had to deliver a baby, fearing the "loss" of the mother and the child. The experience left her bedridden for three days. "*These were the kinds of things we had to go through to live and get along in Labrador*". She later observes, after the death of one son and the near loss of her husband, "*You would be surprised what you can do when you have to do without the doctor.*"

"Poverty" is the only word we have to describe the nature of that life, for it was a life of continual struggle and a modicum of comforts, yet the word is entirely misleading. There was always enough to be able to give, and comfort in the knowledge that one would be provided for in turn. "*Life in Labrador was a life of hard work, but we had peace of mind and contented hearts, and I think this was what made life worthwhile.*"

There was wealth, too, in the beauty of the land. Elizabeth Goudie is never dulled to its impact: "*The sky was so beautiful and clear and the water so calm that I was lost in the beauty of everything around me.*"

I lived in northernmost Labrador for almost one year in an isolated "metropolis" of 600; my copy of *Woman of Labrador* is covered with circles drawn around familiar family names. I experienced many things in Labrador, things I doubt I will ever know again: a pure, constant and incandescent beauty, endless hungers, the loneliness of isolation in the midst of people, a recognition of the egoism and insignificance of city ways. But mostly I learned that everything depended upon people. It is this value that is the kernel at the center of Elizabeth Goudie's life and it is this value that makes it a life richer than most.

Today, the author lives a suburban existence in Happy Valley, Labrador. She even travels to Toronto and Montreal on occasion. Having experienced both ways of life (having, in fact, bridged several centuries in one lifetime) Elizabeth Goudie is in a good position to comment on both. The last two chapters, "What Life Has Meant" and "Looking Forward", are, to me, the most interesting and moving parts of the book. In the comparison between the two cultures may lie the answer to the question few today can avoid: What has gone wrong?

One of the first differences I was aware of in Labrador was that life there was a life without fear. There were no media, no publications,

and without communication with the outside, the outside ceased to exist. Had an atomic war begun we would have learned of it considerably after the fact. Locks were unnecessary; people were friends in time of need, not enemies to be feared. There were no strangers. Today, Elizabeth Goudie comments, “. . . *you feel afraid that something fearful is going to happen,*” and she would choose to live the life she had before.

Another very obvious difference is that we live in a highly mental time. Physical realities impose few requirements upon us; we step around them and continue on our way. We have a lot of free time . . . but for what? Because there is little to do that is essential, many, especially teenagers, lead an inactive existence. In Labrador, wood not chopped meant freezing and game not killed meant starving. Keeping up with what *had* to be done was a more than full-time job.

We hunger, now, for a more elemental life, partly in recognition of the fact that we may have strayed too far from a natural path, and partly as an expression of a need to fulfill an essential role, to be needed. *Woman of Labrador* is fascinating and relevant today for this reason. For me, *Woman of Labrador* has been a significant book because it reaffirmed my faith in the people of the past, in history. We have been through a fantasy-shattering decade. For the most part, I would just as soon believe in Santa Claus as in a portrait of a man and a woman as good, rational, kind, hard-working, courageous, honest, appreciative and sharing. The story of Labrador—its history, its people, its life—is almost unknown to Canadians, yet it is one of the truly worthwhile stories. Furthermore, the story of the life of a pioneer woman, in her own words, has, to my knowledge, never been told. It is the story of our pioneer ancestors, were they alive to speak.

Woman of Labrador would be fascinating reading for young teens and upward (indefinitely); I don't think any library would be complete without it.

Sandra Esche is an editor and writer living in Toronto. She taught grade school in Nain, Labrador, 1970-71.