

“Those were Grand Days”: A New Zealand Teenager Writes her Own Life, 1928–1946¹

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Abstract

This article considers an “autobiography” written by a New Zealand school girl in 1946. This document is a family history artefact that, while possibly unique in terms of genre, has value for broader histories of childhood and youth, of adolescent writing and particularly for understanding the historicised educational experiences of girls in the interwar period. It provides a case study of how such sources can be used or interpreted, arguing in particular for a contextual and relational approach that considers the issues of historical setting, voice versus agency, and discursive influences. In the process it suggests that semi-autonomy rather than full autonomy emerges as a more useful interpretive concept when reading such adolescent life histories.

Introduction

In 1946, a young New Zealand woman, in Form 6B at Waitaki Girls’ High School (WGHS) in Oamaru, picked up her pen and wrote an extended account of her life to that date. Under the simple title of “Autobiography,” Dorothy began to write thus:²

On account of my home having been in Oamaru all the past eighteen years of my life, my birth-place is not unfamiliar to me. In fact I pass the very building in which I was born, twice a day, going to and from school. I was just one of hundreds of babies who have been born in the Rangimarie Nursing Home.

It was late one Sunday night on the twenty-fifth day of March, nineteen hundred and twenty-eight, I was born and quite a substantial baby too, my weight being seven pounds eleven ounces, just one ounce less than my brother Edward’s weight at birth. I was just an ordinary baby with no distinguished looking features, or beautiful white skin. As I grew I was evidently quite good and well-behaved, and did not grizzle as much as some babies. I was not like my brother who, when it came to his feeding time, was always asleep, and Father or Mother had to apply a wet sponge to his face or forehead to arouse him. As the months and weeks passed, I gained in weight, and by the Plunket Nurses reports, I seemed to be quite a normal baby.³

Dorothy told her story over 102 handwritten pages—interspersed with selected annotated photographs or postcards—that filled two standard school exercise books. This was a school assignment, presumably for English; the only evidence for this is a terse teacher’s summative comment which read “Thorough and interesting. 80%.”⁴ Both the structure and language were formal, with turns of phrase that hint at literature that Dorothy may have read (but this is difficult to discern further due to lack of specific literary references). Two pages partially stuck together, in Book 2, indicate that she made mistakes which were subsequently covered up. Apart from family members then or since, her English teacher was possibly the only other person to read the account. It is not clear whether this was an assignment chosen by Dorothy or one that was given to all class members. Together with six exercise books for other subjects, it is all that remains materially from Dorothy’s seven years of junior and senior high school between 1940 and 1946.⁵ As such, these books together comprise a family *taonga*, at once rich and fascinating and yet also frustrating given the limitations of the materials and the relative

lack of contextual information. At the same time, this “Autobiography” begs further investigation. From one vantage point, it provides an important window into our family’s past, doubly important because Dorothy’s generation has now passed, along with their ability to tell us stories or to provide further explanations. From another angle, it presents both a narrative and perspectives that are at once historical (particular to small-town New Zealand in the interwar years of the twentieth century), and that are articulated by a relatively young voice. Here is a young person making sense of her life’s trajectory through formal writing.

This essay focuses on the second vantage point. In particular, I am interested in this rich source as a historian of childhood and adolescence in Aotearoa New Zealand. Internationally, the history of childhood and youth is now a well-established subdiscipline, rooted in the “history from below” turn of the 1970s and subsequently reshaped in response to various epistemological and methodological currents within historical scholarship.⁶ In New Zealand, it was significantly championed and advanced by historian Jeanine Graham,⁷ while others now develop the field further.⁸ Its profile has been raised further by Chris Brickell’s recent compelling history of New Zealand teenagers.⁹ While we now know much more about changing concepts of childhood and of children’s and young peoples’ historical lives, the issue of how to hear from children in the historical record remains. American historian Peter Stearns refers to this as the “granddaddy issue” facing the history of childhood: that is, how to access “information from children themselves, as opposed to adult perceptions and recommendations and adult-created artifacts.” In particular, he notes the difficulties of studying the lives of children aged “between toddlers and teenagers.” While the former have lots of data produced about them, the latter are more likely to produce materials that remain in the historical record.¹⁰

Stearns’ focus was methodological. However, this is also a theoretical and ethical issue, especially given the recent impact on the subdiscipline of postmodernism/poststructuralism and of ongoing revelations about and public enquiries into the institutional abuse of children across a range of national and colonial settings. Australian historians Nell Musgrove, Carla Pascoe Leahy and Kristine Moruzi help to chart the way forward. Instead of focusing on “what the current generation of scholars can say about the history of childhood across time and place” they ask “*how* we can claim to know what we know.”¹¹ Referencing recent foci in the history of childhood—namely “emotion, colonialism, mobilities and religion”—they suggest the following. First, we need to negotiate our way around categories like “children’s voice” and historical “agency,” wherein unhelpfully “simplified binaries of adult versus child do not reflect the complexity of actual human interactions in the past.” Rather, these interactions might be “more usefully understood as relational and contextual.” Second, we should avoid unreflexively reifying children’s voices. Instead, citing sociologist Spyros Spyrou, they highlight the need to “question the frameworks and categories that underpin interpretation” (especially thinking about adult-centred assumptions about the voice of children) and to “examine the discourses which shape what children can say, as well as shaping how researchers interpret what they say.” Third, they highlight both the potential and the power of going beyond “documentary sources written by adults” to consider materials created by children (letters, diaries and artwork) as well as other texts like “photographs, objects, spaces, interviews [and] memoirs.”¹²

Dorothy’s “Autobiography” is a memoir written by an older teenager remembering, processing, selecting, and interpreting the details of her proximate childhood and youth. As such, it seems both to embody Stearns’ expectation (that historical sources produced by adolescents are more accessible) and to act as the kind of source that Musgrove et al. are pushing for us to seek out. My approach is shaped by these concerns about voice versus agency, adult-centred

interpretations or assumptions and the power of prevailing sociocultural discourses operative at the time of writing. In addition, I consider two overlapping concerns. First, this piece of writing is produced by a young New Zealander at a particular point in time, and therefore needs to be interpreted with respect to its historical, geographical and cultural contexts. To this end, Chris Brickell makes a helpful observation: “adolescent histories are intimate tales of thinking, feeling, being, becoming and belonging: large scale shifts and intimate lives are closely intertwined.”¹³ He further argues that New Zealand in this era witnessed the “rise of the ‘teenager,’ a term that first appeared in America around 1930. Like their adolescent predecessors, teenagers were semi-autonomous subjects who navigated the demands of parents, school and work as they fumbled their way towards adulthood.”¹⁴ Therefore, I pay attention to the elements of “thinking, feeling, being, becoming and belonging,” but with an eye on how Dorothy constructed her story in relation to the wider social, cultural and historical contexts within which she lived. In particular, I am interested in the historical formation of adolescent self-identity. As such, I argue that Dorothy’s case appears to corroborate Brickell’s focus on “semi-autonomy” as a more useful descriptive concept than categorical “autonomy.”

Second, this source is an example of a young person narrating her life through writing, and therefore it also needs to be interpreted in the wider context of children’s historical writing. In a broad sense, Dorothy’s “Autobiography” fits into the category of literary juvenilia, that is “youthful writing composed before the age of about twenty.”¹⁵ Over the last decade or so, the scholarly focus, at least in English-language contexts, has mostly been either on letter writing or on children’s published writing in newspaper correspondence columns.¹⁶ Autobiographical writing still needs proper consideration, especially in the educational context.¹⁷ Irrespective, English historian Siân Pooley argues that children’s historical writing needs to be interpreted through a set of overlapping contextual lenses. In her case, investigating “how a popular culture of writing was created by the young” in northern England up to 1914, she argues for the need to engage simultaneously with “three historiographies—of journalism, education and selfhood.”¹⁸ Pooley’s source base is large and various, focused on children’s public writing in the popular press. Here, however, I have a single source, which might very well be unique. Therefore, I will consider together the writer’s context (as stated above), education in the interwar period, and children’s/adolescents’ writing of the self. Discussion focuses on both contents and context and is shaped by a set of key questions.

Contents: Main Emphases

The first question is simply put: what did Dorothy write about and what were her main points of focus? Dorothy devoted almost equal physical space to her younger and older years, with one book covering her pre-school and primary school years and the other her high school years (Table 1). In effect, however, she wrote as much about her six high school years as about her previous eleven years. The story was narrated chronologically, tracing her trajectory from infancy through early childhood and on into her school years. Chapter 3 formed an asynchronous interlude, focusing on annual holidays at a family orchard in Roxburgh, Central Otago that continued through into her early adult years. The final chapter was brief by comparison, being current to the year in which she was writing. It effectively formed an epilogue, serving as a commentary on her values, her hopes and her likely future plans.

Table 1. Structure / Chronology of Dorothy's "Autobiography."

	Title	Age	Years	Pages
Book 1 [0–11 years old]				
1	"I introduce myself, my home and family"	Birth/Background	1928	1–6
2	"Early days of my life"	0–5	1928–1933	7–22
3	"Holidays at Roxburgh"	-	-	22–29
4	"Primary school days and term holidays"	6–8	1934–1936	29–38
5	"Still at primary school"	8–11	1936–1939	39–58
Book 2 [11–18 years old]				
6	"I am a member of the Waitaki Girls' Junior High School"	11–13	1940–1941	59–74
7	"I am a member of the Waitaki Girls' Senior High School"	13–16	1942–1945	75–99
8	"I think about my future"	17–18	1946	100–02

Dorothy recounted a sequence of regular or one-off events, some of which were particular to her situation: early years at home; getting glasses fitted at age three; playing with brother, neighbours and friends; Christmas Days; the annual visit by Wirth's Circus; holidays at Roxburgh and the coastal village of Moeraki; visits with favourite relatives; learning to ride a bicycle; Guy Fawkes' bonfire nights; picnics and birthday parties; taking cod liver oil on Saturday mornings; learning the piano; being bridesmaid for an uncle's wife; trips to Wellington (for the Centennial Exhibition in 1940) and Christchurch; and house parties with senior school friends at Kakanui and Timaru. At a structural level, however, her story revolved around key foci: family (immediate and extended), where she lived (both neighbourhood and town), holidays and recreation, important people, school, and to a lesser extent church or religious involvement.¹⁹ While there were many other points of focus, these were the ones that occurred the most. For example, interspersed throughout were accounts of current events at a local, national and international level; these, however, were not her main reference points.

I would argue that Dorothy shaped her life story with reference to key social institutions. On the one hand, family, home and town served as narrative anchor points. The first three chapters effectively focused on these. Understandably, the companionate family was a primary point of reference: mother and father, who were married in 1923, and a brother Edward, who was three years her senior. This reflected the reality that by the early twentieth century the Western domestic family unit was commonly accepted to be "shaped by affection, based on companionate marriage, and centred on the nurturing of children."²⁰ Their home was built prior to her parents' marriage: "an ordinary bungalow situated in a quarter-acre section with too much garden, hedge and lawn to look after." At the same time, she thought that where they lived had "one of the choice views of Oamaru," with views of the inland "Kakanui range" and out to sea. As a result, she thought that she would not like "to live in any other part of Oamaru," especially not on the flat where "one sees absolutely nothing of the beauty of the surrounding countryside."²¹ She wrote about her parents and brother in warm and respectful tones, with semiformal references to "mother" and "father" throughout. She was obviously fond of Edward yet, at the same time, he was a contested figure in her writing. Early on she observed that he, "being three years older than me, has always been able to better me in everything. He was always successful in an arguement [sic] or quarrel and I used to envy him so much, when he

was allowed to do things in which I of course could not take part. I used to think how much more pleasing it would be if I had a big sister instead of a big brother, but I have come to the conclusion that [he] has always been a good and true brother to me.”²² This theme was repeated in both the “Autobiography” and in an earlier exercise book of essays, reflecting either a particular personality, a younger sibling’s frustration or the prevailing social expectations of girls. At the same time, a sustained focus on members of her extended family, and on place, accentuated the importance of familial connections and of geography within her narrative.

On the other hand, she described her life as passing through an institutional arc that began at a private kindergarten at age five, and progressively moved through all of her school years. Dorothy went through the full experience of compulsory and post-compulsory schooling that was commonplace in New Zealand by the 1940s. As such, her story exemplified the extent to which modern New Zealand childhood was increasingly and “significantly constructed around notions of the schooled childhood,” irrespective of class or locality.²³ This arc also included church involvement, as for many other New Zealand children in this era, but it took up less room in her narrative.²⁴ She referred to being “christened in the Columba Presbyterian Sunday School” at age four months, attending Sunday school and later Bible Class, periodically going to church with her mother and brother, and finally in senior high school joining the Student Christian Movement group.²⁵ While at primary school she was also a Brownie, enjoying weekly meetings and weekend hikes and sausage sizzles at the local “Old Mill.”²⁶ In the case of each new school setting, there was a familiar pattern to her recollections: anticipatory anxiety and awkwardness followed quickly by growing “to like school.”²⁷ Her journey into schooling in 1934 was delayed until age six due to what she termed a “Government Retrenchment Scheme,” the closest reference to the impact of the Depression years.²⁸ By the end she summed up her school years as ones in which “I have learned many good and useful things, made many friends, and spent such happy times.” Looking ahead and anticipating “many hardships and difficulties,” she invoked her school years by writing that “I shall always try to attack [hardships] valiantly and successfully,” striving to follow the paths of virtue—kindness, unselfishness and diligence, and always to respect my elders.”²⁹ The overwhelming impression from her account of schooling and other institutional involvement was one of deep satisfaction; this was a product of subjects learnt and values imbibed, but issued primarily from the enduring friendships that she made.

Contents: Changing Emphases and Silences

Two further questions emerge from the contents. First, how did the emphases in her narrative change over time? Table 2 is an attempt to trace this through the seven main chapters (up until age 16). Some emphases remained relatively constant, such as “place” and to some extent “wider family.” Some, like “play/recreation,” became somewhat blurry categories, morphing into other categories like “holidays,” “friends” and “trips,” especially in her high school years. Other emphases appeared or disappeared at particular points of transition, as might be expected. For example, apart from noting that her mother “came the first day to enrol me” at high school, both parents disappeared from her narrative in the postprimary school chapters.³⁰ That is not easily explained. What is more explicable were the increasingly fewer references to her brother. By this stage he was well ahead of her at Waitaki Boys’ High School, leaving around 1941 or 1942. One reference again included the competitive element; on holiday at Moeraki “we would always have a competition to see who could eat the greater number of hot cakes.”³¹ Other emphases, like “current events” were time dependent in terms of where they were located in the narrative. By her teenage years, however, school was the most frequent emphasis, although it could be argued, in the context of Book 2, that “school” and “friends” became completely synonymous both in her mind and in her articulation of those years in her text.

Table 2. Changing Main Points of Focus 1928–1946 (Numbers of Pages with Mentions).³²

	0–11 years old					11–18 years old	
	Chap 1 [Birth]	2 [0–5]	3 [Roxburgh]	4 [6–8]	5 [8–11]	6 [11–13]	7 [13–16]
1	Place (4) Brother (4)	Brother (9) Play/Recreation (9)	Place (7) Holidays (7)	Play/Recreation (6)	Place (11) Wider family (11)	School (11)	School (16)
2	Parents (3)	Parents (5) Holidays (5)	Wider family (4) Play/Recreation (4)	School (5)	Brother (10) School 10 Play/Recreation (10)	Place (10)	Place (15)
3	Home (2) Landscape (2)	Home (3) Neighbourhood (3) Current Events (3)	Brother (3) Landscape (3)	Wider family (4) Current Events (4)	Friends (9)	Holidays (9)	Wider family (9)
4						Friends (8) Trips (8)	Friends (8)
5							Holidays (6) Current Events (6)

The second question is what were the silences? Some were partial, while others were demonstrably more complete. First, there was silence around some of the elements that made up teenagers' lives in the 1930s and 1940s. Brickell outlines how New Zealand teenagers emerged in this era amidst a combination of homegrown and international influences: the Great Depression; World War Two; bicycles and youth hostels; milk bars and magazines; the thrill of carnivals and Centennial Exhibition rides; American comics and movies; dating, "pashes" and romances. Here, "multi-layered characters engaged with the cultural life around them as they cut and pasted the bits they liked and discarded the rest."³³ That these had taken hold among interwar teenagers was clear from a speech at New Plymouth Girls' High School in 1925. The headmistress, Miss Doris Allan, encouraged girls over the summer holidays to "get out of doors and stay there. Use your long hours, not to parade up and down the streets, not to gaze at an endless procession of movie stars, not to pore over story books, but as a chance to learn something of the intricate, secret, beautiful ways of Mother Nature."³⁴

Brickell's cultural "cut and paste" image is apposite for Dorothy's narrative, serving to accentuate what she did and did not include. Her focus on friends rather than on immediate family, especially for her teenage years, signalled their importance in her life, including daily interactions at school, trips away from Oamaru, and cycling trips to beaches and house parties. Like her friends, Dorothy spent most of her time and money at the 1940 Centennial Exhibition in Wellington in the "Playland" area, with countless rides on "the Ghost Train," a visit to the "Crazy House" and roller-coaster.³⁵ There were limited references to events that brought the wider world into her life. She attended visits to Oamaru by aviators Kingsford Smith (1932) and Jean Batten (1936), General Freyberg (1943), and Danish pianist Haagen Holenberg (1944), as well as the public celebrations for the coronation of King George VI. The Depression was simply alluded to, perhaps because of her young age and memory, which suggests that the Depression did not have a noted impact on her family. New Zealand's centennial year was present through her account of the Exhibition trip, and memories of a celebratory procession

of floats in Oamaru. At the same time, a class of junior girls “acted [out] the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi,” which she simply thought “how interesting it was especially when I had learned about it at school.”³⁶ At the end of Book 1 she wrote “in September 1939 war was declared, but little did I then think of what war really was and would be.” More important was the end of primary school and the “very big step” of going to high school.³⁷ War popped up at a few points, but it did not dominate the content and appeared with little commentary.³⁸ Unlike in many families, no one immediate to her was involved as a combatant overseas; her brother Edward was only just in training with the air force in New Zealand at war’s end. Therefore, perhaps World War Two did not have such immediacy for her. Furthermore, there is no hint in the narrative, at least, of the more draconian approach recalled by later educationist Geraldine McDonald, who attended Wellington East Girls’ College, where “the war was filtered through the influences of the school. We were informed what we should think about it (right was on our side), how we should feel about it (indignant but proud), and what we should do about it (make the kind of things that were useful in World War One).”³⁹ The one hint of its deeper impact appeared in Dorothy’s final pages, where she wrote that whatever she did in life, she would “try to help to make this weary, war-torn world into a brighter and better place.”⁴⁰

Yet other elements of being a teenager in this period were missing. While she indicated that sometimes she was a wilful and naughty younger child, in her teenage years there was no mention of visits to the cinema, reading magazines, romantic interests or of social misbehaviour. One explanation might be that none of these were her experience as a teenager. A more plausible explanation might be to consider her intended audience: namely, her English teacher and possibly her own family, and therefore an awareness of particular social proprieties to maintain. This, along with social expectations of high school girls in this period, will be considered further. Yet there were other silences that seem harder to explain. One is the fact that we learn nothing about her parents beyond their marriage date, her father having their house built, and various home or holiday activities. There are no further reference points in the text for us to be able to position Dorothy and her family socially or culturally (thus limiting the usefulness of this type of source’s potential for reconstructing the social or cultural worlds of children/young people). In fact, other unrelated family history information at our disposal tells us that: the family never owned a car; her father was a jeweller and owned a business in Oamaru; her mother was a teacher (whose father had been an educational leader in Dunedin); her father served in World War One at Gallipoli and as both an NCO and officer with the Māori Pioneer Battalion on the Western Front; and that he was an active and respected freemason in Oamaru.⁴¹ None of these details appeared in her narrative. Neither do we learn of any hardships faced either personally or by the family; again, this is apposite given that the narrative covered both Depression and war years. Overall, the narrative has a distinctly golden-age, rose-tinted feel about it, begging further questions like: did this reflect her family’s story as being relatively untroubled? To what extent were or are teenage storytellers aware of the bigger context? Were there social proscriptions on divulging family details in public writing? Or is this how she chose to remember things?

Context: Education

A second set of questions contextualise and historicise Dorothy’s “Autobiography” more specifically: why did she write this account?; what shaped her approach?; and how does it help us to understand the secondary schooling context in which both this piece of writing was embedded and in which Dorothy found so much meaning? Here, discussion will revolve around secondary schooling in interwar New Zealand and the place of English in the curriculum.

Answering the first of these questions is difficult. There is no explicit evidence to explain the nature or context of the assignment, or that indicates its ubiquity or uniqueness in the context of contemporary English teaching and assessment. However, there are some suggestive threads indicating that autobiographical writing had a place in school contexts. First, this is not the only example of autobiographical writing in the extant school materials left by Dorothy. In particular, two books of essays from both primary and secondary school contain explicit examples of autobiographical writing or, at least, indicate that autobiographical elements were drawn upon for compositional inspiration.⁴² These included essays on picnics and holidays, accounts of everyday life at home, seasons, and family members (Standard 3), and on home, animals, trips and visits, perspectives on being young, and a week's diary (Form 3). In some places, Dorothy directly mined material from these books for her "Autobiography."

Second, it is worth speculating that an individual teacher's creativity may have played some role in what students produced in response to teaching. This was certainly the case in other schools in this period where students were influenced by the creative or performative energies of English teachers, like Miss Bethel at New Plymouth Girls' High School, who "made poetry live . . . [declaiming] *The Ancient Mariner* so that scores of verses still sing in my mind."⁴³ Dorothy was taught senior English by Jean Ballard, the recently appointed head of department in English.⁴⁴ Eventually the founding principal of Queen's High School in Dunedin (1955–1973), Ballard taught English at WGHS between 1944 and 1947 before taking up an interim position as English lecturer at Dunedin Teachers' College.⁴⁵ Newspaper references to Ballard for this period reveal a lively, creative and socially engaged young woman: she performed dramatically and musically in Dunedin as a student and in Balclutha as a beginning teacher; she delivered public lectures on literary topics to the Oamaru Workers' Education Association branch; and she produced dramas in Dunedin for both the Teachers' College and church events.⁴⁶ In light of this, it is reasonable to imagine that she extended this creativity to her students, in the otherwise more formal context of the English classroom, and viewed an exercise such as Dorothy's "Autobiography" as a legitimate way of furthering literary appreciation and writing skills among her students.⁴⁷ It is instructive to note, for example, that both biography and autobiography were listed among the "literary forms" recorded in Dorothy's Form 6 English literature exercise book, wherein she wrote down that "to be of literary importance, a biography should be accurate & important, & told with some degree of skill."⁴⁸ Herein may have resided both the rationale and aims of the "Autobiography" that she finally produced.

Third, conventions of autobiographical writing were evident in wider educational settings and, therefore, a possible focus of students' writing. This was most evident in a set of autobiographical essays written internationally in the 1940s and 1950s. From 1947 onwards, an annual World Youth Forum was held in New York, involving high-school-aged young people from every part of the world and funded initially by the *New York Herald Tribune* newspaper. Part of the application process involved prospective delegates writing a succinct autobiography that also stated why they wished to attend.⁴⁹ These were written by school students and followed very similar writing conventions. As such, they indicate that autobiographical writing was a widely recognised literary form for high school students, practised by young writers from a great diversity of cultural and geographic locations (including Australasia), and therefore feasibly a focus of New Zealand students of the period.

These limitations and speculations aside, Dorothy's "Autobiography" reflected a set of broader emphases in girls' secondary education in interwar New Zealand that revolved around the

importance of literature and aesthetics and which emphasised particular notions of informed, empathetic, and gendered citizenship. The WGHS school prospectus for her period stated that:

The main object of the education provided is the preparation of girls for an intelligent and well-ordered home life, or for a University course and the various professions open to women. . . . Lectures are given during the session on subjects likely to interest and instruct the girls, such as Art, Travel, and Music. Lectures by distinguished specialists are also given when arrangements can be made. In the upper forms the girls are afforded the opportunity of specialising in various subjects, and there are several optional courses available for different careers from which a choice may be made. Pupils in Form VI.a are prepared for the University Scholarship Examinations.⁵⁰

This statement positioned Dorothy at the confluence of two broader sets of influences: a swirl of changes that incrementally reshaped the educational landscape of New Zealand during this period and a long-running emphasis on the value of a liberal education in the Western context. She was one of a new generation of young people for whom a high school education became the norm, due to earlier legislation that abolished the restrictive proficiency examination (1936) and therefore opened up secondary schooling to a greater range of young New Zealanders.⁵¹ Furthermore, while she was still at primary school the new Labour Government championed the New Education Fellowship (NEF) conference in 1937.⁵² This event brought international education specialists to New Zealand and laid the groundwork for a decade of curriculum change following the recommendations of the Thomas Report (1943). As a senior student, Dorothy was part of the first wave of students who participated in a more comprehensive postprimary school system, undergirded by a common core curriculum and which provided dual academic or vocational pathways beyond school. Her track was as a “Professional I” student, an academic stream differentiated by learning French and Latin alongside compulsory English, and options like History, Mathematics, Science and Home Economics.⁵³

The WGHS prospectus hinted at these points of emphasis. It also revealed a philosophical commitment to a liberal education, a broad seam that ran longitudinally through the whole education system. While this has been understood historically in a range of ways, its meaning in the 1930s and its wide-ranging nature was explicated by a NEF delegate:

The body should be developed and trained by systematic and vigorous exercise. The eyes should be trained to see, the ears to hear, with quick and sure discrimination. The sense of beauty should be awakened. The hands should be trained to skilful use. The will should be kindled by an ideal and hardened by a discipline enjoining self-control. The pupil should learn to express himself [sic] accurately and simply in his mother tongue. . . . Above all, a liberal education should endeavour to give, by such methods and influences as it is free to use, a sure hold upon the principles of right and wrong. It should arouse and enlighten the conscience. It should give experience in bearing responsibility, in organisation and in working with others for public ends, whether in leadership or in submission to the common will.⁵⁴

English was central to this conceptualisation of education and was the one subject that Dorothy pursued with sustained success.⁵⁵ Both “appreciation of the best literature” and “knowledge of the languages” (primarily oral and written skills in English) were early touted as fundamental educational goals in New Zealand high schools,⁵⁶ reflecting culturally bound priorities that enveloped the British metropole and white settler colonies.⁵⁷ Such priorities were mirrored by speakers at the NEF conference. With the new focus on individual learning, grammar would be “learned incidentally from the treatment of language as a method of expression of thought

. . . [wherein the child would be] taught to speak well, to express his [sic] thoughts on paper, and to enjoy literature.” A common curriculum should include “English language and literature” with the emphasis on “the ability to read and interpret the printed page.” In New Zealand, “English language and literature” remained central to the common core curriculum that was proposed by the Thomas Report and then instituted for all high schools from 1946 onwards.⁵⁸ At WGHS, it was supported by a newly created department with dedicated teachers, a school-wide “scheme of work” and “programme of reading,” a teacher-run library and such subsidiary programmes as the annual “Shakespeare Day.”⁵⁹ Evidence from the school magazine also reveals a lively culture of creative student writing that encompassed expository or imaginative essays alongside original poetry.

The same literary emphases emerge from other girls’ schools of the period,⁶⁰ which raises a critical point: literary studies were deemed important for girls’ secondary education. Therefore, both Dorothy’s “Autobiography” and her high school experiences need to be viewed through the lens of gender. From the start, English was a core subject in girls’ schools (taking the role played by Classics in some boys’ schools). By the 1920s, as noted by educational historian Ruth Fry, “aesthetic interests generally found more fruitful soil in girls’ schools where the urge to ‘write’ might be given free rein.”⁶¹ As early as 1905, Dunedin educationist Alexander Wilson argued that English was critical for “the sort of education that a girl ought to have that she may be the happier for it, and make others happier for it.”⁶² He argued that literary appreciation would help to enhance the logical faculties (of both girls and boys), as a form of what he termed “mind training.” Furthermore, “a well-educated girl should have some knowledge of languages . . . [and preferably] have as complete a knowledge as possible of her own language.” This included: knowing the history of the English language, how to use words “so that she may also do her little best to hasten that perfectly possible millennium when every man and every woman will treat the queen’s English as they ought to treat all things noble and royal”; having “that respect for words which is founded on intimate knowledge”; and gaining “some perception of style” with respect to the application of both written and spoken English, noting that there was supposed to be “a moral quality in style.”⁶³

These sentiments persisted over subsequent decades, with the emphasis on English as “one of the chief temples of the human spirit.”⁶⁴ As such they were a common focus for annual inspectors’ visits, with scrutiny not just of classroom practice but also the literature available for girls to read and a particular focus on the efficacy of school library collections. As the quoted material above makes clear, literary and linguistic education was as much about shaping girls into socially responsible women and mothers as it was about learning for its own merits. Dorothy’s “Autobiography,” then, as a literary production and a reflection of what she was learning, fitted into a regime whereby, as Fry notes, New Zealand high school girls “were generally given good measure in various branches of English so as to cultivate their tastes, to furnish them with a source of moral inspiration for their task in life and to provide them with a grounding in correctness.”⁶⁵ For some, like an earlier WGHS student, Janet Frame, this “world of literature” became all absorbing and sustaining.⁶⁶ In Dorothy’s case, it was more of a constant and familiar travelling companion in whose company she derived some pleasure.

Context: Adolescent Writing and Identity

Finally, then, how do we make further sense of this contextual matrix with respect to Dorothy’s “Autobiography” as an example of a young person crafting her own life through formal writing in the interwar period? In general terms, as noted by Brickell, the sources created by students of this era “tell of a range of school cultures,” differentiated by such things as students’ experience as boarders or day pupils.⁶⁷ Students’ memories were varied in tone as a result.

Reflecting more particularly on this (for boys at Melbourne's Scotch College in the 1920s), Australian historian Martin Crotty astutely observes that there was a "gap between the self-proclaimed mission" of high schools and the "self-recalled experience of the boys," reflecting a sizeable "gulf between the dissemination and reception of educational ideology."⁶⁸ While accepting that we need to consider the historically "dominant or hegemonic educational ideologies" that shaped such schools, Crotty argues further that it is now time "for a change of focus; through what means we can . . . we should collectively turn our attention towards the lived experience of boys and men who learnt and operated in such environments."⁶⁹ Dorothy's "Autobiography" is one such example of this focus, which points to a complex interplay, I think, between school, society and identity formation. In particular, revisiting Brickell's contention about historical teenagers, two related questions are posed: how did her "Autobiography" manifest "intimate tales of thinking, feeling, being, becoming and belonging"?⁷⁰ and therefore, to what extent did it reveal Dorothy writing herself as a semiautonomous as opposed to fully autonomous individual?

In the first instance, the immediate context of high school is important to consider, because it limited the scope of her writing. This is a standard "caution" for historians working with educational materials. Hester Barron and Claire Langhamer, for example, note that northern British school children writing autobiographical essays for the Mass Observation social surveys of the late 1930s (but knowing that their teachers would check their writing before submission) "adapted their writing—if not their practice—accordingly, reflecting the norms and emotional expectations of the social context."⁷¹ For Dorothy, anticipation of her immediate audience (teacher and possibly parents) implicitly forced her to be both author and censor, and thus set boundaries around what she might write.⁷² In a similar fashion, the autobiographies written for the *New York Herald Tribune* youth forum competition were all clearly written with a specific aim and expectations of what scrutineers might look for. In 1955, after rehearsing a life lived to the full, Melbourne schoolgirl Lesley wrote sincerely—but also with an eye to what her reader expected—that "I also hope to travel [to Europe] and to visit Australia's near northern neighbours, especially Japan, since I believe that only travel can give people an understanding of other countries' problems and help us to understand our own."⁷³ So it was with Dorothy, who took an understandably compliant authorial position with respect to her view of school. She fitted in with the norms and expectations ubiquitous across all New Zealand girls' schools in this era. Christine Cole Catley observes that when Janet Frame wrote her own account of life at WGHS, she received letters from women nationwide "not just because *To the Is-land* is one of the very best accounts of school life ever written but because they wanted to say, 'You wrote about *my* school, too!'"⁷⁴ These schools oftentimes resembled mini fiefdoms, presided over by a headmistress of long tenure who acted as a surrogate mother and who expected high standards of girls both at school and in other public spaces.⁷⁵ Miss J. B. Wilson was no exception. As the headmistress at WGHS from 1920 to 1950, she "made it her life's work to produce scholars and citizens." As such, she "declared that all girls should 'have an education in the worthy uses of leisure, with opportunities for growth and development of character, for personal responsibility and initiative, and for service in the true spirit.'"⁷⁶ In this environment it was not easy to be different or to show resistance. Janet Frame remembers, for instance, that Miss Wilson admonished her sister Isabel with the comment that "You Frame girls think you're so different from everyone else," to which Frame added that at school "to be different was to be peculiar, a little 'mad.'"⁷⁷ For Frame, navigating that world of perceived difference, and making it her own, proved to be critical:

Therefore in an adolescent homelessness of self, in a time where I did not quite know my direction, I entered eagerly a nest of difference which others found for me but which I lined with my own furnishings; for, after all, during the past two years I had

tried many aspects of “being”—a giggling schoolgirl who made everyone laugh with comic recitations, mimicry, puzzles, mathematical tricks, such as “Think of a number, double it,” attempts at ventriloquism; and now I was at home, with some prestige and fairly comfortable.⁷⁸

Dorothy’s narrative, however, suggests that in her mind social belonging and conformity were important for her own identity. Without Dorothy to tell us, or other similar sources across the wider landscape of 1940s New Zealand girls’ schools, we are simply left to speculate why this might have been: most probably a mix of personality and of the values shaped by family, community, class, church or school.

Ex-students of girls’ schools, as for the boys of Scotch College, inhabit the complete spectrum from positive to negative with respect to how they remember their time at school; this is attested to across a range of sources and most graphically, perhaps, in Janet Frame’s writing.⁷⁹ Dorothy’s high school narrative sits towards the positive end of this spectrum, respectfully referring to or judiciously avoiding any pejorative utterances against her teachers and barely mentioning the redoubtable Miss Wilson.⁸⁰ It is possible to detect small resistances: a complaint about the never-ending repetition of words and lines at choir practices; an implicit criticism of the school hall when contrasted with the “magnificent” WBHS Hall of Memories; and an objection over wearing “those horrible black things [stockings]” to the junior school prize-giving ceremony.⁸¹ These, however, were no more than minor irritations. More typical was her praise for Miss Harvey who, as their Latin teacher “had an amazing amount of patience with us. . . . She always had to drum the different rules into our heads over and over again, and I am sure that some of the mistakes she had to correct in our exercise books must have just about made her hair stand on end.”⁸² If there was critique, it was of her own inability to understand, rather than of teachers or teaching methods. This compliant thread was coherent through her whole narrative, culminating perhaps in her stated future adherence to life-long values congruent with those inculcated at school (“virtue,” “kindness,” “unselfishness,” “diligence,” and “respect” for those in authority) and her plan to pursue a teaching vocation, aligned as it was with prevailing expectations for a woman’s choice of career.⁸³ In this respect she potentially reflected an operative gendered moral code transmitted to students through both formal curricula and everyday expectations that were embedded in school ethos and life.⁸⁴ Alternatively, her writing might be one expression of what Barron and Langhamer observed for northern British school children of the 1930s, who in their writing seemed to know how to navigate between “different emotional contexts (for example, school and home) and sought to manage their competing demands” and thus “match emotional style to spatial context.”⁸⁵

A second observation, then, is that this self-censorship notwithstanding (and the implicit questions raised about what persona Dorothy intended to convey and why), the overwhelming impression is that school was extremely important to her and for her own developing sense of self. This was conveyed primarily in emotional terms. While her “Autobiography” can be mined for factual or anecdotal evidence of her childhood and teenage years, there is also a rich seam of emotional language that conveys how Dorothy felt about her lived experience to date and that highlights school as an important emotional point of reference. Of the emotional words that Dorothy deployed in her writing, the vast majority were positive, and this was consistent across all chapters. There were certainly negative emotions dotted throughout (for example, dread at the dental nurse, the disgrace of being punished at kindergarten, loneliness at home and belittlement by her brother, being frightened on first days of new schools, fear when her brother went to hospital, and grief at the death of her dearly loved maternal grandfather).⁸⁶ Negatively framed emotions were almost non-existent in reference to her high school years;

the exceptions were some trepidation at moving from junior to senior high school and anxieties over sitting examinations for the national School Certificate.⁸⁷ However, these were overshadowed in the text by the sheer weight of positive imagery for all stages of her life, employing a wide range of emotions, including pleasure, excitement, joy, fun, pride, being thrilled, and love. Being “happy” was the dominant emotion expressed *ad nauseum*, epitomised in having “many very happy recollections of those happy days” while on holiday at Roxburgh.⁸⁸ While this perhaps reflected a formulaic way of writing or a non-reflexive approach to her memories, Dorothy also gave expression to the prevalent early twentieth-century discourse that happiness should be a defining quality of childhood.⁸⁹ This same emotional refrain was common across many of the culturally differentiated *New York Herald Tribune* mini autobiographies of the 1950s, epitomised by Nasreen from Pakistan who concluded by writing that she did not know “what else to write—my interests are similar to that of any average happy girl.”⁹⁰ In Dorothy’s text the use of emotional language bolstered the sense that she viewed her life to that point with a sense of deep contentment, and that both family and school were significant communities of belonging and self-identity.

Late in her narrative, Dorothy fleetingly revealed herself, when remembering that she was “terribly excited” about passing her “School Certificate Examination,” but that her friend Catherine “just seemed to take it quietly, as of course she would naturally pass; but too, she is a person who seems to be able to control her emotions.”⁹¹ This brings us back full circle to the issue of identity formation in her writing and the degree of teenage autonomy revealed. The foregoing discussion indicates that, while she may not have fully perceived the discursive or contextual parameters of her upbringing, she did clearly identify significant influences that were socially and emotionally important. Two brief comments can be made here. The first is that this hindsight document does reveal a developing sense of autonomous self that was congruent with her stage of development as an emerging young adult. Such moments of self-revelation occurred occasionally throughout the text, but two stand out in this respect. One was a reflective note indicating changing views of self, in which she distanced herself from her younger teenage years. Comparing her senior and junior Bible class involvement, she wrote: “I used to go to [the] socials, where, so I used to think, everyone had grand fun rushing around like mad things, but now as I look back, I do not know what I saw in those silly games we used to play. Probably it was because I was so young and I did not know any better.”⁹² The other moment in the text is her choice to end the whole autobiography by quoting a poem, “Uphill,” by the Pre-Raphaelite poet Christina Rossetti, about which Dorothy wrote that it fittingly “describes life in such a simple way.”⁹³ Perusal of two other senior high school exercise books, in which she kept a record of literature studied and poems read, indicates a focus on literature produced solely by men. This was entirely in keeping for the time, with respect to the English curriculum,⁹⁴ which puts Dorothy’s choice somewhat at odds with the pedagogical status quo. While entirely speculative, this potentially subversive act suggests a young woman attempting to declare, in the formal setting of school, that she was her own person.

The second and final comment, however, is that such moments—while important to note—were overshadowed by the greater weight of her narrative that reveals a sense of self that was relationally and spatially orientated. In other words, people and place were important in how she progressively constructed and reflected upon her life story to date. As we have seen, immediate family, friends and institutional life predominate throughout the narrative. Even where parents and brother disappeared from view in the high school years, wider family members were still significantly present. I would argue, however, that place or space was the matrix that held all of these together in Dorothy’s mind; her narrative was framed by the frequently cited geographic realities of home, family (immediate and wider), neighbourhood,

schools, church, town, holidays and trips. In particular, there appeared to have been a very interesting coalescence of place, family and holidays. Beyond Oamaru, two places, and their inhabitants, took central stage: Roxburgh in Central Otago, where her maternal grandfather owned and ran a commercial orchard; and Moeraki, a coastal village, where her favoured maternal great-aunt retired after being matron of the Oamaru Hospital. Both the positioning of accounts of these places, and the emotionally warm language used in reference to the family members involved, indicate important relationships that were central to Dorothy's evolving sense of self. It is significant, perhaps, that these sentiments were not relegated to the narrative of her earlier childhood, but still resonated for her as a young adult author in 1946. At the same time, the force of her narrative was that both places and people were instrumental in defining who she perceived herself to be, on the cusp of leaving school and entering the world of adulthood.

Concluding Reflections

In her recent book on histories of the self and personal narratives, British historian Penny Summerfield notes the perplexing plethora of “terminological possibilities” faced by the historian: “Life histories, life stories, life narratives, personal testimony, ‘testimonio,’ ego documents, and histories of the self” have all been used but not always helpfully. As such she argues for using “histories of the self,” because it is a term that “does not carry the connotations of chronology and accuracy attached to [such a term as] ‘life histories,’” in that it:

links the idea of the exploration of the past with accounts of the individual self; it embraces narratives that are both voluntary and involuntary, and that provide a snapshot of a life or that extend across the entire life-course; and it is flexible and inclusive, making space for any method of telling a story of the self.⁹⁵

Turning more specifically to autobiography or memoir as a specific form of “history of the self,” Summerfield notes among other things the differentiated nature of such writings. They can be read, for example, “as a source of factual evidence about the author, their experiences, and their social world,” or they can be read as a “literary form through which subjectivity is composed.” At the same time, they exist as a “historically situated practice of self-representation” and therefore constitute an ever-changing genre over time. Furthermore, they are “emphatically retrospective” in that they “are shaped by the two points in time that inform their creation: the moment at which they are composed, and the period in the past that they recall.” This forms a “necessary tension” between “two personal subjectivities, ‘me now’ and ‘me then.’” Finally, there is always an audience which necessarily has an influence on what is written (and what is not written).⁹⁶ Perhaps, in this regard, autobiographies and memoirs are similar in character to two of the key features that sociologist Liz Stanley identified in epistolary writing: the fact that they are “perspectival” documents (wherein their “structure and content changes according the particular recipient and the passing of time”) and that they have “emergent properties” (with their “own preoccupations and conventions” and ethics, which “are likely to change according to particular correspondences and their development over time”).⁹⁷

Dorothy's “Autobiography” is a *taonga* which provides our family with important connections to our past, to the places and people that inhabit that past, and to our sense of being a family. On a broader front, however, it is also a rich and suggestive historical source that bears out the ambiguities and potential of life writing more broadly considered in the above discussion. It is a document that, irrespective of its possible uniqueness, informs us of what it was like for a girl to grow up and live through the dynamic period of the interwar decades, in small-town and middle-class Pākehā New Zealand. It thus fills in some more of the detail of interwar

adolescence presented in broader brushstrokes through such texts as Brickell's history of that same period. At the same time, its significance is also borne out in its function of elucidating how children or young people have narrated their lives through formal writing. In particular, thinking about the ways forward for excavating children's voices posited by Musgrove et al.,⁹⁸ it suggests that we need to look carefully for the ways that developing identity for young people in particular historical or cultural contexts were simultaneously expressions of autonomous selves and framed through dependent, emotionally meaningful or negotiated relationships, shaped further by institutions, public and private mores, geography, race, class, experiences and personal expectations. This list suggests much more that might be said or reflected on, and it might be that this article leads to finding other similar sources or to re-examining this one source as part of a wider project about education and adolescence in mid-twentieth-century New Zealand. However, my hope is that this particular scholarly reflection adds value to ongoing discussions around historical childhoods—both in general and in settler societies such as Aotearoa New Zealand—as well as prompting readers to consider the archives sitting in their own homes and the value that they have for both family self-understanding and wider community engagement.

¹ A draft version of this article was presented to the 10th biennial conference of the Society for the History of Children and Youth, Australian Catholic University, Sydney in June 2019. I thank the panel members and delegates for helpful comments and guidance, and especially Dr. Charlotte Bennett (University of Auckland) for further advice on secondary sources. Furthermore, I acknowledge: the staff of the North Otago Museum for their professional and enthusiastic help; Waitaki Girls' High School for access to school archives; Dr. Catherine Bishop (Australian National University) for generous access to selected autobiographical samples from the World Youth Forum project files; and both the two peer reviewers for their supportive and constructive critique and Associate Professor Anna Green as the editor of the journal. The "Autobiography" is written by one of my extended family and is privately held, as are other supporting materials referred to. These are used here with the family's permission.

² Dorothy is a pseudonym, as are all other names referenced in the "Autobiography" except for school staff.

³ Dorothy, "Autobiography," Book 1, 1–2, Private Collection, Hugh Morrison, Dunedin, New Zealand [henceforth Morrison Collection].

⁴ "Autobiography," Book 2, end page. School records for 1946 indicate that Dorothy took the following subjects that year: English, History, French, Sciences (Chemistry), Home Science and Physical Education. Mark Book, 1943–1948, Acc. 5089, Waitaki Girl's High School Archives, Special Collections, North Otago Museum, Oamaru (henceforth WGHS/NOM); Register, 1946, Acc. 38013, WGHS/NOM.

⁵ Dorothy's other extant high school exercise books are titled: "Ancient History" (two books); "New Zealand History," "Hygiene," "Essays," "My Book of Poems," and "Literature," Morrison Collection.

⁶ Heidi Morrison, "Introduction," in *The Global History of Childhood Reader*, ed. Heidi Morrison (London: Routledge, 2012), 1–5; Nell Musgrove, Carla Pascoe Leahy and Kristine Moruzi, "Hearing Children's Voices: Conceptual and Methodological Challenges," in *Children's Voices from the Past: New Historical and Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Kristine Moruzi, Nell Musgrove and Carla Pascoe Leahy (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 2–9. Its scope is further represented through four other significant collections: Paula Fass, ed., *Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood in History and Society*, 3 vols (New York: MacMillan Reference, 2004); Elizabeth Foyster and James Marten, eds., *A Cultural History of Childhood and Family*, 6 vols (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2010); and Paula Fass, ed., *The Routledge History of Childhood in the Western World* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015).

⁷ For example: Jeanine Graham, *My Brother and I: Glimpses of Childhood in Our Colonial Past* (Dunedin: Hocken Library, University of Otago, 1992); Jeanine Graham, "New Zealand," in

Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood, vol. 2, 623–25; and Jeanine Graham, “Young New Zealanders and the Great War: Exploring the Impact and Legacy of the First World War, 1914–2014,” *Paedagogica Historica* 44, no. 4 (2008): 429–44.

⁸ For example: Grace Bateman, “Signs and Graces: Remembering Religion in Childhood in South Dunedin, 1920–1950” (PhD thesis, University of Otago, 2014); Charlotte Bennett, “Now the War is Over, We Have Something Else to Worry Us: New Zealand Children’s Responses to Crises, 1914–1918,” *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 7, no. 1 (2014): 15–41; Chris Brickell, “Friendship, Intimacy and Desire in Young New Zealanders’ Diaries, 1880–1940,” *New Zealand Journal of History* 50, no. 1 (2016): 69–87; Anna Gilderdale, “Where ‘Taniwha’ Met ‘Colonial Girl’: The Social Uses of the *Nom de Plume* in New Zealand Youth Correspondence Pages, 1880–1920,” in *Children’s Voices from the Past*, 53–84; and Helen May, Baljit Kaur and Larry Prochner, *Empire, Education and Indigenous Childhoods: Nineteenth-Century Missionary Infant Schools in Three British Colonies* (Farnham, Surrey and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014).

⁹ Chris Brickell, *Teenagers: The Rise of Youth Culture in New Zealand* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2017).

¹⁰ Peter Stearns, “Challenges in the History of Childhood,” *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 1, no. 1 (2008): 35, 36.

¹¹ Musgrove et al., “Hearing Children’s Voices,” 2, emphasis original.

¹² Musgrove et al., “Hearing Children’s Voices,” 12–14; in turn citing Mona Gleason, “Avoiding the Agency Trap: Caveats for Historians of Children, Youth, and Education,” *History of Education* 45, no. 4 (2016): 446–59, and Spyros Spyrou, “The Limits of Children’s Voices: From Authenticity to Critical, Reflexive Representation,” *Childhood* 18, no. 2 (2011): 151–65.

¹³ Brickell, *Teenagers*, 322.

¹⁴ Brickell, *Teenagers*, 190.

¹⁵ Christine Alexander, “Playing the Author: Children’s Creative Writing, Paracosms and the Construction of Family Magazines,” in *Children, Childhood and Cultural Heritage*, ed. Kate Darian-Smith and Carla Pascoe (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 85.

¹⁶ For example, on letter writing, see Emily C. Bruce, “‘Each Word Shows How You Love Me’: The Social Literacy Practice of Children’s Letter Writing (1780–1860),” *Paedagogica Historica* 50, no. 3 (2014): 247–64; A. M. Y. Harris, “‘This I Beg My Aunt May Not Know’: Young Letter-Writers in Eighteenth-Century England, Peer Correspondence in a Hierarchical World,” *Journal of the History of Childhood & Youth* 2, no. 3 (2009): 333–60; and Claire L. Halstead, “‘Dear Mummy and Daddy’: Reading Wartime Letters from British Children Evacuated to Canada During the Second World War,” in *Children, Childhood and Youth in the British World*, ed. Shirleen Robinson and Simon Sleight (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 92–108. On newspaper correspondence clubs, see Gilderdale, “New Zealand Youth Correspondence Pages”; Siân Pooley, “Children’s Writing and the Popular Press in England 1876–1914,” *History Workshop Journal* 80, no. 1 (2015): 75–98; Sherry Olson and Peter Holland, “Conversation in Print among Children and Adolescents in the South Island of New Zealand, 1886–1909,” *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 12, no. 2 (2019): 219–40; and Keith Scott, *Dear Dot I Must Tell You: A Personal History of Young New Zealanders* (Auckland: Activity Press, 2011).

¹⁷ To date, the main exceptions are Hester Barron and Claire Langhamer, “Feeling through Practice: Subjectivity and Emotion in Children’s Writing,” *Journal of Social History* 51, no. 1 (2017): 101–23, and James Greenhalgh, “‘Till We Hear the Last All Clear’: Gender and the Presentation of Self in Young Girls’ Writing About the Bombing of Hull During the Second World War,” *Gender and History* 26, no. 1 (2014): 167–83.

¹⁸ Pooley, “Children’s Writing and the Popular Press,” 75.

¹⁹ Analysis of content involved a meticulous page-by-page tabulation of all points of focus in the text. In total, 32 different points of focus were referenced to greater or lesser extent in the pages of the “Autobiography”: animals, behaviour, birth, boys, Brownies, current events, early childhood education, emotions, family (wider), friends, future goals, health, holidays, house or home, imagination, landscape, literature, music, neighbourhood, parents, patriotism, place, play or recreation, reading, religion, school, seasons, sibling, trips, values, weather or climate, and World War Two.

- ²⁰ James Marten, "Family Relationships," in *A Cultural History of Childhood and Family in the Age of Empire*, ed. Colin Heywood, (London, New Delhi, New York, Sydney: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 19.
- ²¹ "Autobiography," Book 1, 3–5.
- ²² "Autobiography," Book 1, 5–6.
- ²³ Helen May, "Recollecting Childhood at School in the Early Twentieth Century," in *Childhoods: Growing up in Aotearoa New Zealand*, ed. Nancy Higgins and Claire Freeman (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2013), 96; and also noting Colin McGeorge, "Childhood's Sole Serious Business: The Long Haul to Full School Attendance," *New Zealand Journal of History* 40, no. 1 (2006): 25–38. For further differentiation of New Zealand childhood experiences by the early twentieth century, see also: Helen May, "Mapping Some Landscapes of Colonial-Global Childhood." *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal* 9, no. 2 (2001): 5–20.
- ²⁴ See further: Graham, *My Brother and I*, 13–15; Geoffrey Troughton, "Religion, Churches and Childhood in New Zealand, c.1900–1940," *New Zealand Journal of History* 40, no. 1 (2006): 39–56; Grace Bateman, "Signs and Graces: Children's Experiences of Confirmation in New Zealand, 1920s–1950s," in *Creating Religious Childhoods in Anglo-World and British Colonial Contexts, 1800–1950*, ed. Hugh Morrison and Mary Clare Martin (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 201–21; and Hugh Morrison, "Service, Sacrifice and Responsibility: Religion and Protestant Settler Childhood in New Zealand and Canada, c.1860–1940," in *Creating Religious Childhoods*, 241–60.
- ²⁵ "Autobiography," Book 1: 2, 21–22, 53–54; Book 2: 73, 84–85, 94–96.
- ²⁶ "Autobiography," Book 1, 34–35, 36.
- ²⁷ "Autobiography," Book 1, 30.
- ²⁸ "Autobiography," Book 1, 29. For context, see Ian Cumming and Alan Cumming, *History of State Education in New Zealand 1840–1975* (Wellington: Pitman Publishing NZ Ltd, 1978), 249–50.
- ²⁹ "Autobiography," Book 2, 100–01.
- ³⁰ "Autobiography," Book 2, 59.
- ³¹ "Autobiography," Book 2, 83.
- ³² These are the five most recurring emphases in each chapter, with no. 1 being the most cited.
- ³³ Brickell, *Teenagers*, 189–244, 245.
- ³⁴ Quoted in Christine Cole Catley, *Springboard for Women: New Plymouth Girls' High School, 1885–1985* (Whatamongo Bay, NZ: Cape Catley Ltd., 1985), 48.
- ³⁵ "Autobiography," Book 2, 63–65.
- ³⁶ "Autobiography," Book 2, 59–60.
- ³⁷ "Autobiography," Book 1, 58.
- ³⁸ Perhaps, also, the war was so much a part of New Zealanders' lives that it needed little further comment. For national context, see Roberto Rabel, "New Zealand's Wars," in *The New Oxford History of New Zealand*, ed. Giselle Byrnes (South Melbourne, Vic.: Oxford University Press, 2009), 256–58. However, also note Charlotte Bennett's suggestion, for the period 1914–1918, that geographical proximity was a key factor in the extent to which children reacted to or perceived the events of World War One compared with the Spanish Influenza pandemic, and that younger children were likely to be less aware or affected, compared with teenagers (Bennett, "Now the War is Over").
- ³⁹ Quoted in Sue Middleton, "Geraldine in Her Own Words," in *For Women and Children: A Tribute to Geraldine McDonald*, ed. Sue Middleton and Helen May (Wellington: NZCER Press, 2019), 21.
- ⁴⁰ "Autobiography," Book 2, 101.
- ⁴¹ These details are known from a mix of family history ephemera, orally transmitted anecdotes and genealogical research/writing by members of the extended family. Dorothy's maternal grandfather's tenure as principal of Dunedin Teachers' College is briefly documented in David Keen, *In a Class of its Own: A Dunedin College of Education Anniversary History* (Dunedin: Dunedin College of Education, 2001), and in Carol Morton Johnson and Harry Morton, *Dunedin Teachers College: The First Hundred Years* (Dunedin: Dunedin Teachers College Publications Committee, 1976).
- ⁴² "S.3. Essays 1938" and "Essays Form IIIA 1942," Morrison collection.
- ⁴³ Connie Gilmore, quoted in Cole Catley, *Springboard for Women*, 111. This is further attested to for both Southland and Otago Girls' High Schools in Ruth Fry, *It's Different for Daughters: A History of the Curriculum for Girls in New Zealand Schools, 1900–1975* (Wellington: New Zealand Council for

Educational Research, 1985), 37, and in Sue Middleton and Helen May, *Teachers Talk Teaching 1915–1995: Early Childhood, Schools and Teachers’ Colleges* (Palmerston North: The Dunmore Press, 1997), 57–58.

⁴⁴ This is the turn of phrase used in *W.G.H.S.* [magazine], December 1946, front page. Jean Ballard joined the school in 1944 and was listed as head of department by 1946. This was in response to a 1943 school inspectors’ report suggesting that English teaching “would benefit from more coordination and the appointment of one mistress as unofficial head of department.” Inspection Report on Waitaki Girls’ High School, Oamaru, 1943, Acc. 4919, WGHS/NOM. See also “Principal’s Report,” February 1946, in Principal’s Reports 1941–48, Acc. 4945, WGHS/NOM.

⁴⁵ Atholea Ramsay, Helen Stead and Elspeth Ludemann, *The Honour of Her Name: The Story of Waitaki Girls’ High School 1887–1987* (Oamaru: Waitaki Girls’ High School Centennial Committee, 1987), 201; Keen, *In a Class of its Own*, 32; Owen Gibbons, “Jean Elizabeth Ballard,” Ancestors of Owen Gibbons, accessed October 14, 2019, <http://gibbins.gen.nz/gibbins/30.htm>.

⁴⁶ Gleaned from advertisements or announcements in the *Otago Daily Times* as follows: 6 June 1933, 3; 8 October 1940, 9; 10 May 1947, 4; 10 June 1947, 3; 18 June 1947, 3; 2 July 1947, 3; 2 August 1949, 10; 4 May 1950, 8.

⁴⁷ Jean Ballard’s role as an innovative and creative lecturer (at Dunedin Teachers’ College) and school principal (at Queen’s High School) is further attested to by ex-students and teachers interviewed by Sue Middleton and Helen May in the 1990s. See Middleton and May, *Teachers Talk Teaching*, 158, 229.

⁴⁸ “Literature,” 9.

⁴⁹ For context, see Catherine Bishop, “World Youth Forum,” accessed October 10, 2019, <https://catherinebishop.wixsite.com/history/world-youth-forum>. The *New York Herald Tribune* Youth Forum autobiographies are archived in “Herbert C. Hunsaker Papers,” Syracuse University Special Collections Research Centre, accessed October 10, 2019, https://library.syr.edu/digital/guides/h/hunsaker_hc.htm. An example of an account of one such forum is given in: Anonymous, “*New York Herald Tribune* Forum for High Schools,” *The Record*, May–June, 1950, 6:3, 24–27.

⁵⁰ *Prospectus of the Waitaki Girls’ High School and Intermediate Department, Oamaru*, 3, n.d., Acc. 5085, WGHS/NOM. This prospectus must have been for the 1938–41 period, because Mr. L. J. K. Familton was listed as a school governor and he was the Mayor of Oamaru for this period.

⁵¹ Maxine Stephenson, “Thinking Historically: Maori and Settler Education,” in *Introduction to the History of New Zealand Education*, ed. Elizabeth Rata and Ros Sullivan (Auckland: Pearson, 2009), 11–12; Scott Ray, “New Zealand Education in the Twentieth Century,” in Rata and Sullivan, eds., *Introduction to the History of New Zealand Education*, 18; Roger Openshaw, Greg Lee and Howard Lee, *Challenging the Myths: Rethinking New Zealand’s Educational History* (Palmerston North: The Dunmore Press, 1993), 162–76; Fry, *It’s Different for Daughters*, 100.

⁵² Noeline Alcorn, *‘To the Fullest Extent of His Powers’: C. E Beeby’s Life in Education* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1999), 80–89; T. A. Hunter, “Introduction,” in *Modern Trends in Education: The Proceedings of the New Education Fellowship Conference Held in New Zealand in July 1937*, ed. A. E. Campbell with C. L. Bailey (Wellington: Whitcombe and Tombs Ltd., 1938), xi–xiv; Jane Abbiss, “The ‘New Education Fellowship’ in New Zealand: Its Activity and Influence in the 1930s and 1940s,” *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies* 33, no. 1 (1998): 81–93.

⁵³ Inspection Report on Waitaki Girls’ High School, Oamaru, 1947, Acc. 4919, WGHS/NOM; Mark Book, 1943–1948, Acc. 5089, WGHS/NOM.

⁵⁴ Sir Percy Meadon, “A Liberal Education,” in Campbell and Bailey, eds., *Modern Trends in Education*, 49–50. Meadon was at the time Director of Education for Lancashire, England (Campbell and Bailey, eds., *Modern Trends in Education*, xx).

⁵⁵ Mark Book, 1943–1948, Acc. 5089, WGHS/NOM.

⁵⁶ A. Wilson, *The Education of Girls: Presidential Address to the Otago Educational Institute* (Dunedin: Otago Daily Times Print, n.d. [1905]), 13–16.

⁵⁷ For broad-ranging analyses of the relationship between imperialism and education across the British Empire see: J. A. Mangan, ed., “Benefits Bestowed”? *Education and British Imperialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), and J. A. Mangan, ed., *The Imperial Curriculum:*

Racial Images and Education in the British Colonial Experience (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993).

⁵⁸ G. T. Hankin, "Tendencies in English Education," in Campbell and Bailey, eds., *Modern Trends in Education*, 164; I. L. Kandel, "The Education of the Adolescent," in Campbell and Bailey, eds., *Modern Trends in Education*, 289; Thomas Report cited in Openshaw et al., *Challenging the Myths*, 171.

⁵⁹ Inspection Report on Waitaki Girls' High School, Oamaru, 1947, Acc. 4919, WGHS/NOM.

⁶⁰ W.G.H.S. 1943–1946; *Otago Girls' High School Magazine*, 1927–1929; *Southland Girls' High School Magazine* 1939; Cole Catley, *Springboard for Women*, 88–107, 111–21.

⁶¹ Fry, *It's Different for Daughters*, 37.

⁶² Wilson, *The Education of Girls*, 13. Here, Wilson was arguing against Western education becoming more regulated and regimented, shaped in particular by an emerging focus on assessment and competition.

⁶³ Wilson, *The Education of Girls*, 15–16.

⁶⁴ Sir Henry Newbolt reporting for a 1921 committee on English teaching, cited in Fry, *Its Different for Daughters*, 38.

⁶⁵ Fry, *Its Different for Daughters*, 39.

⁶⁶ Janet Frame, *To the Is-land: An Autobiography* (London: The Women's Press in association with Hutchinson Group (NZ) Ltd., 1982), 215. Including her junior high school years, Janet Frame was at WGHS from 1936 to 1942; see Michael King, *Wrestling with the Angel: A Life of Janet Frame* (Auckland: Viking, 2000), 38–50.

⁶⁷ Brickell, *Teenagers*, 219.

⁶⁸ Martin Crotty, "Pointing the Way—Antipodean Responses to J. A. Mangan's Athleticism and Related Studies: Scotch College, Melbourne, in the Inter-War Years," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 20, no. 4 (2003): 68. Five student memoirs (on pages 69–77) fall clearly along a spectrum of complete acceptance to complete rejection of the school's ideology and its impact on everyday life. In a similar vein, Rebecca Swartz writes: "As Lambert argues in the context of elite boys schools in South Africa, school magazines should be read as 'stereotypical views of school life' that emphasise 'man-liness and 'playing the game,'" and fail to represent dissenting voices" (Rebecca Swartz, "'Good Citizens and Gentlemen': Gender, Reputation and Identity at the South African College, 1880–1910," *South African Historical Journal* 68, no. 4 (2016): 521, in turn citing J. Lambert, "'Munition Factories . . . Turning Out a Constant Supply of Living Material': White South African Elite Boys' Schools and the First World War," *South African Historical Journal*, 51, no. 1 (2004): 71).

⁶⁹ Crotty, "Pointing the Way," 80.

⁷⁰ Brickell, *Teenagers*, 322.

⁷¹ Barron and Langhamer, "Feeling through Practice," 107.

⁷² For a helpful scholarly reflection on the construction of autobiographies and the productive use of silences within them in an adult educational setting, see Judy Sharkey, "Lives Stories Don't Tell: Exploring the Untold in Autobiographies," *Curriculum Inquiry*, 34, no. 4 (2004): 495–512.

⁷³ Lesley, "Autobiography," in "Herbert C. Hunsaker Papers," Syracuse University Special Collections Research Centre, used by permission of Catherine Bishop, Australian National University.

⁷⁴ Cole Catley, *Springboard for Women*, 45, emphasis original.

⁷⁵ See for example ex-students' memories and reflections on Miss Doris Allan at New Plymouth Girls' High School (whose grandmother Margaret Burn was founding principal of both Otago Girls' and Waitaki Girls' High Schools), collated in Cole Catley, *Springboard for Women*, 44–49.

⁷⁶ Quoted in Ramsay et al., *The Honour of Her Name*, 20.

⁷⁷ Frame, *To the Is-land*, 197.

⁷⁸ Frame, *To the Is-land*, 197.

⁷⁹ Middleton and May, *Teachers Talk Teaching*, 58; Cole Catley, *Springboard for Women*, 44–51, 59–64, 67–72, 75–85, 88–107, 111–31; Frame, *To the Is-land*, 129–249.

⁸⁰ This was in contrast to Dorothy's later verbal recollections, wherein Miss Wilson loomed large as something of a harridan and a veritable force of nature. Likewise, Janet Frame mentions Miss Wilson but without elaboration. However, in her novel *Owls Do Cry* Michael King notes that she paints a

verbal picture of Miss Wilson as “big, with a head shaped like a bull and no neck to speak of,” in a manner that “was recognised for its documentary quality by former pupils and teachers”; King, *Wrestling with the Angel*, 43, 531n2.

⁸¹ “Autobiography,” Book 2, 68, 70–71, 73.

⁸² “Autobiography,” Book 2, 79–80.

⁸³ “Autobiography,” Book 2, 100–101.

⁸⁴ The concept of “moral codes” transmitted within school environments is introduced in Swartz, “Good Citizens and Gentlemen,” 523, 533. My thanks to Dr. Charlotte Bennett for alerting me to this concept in published school writings such as annual magazines.

⁸⁵ Barron and Langhamer, “Feeling through Practice,” 106.

⁸⁶ “Autobiography,” Book 1, 20, 21, 22, 29–30, 53; “Autobiography,” Book 2, 75, 86.

⁸⁷ “Autobiography,” Book 2, 75, 97.

⁸⁸ “Autobiography,” Book 1, 23 and several times between 23 and 29.

⁸⁹ See Peter N. Stearns, “Defining Happy Childhoods: Assessing a Recent Change,” *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 3, no. 2 (2010): 467–82.

⁹⁰ Nasreen, “Autobiography,” in “Herbert C. Hunsaker Papers,” Syracuse University Special Collections Research Centre, used by permission of Catherine Bishop, Australian National University.

⁹¹ “Autobiography,” Book 2, 97–98.

⁹² “Autobiography,” Book 2, 85.

⁹³ “Autobiography,” Book 2, 101–02.

⁹⁴ Fry, *Its Different for Daughters*, 36–39; Wilson, *The Education of Girls*, 13–14; Inspection Report on Waitaki Girls’ High School, Oamaru, 1943 and 1947, WGHS/NOM.

⁹⁵ Penny Summerfield, *Histories of the Self: Personal Narratives and Historical Practice* (London and New York: Routledge, 2019), 4, 6.

⁹⁶ Summerfield, *Histories of the Self*, 78–80.

⁹⁷ Liz Stanley, “The Epistolarium: On Theorizing Letters and Correspondences,” *Auto/biography* 12 (2004): 202–03.

⁹⁸ Musgrove et al., “Hearing Children’s Voices,” 12–14.