Mount Royal University

"I just have enough here to get by": Motherhood, poverty, and the family economy in Postwar British Columbia[1]

Renee Leitch

Supervised by Dr. Heather Nelson and Dr. Kirk Niergarth

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[1] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, September 10, 1965, McCrae Letters, Private Collection.

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Introduction

I first learned of my great grandmother Jacklyn McCrae's letters two years ago. I had known about the hardships my grandmother and her siblings had faced after the death of their mother but had no knowledge of the life they had lived before her passing. My aunt, who visits family in Terrace regularly brought the letters to me after I had expressed my interest in learning more about our family history. The letters tell the story of a hard life: McCrae often struggled with poverty, poor health, and difficult relationships with men while trying to care for her children. Even through her many struggles, McCrae's letters also reveal the life of a hardworking woman who used every tool available to her for her family-and whose deep care for her children shows decades later, even through great poverty and struggle.

The letters from McCrae provide insight into working class life in small town British Columbia from 1955 to 1966 and, particularly, about the experience of a woman whose life was both ordinary and unusual. Ordinary in the sense that to make ends meet, she drew upon a variety of strategies of household economy that had been employed by Canadian women for generations. She also had some of the advantages of state support that were relatively new in the postwar era. Yet, McCrae was also not typical because she lived outside the social norm of her time. She left her husband due to his alcoholism, but without a legal divorce, lived with a man to whom she was not legally married, and had children with two different fathers. She was decidedly outside the traditional nuclear family model that was idealized in North America during the postwar years.

Born in 1938, Jacklyn McCrae was raised in Northern BC on the Queen Charlotte Islands, and she would later spend time living in Quesnel and Terrace [see Figure 1]. She married Vincent Shannon in 1955, and had four children – Kathleen, Donna, Darlene and Joey.

When she left Shannon in 1961, she was only able to take custody of her daughters while Shannon retained custody of her son Joey. She took her three daughters to Quesnel, British Columbia, where she eventually began a relationship with Roy Ridler. During her relationship with Mr. Ridler, she had two additional children, Christine and Robin. They moved from Quesnel to Terrace in June 1965, where they remained until McCrae's death in October of 1966 at the age of 28.

McCrae died by overdose in her home on October 16th, 1966. Her eldest daughter Kathy was the one who discovered her. The exact circumstances around her overdose are unclear, but it is a common belief in the family that her death was suicide via overdose. My own mother, who was named Jacquelyn after her, grew up being told that McCrae committed suicide because of her circumstances. Regardless, McCrae's death had immeasurable consequences for her children. She was deceased in the home for a period of hours with her children before she was discovered by an adult and the children were removed. After their removal, all of the children were put into foster care, with her three oldest children by Shannon remaining together, while her daughter with Ridler, Christine, was placed in a separate foster home, and her youngest son Robin was adopted. When the children were placed in care, they were not permitted to bring any of their belongings from home, or to have contact with their siblings in separate care homes. Overnight, her children lost their home, their mother, their belongings, and for Christine and Robin, their siblings. McCrae's aunt Alice, who received the letters she had written was an important person for McCrae's children even after her death. While she herself did not get custody of the children, she had contact with them as they got older. Some letters between McCrae's eldest daughter Kathy and Alice occurred after McCrae's death. She eventually passed the letters to McCrae's children, which she had kept for years if not decades.

While McCrae's experiences occur in a period with a growing welfare state, the support available to her through family allowance and social welfare programs was not sufficient and often left her to find means and support informally. McCrae relied on many methods: the wages of a male breadwinner, taking in boarders, babysitting for pay, moving, support from family and friends both financial and other, formal loans and from family, buying on credit, and delaying purchases. These strategies were in many ways consistent with long-standing patterns adopted by poor and working-class families in Canada but were adapted to the postwar era.

The methodology used to analyze McCrae's letters will be similar to that of Bonnie Huskins and Michael Boudreau's *Just the Usual Work.* This book examines the diary entries of Ida Martin, a working-class woman from St. John, New Brunswick. Ida Martin made daily diary entries for decades, from 1945-1992, and these entries often detail the daily life of the writer. McCrae's letters span an eleven-year period, and much like the diary entries of Ida Martin, speak about her everyday experiences as a working-class woman. One of the methodological tools employed by Boudreau and Huskins is the close literary analysis of women's life writing. [2] The writing style of the author, such as handwriting, underlining, or punctuation, can give further insight.[3] It is also important what remains unwritten. In the case of Ida Martin, she rarely wrote directly about sexuality or alcoholism. Boudreau and Huskins identify the use of "bad" as coded language to describe her husband's drinking.[4] Like the diaries of Ida Martin, Jacklyn McCrae's letters were written to be read by the family, specifically her aunt. Therefore, using this

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[2] Michael Boudreau and Bonnie Huskins, *Just the Usual Work: The Social Worlds of Ida Martin, Working-Class Diarist*, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2021, pg. 9.

[3] Boudreau and Huskins, *Just the Usual Work*, 21.

[4] Boudreau and Huskins, *Just the Usual Work*, 17.

methodology and examining coded language is especially important. When life writing was written to family, negative experiences are often written about in nuanced ways. For McCrae, her relationship struggles were often written in a way that downplayed the severity, likely to prevent Alice from worrying about her niece.

Boudreau and Huskins demonstrate the ways in which history can be written appropriately by those who have a personal connection to the historical subject. Huskins has a personal connection to Ida Martin much like I do to McCrae, as Ida Martin was her grandmother. While many traditional historical narratives require a distanced approach to writing history, Huskins and Boudreau identify the strengths of writing a historical analysis with a personal connection. They explain how it puts bias at the forefront. Personal history is described as a form of feminist analysis, which uses emotional attachment as a tool to encourage "insightful readings that emotional attachment brings by an attention to theorization."[5] Rather than traditional methods of historical analysis which call for a distant emotionless approach to history, the feminist approach described by Huskins and Boudreau encourages a full acknowledgement of bias in historical study.

Boudreau and Huskins characterize this methodology of historical writing as "a case of 'vulnerable writing' where one is more exposed by showing the personal."[6] This methodology aims to recognize and acknowledge the bias of a historian rather than minimize it altogether. Making personal bias the forefront of a historical study encourages transparency. Rosalind Kerr writes of her grandmother's letters in *Working in Women's Archives* and argues that vulnerable

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[5] Boudreau and Huskins, *Just the Usual Work*, 22.

[6] Boudreau and Huskins, *Just the Usual Work*, 22.

writing is "discouraged by traditional scholarship, which idealizes an 'objectivity' that hides unacknowledged assumptions and biases."[7] Instead, personal writing encourages a direct acknowledgment of bias.

Life writing, such as McCrae and Kerr's letters or Martin's diary entries, were a common form of women's writing in the 20th century. Since examining the lives of working-class women must be done with unpublished writing of a kind that is rarely collected by archives, like McCrae's letters, there is limited source material available. The experiences of working-class families and women were not perceived to be of great historical significance in many cases. Like Ida Martin's diaries, McCrae's preserved letters are significant, as Bettina Bradbury explains, since "few working-class women … appear to have kept diaries and few letters or other writing by such women have been preserved in archives."[8] Other historians have handled this challenge in different ways. My study of McCrae's letters attempts to use a type of source that is rarely preserved to identify the experiences of working-class women. In the case of documents such as McCrae's letters, their survival was contingent on descendants valuing them enough to preserve them. Often families are the only ones who care enough to keep sources of this kind, like how mine kept these letters. If preserved, however, the life writing of working-class women introduces the historian into the experiences of a group of people that would otherwise be voiceless.

This thesis aims to contextualize Jacklyn McCrae's letters within a larger framework of women's working-class experience. The household economy, which determined how women

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[7] As quoted in Boudreau and Huskins, *Just the Usual Work*, 22.

[8] Bettina Bradbury, as quoted in Boudreau and Huskins, *Just the Usual Work,* 5.

managed formal and informal income in order to, as Baillargeon puts it, "make do." Her study examines the experiences of impoverished women, and their household economy. Baillargeon identifies the methods used by working-class women to provide for their children when the man's income was insufficient to do so with the women taking on boarders, relying on their families, doing informal work, and receiving social welfare support to manage the household economy.

Although McCrae's experiences are thirty years later, the methods used by working class families, even with the changing welfare state, largely remained the same. While the women Baillargeon interviewed did not work formally, the domestic work they did in the household nevertheless had economic value and was essential to their families' survival.[9] The money these women earned through their informal work was used for household needs, rather than just for the woman herself.[10] These necessities often included paying the rent, groceries and the children's clothing.[11] Baillargeon examines the experiences of working class families, which were particularly stressed by the Depression since "the majority of them were already using all of their resources and skills to get the most out of what they had" even before the Depression had hit.[12] For the women she interviewed, housing boarders, especially relatives or friends, was a common method to gain other income within the household in 1930s Montreal. Like McCrae, who housed

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[9] Denyse Baillargeon, *Making Do: Women, Family and Home in Montreal during the Great Depression,* Translated by Yvonne M Klein (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1999), 98.

[10] Baillargeon, *Making Do,* 101.

[11] Baillargeon, *Making Do*, 101.

[12] Baillargeon, *Making Do*, 135.

her common law husband's brother, in some cases boarders were friends or family.[13] One potential reason was because they would accept living conditions others would not.[14] Similarly, in industrializing Montreal, housing boarders was a common practice that gave women additional income they would not have otherwise. This was especially common when women had young children.[15] Bettina Bradbury also points to this strategy, noting it was most common during difficult periods.[16] She also calls attention to how wives would seek informal paid work when the male breadwinner's income would not support their needs. Domestic work, or 'women's work' could be turned into a source of income when needed.[17] Likewise, McCrae often babysat for her friends and neighbours, which provided her with a source of income.

The expectation that the wife managed the family economy was common in working-class families and this continued into the development of the welfare state. Working class wives like McCrae were expected to handle the income of the male breadwinner. One of the largest tasks for these women, which remained through to McCrae's time, was the management of the household economy, which required "the transformation of those wages into daily survival."[18]

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[13] Baillargeon, *Making Do,* 97.

[14] Baillargeon, *Making Do*, 97.

[15] Bradbury, *Working Families*, 178.

[16] Bradbury, *Working Families*, 178.

[17] Bettina Bradbury, *Working Families: Age, Gender, and Daily Survival in Industrializing Montreal* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 164.

[18] Bradbury, *Working Families*, 153.

Women had little control over the amount of income brought in by the male breadwinner, both because of the work the man could find, and how much of his income was available to the wife.[19]

In B.C specifically, Margaret Hillyard Little examines space for women in welfare in "Claiming A Unique Space: The Introduction of Mothers' Pensions in B.C."[20] The development of the Mothers' Pension in British Columbia, as explained by Little, "reveals a distinct notion of citizenship. During the lobby effort, advocates embraced a rights-based discourse, claiming that single mothers were able to make this claim to entitlement," unlike single mothers in other provinces.[21] While Little's examination of Mothers' Pension took place in the 1920s, her analysis examines women's unique relationship to the state, which continued to be influential for McCrae. One of the driving forces of the lobbying for Mothers' Pensions in British Columbia was how wealthy women's identities were increasingly focused on their role as a mother.[22] These wealthy women aimed to act as 'experts' and promote their idea of the ideal family; husband as a male breadwinner, while the wife and children remained at home.[23] As Little explains, wealthy women aimed "to extend this ideology even to poor single mothers, by allowing them to remain in the home to care for their children."[24] This was made possible due to the "concern of the many women's organizations who played a central role in lobbying for

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[19] Bradbury, *Working Families*, 107 and 153.

[20] Margaret Hillyard Little, "Claiming a Unique Place: The Introduction of Mothers' Pensions in B.C.," In *Child and Family Welfare in British Columbia,* eds. Christopher Walmsley, and Diane Purvey (Detselig Enterprises, 2005).

[21] Little, Claiming a Unique Place, 328.

[22] Little, Claiming a Unique Place, 331.

[23] Little, Claiming a Unique Place, 331.

[24] Little, Claiming a Unique Place, 331.

Mothers' Pensions," which likely explained why British Columbia was uniquely positioned in the social welfare system.[25]

The inclusion of single mothers was not the only factor that made British Columbia unique. Rather than a Mothers' Allowance that Ontario and other provinces had, the Mothers' Pension in B.C. was seen as comparable to workers compensation or old age pensions, which were understood to be paid in recognition of services and work by the recipient.[26] While B.C's Mothers' Pension was "more generous than most Mothers' Pensions policies they still remained inadequate.".[27] For example, the Veterans allowance was $55 a month, whereas the Mothers' pension was $35. The $20 was a significant deduction in benefits and goes to demonstrate just how inadequate the benefit was. It also suggests, perhaps, that entitlement to benefits was influenced by a multitude of factors. The space for single mothers in the welfare state as established by Little are reflected within the experiences of McCrae in the later decades.

Similarly, Little's *No Car, No Radio, No Liquor Permit* examines the development of the welfare state in Ontario through the passing of Ontario Mothers' Allowance policy. Little's analysis suggests that development of the OMA was centered as a "joint public-private welfare venture" designed to "distinguish between the deserving and undeserving poor."[28] Development of this social welfare program acted as a tool to reinforce morality and traditional gender roles for men and women, by keeping women in the home while the man acted as the breadwinner.

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[25] Little, Claiming a Unique Place, 331.

[26] Little, Claiming a Unique Place, 335.

[27] Little, Claiming a Unique Place, 337.

[28]Margaret Hillyard Little, *No Car, No Radio, No Liquor Permit : The Moral Regulation of Single Mothers in Ontario, 1920-1997*, (Toronto ; Oxford University Press), 1998, 2.

Formation of the Ontario Mothers' Allowance was created within the context of a maternalist ideology that idealized domesticity.[29] However, support for Mothers' Allowance was only grants so far as it continued to conform to existing gender roles. One of the persistent arguments in support of Mothers' Allowances was that they would reinforce existing roles for women. One such example was how lobbyists endorsed legislation for Mothers' allowances while "rejecting other policies such as childcare; thus did not support policies that would have dramatically altered gender relations."[30] Unmarried mothers were especially susceptible to scrutiny. In the postwar period, Little argues that morality for single mothers was commonly judged within the context of her sexual behaviour.[31] Single mothers and deserted wives especially faced challenges when attempting to receive benefits.[32] Fears of increasing family breakdown and movement away from the nuclear family model were considered especially concerning.[33]

Understanding the importance of the development of the Canadian welfare state after the Second World War is also essential in identifying how McCrae's family economy functioned. During this period, Raymond Blake explains, welfare policies, such as the family allowance, were understood as a right for Canadians. While welfare policies did provide some support to low-income families, the complex political and economic climate often played a large role in the formation of welfare policies.[34] In post Second World War Canada, state funded welfare

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[29] Little, *No Car, No Radio, No Liquor Permit*, 26.

[30] Little, *No Car, No Radio, No Liquor Permit*, 26.

[31] Little, *No Car, No Radio, No Liquor Permit,*130.

[32] Little, *No Car, No Radio, No Liquor Permit*,130.

[33] Little, *No Car, No Radio, No Liquor Permit*, 130.

[34] Raymond B. Blake, *From Rights to Needs: A History of Family Allowances in Canada, 1929-92*, (Vancouver, UBC Press, 2009), pg. 3.

programs often worked to supplement the wages of men in an effort to encourage a nuclear family.[35]The family allowance, for example, supplemented the wages of the male breadwinner and made it unnecessary for women to work in some cases. The nuclear family model worked to encourage women to stay in the home, while the man was the breadwinner. However, when the male breadwinner was insufficient, which was often the case for McCrae, the state instead became the breadwinner in some ways. By providing enough financial support to keep women in the home, the state in turn took on the paternal role for McCrae when Ridler did not. This was especially important in the years directly following the war, as women leaving the workforce would improve employment for returning veterans. These social conditions led to the introduction of the family allowance program in 1945, as its universal payment made public discontent less likely[36]. Since the benefit went to all parents of underage children, it was believed that parents would support the policy, rather than a needs based program, which would only provide support for those who needed it most.

Rather than providing enough money to support children, the benefit was created to supplement the wages of a male breadwinner so that other income would not be needed.[37] Raymond Blake examines how the driving forces of the family allowance focused more on nation unity than benefitting low-income families.[38] Unlike before, where any social support was

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[35] Alvin Finkel, *Social Policy and Practice in Canada: A History*, (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006), pg. 8.

[36] Finkel, *Social Policy and Practice in Canada,* 131.

[37] Blake, *From Rights to Needs,* 111-112.

[38] Blake, *From Rights to Needs*, 10.

decided by each individual province. The family allowance was a universal payment that was distributed to all parents regardless of income. Since all families were paid the benefit, rather than just low-income families, family allowances were more acceptable to elites and the middle class than targeted programs might have been and, because of their universality, could foster national unity after the divisions that had emerged during the war. This is because the family allowance was a national social welfare program, aimed at interprovincial cohesion.

Alvin Finkel similarly examines the distribution of wealth and power through the development of social programs in Canada. Finkel argues that by providing the needed additional support for children, the family allowance helped prevent wage increases for men while keeping married women in the home.[39] The limitations of the role of the state in providing childcare is shown both in the works of Finkel and Pasolli. Childcare was understood as the responsibility of the nuclear family, not of the state.[40] Additionally, encouraging greater numbers of women to return home after the Second World War ended would reduce any need for childcare.[41] Pasolli argues that previous scholarship had shown "that the citizenship rights associated with earning have largely been reserved for male breadwinners."[42]Instead, Pasolli finds that much of the scrutiny and judgement around mothers working were formed through classed and racialized social norms for women.[43] Childcare politics, as examined by Pasolli largely reflect constructed

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[39] Finkel, *Social Policy and Practice in Canada*, 8.

[40] Finkel, *Social Policy and Practice in Canada*, 194.

[41] Finkel, *Social Policy and Practice in Canada*, 143.

[42] Lisa Pasolli, *Working Mothers and the Child Care Dilemma: A History of British Columbia's Social Policy*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2015). ProQuest Ebook Central, 8, https://doi.org/10.59962/9780774829250.

[43] Pasolli, *Working Mothers and the Childcare Dilemma*, 5.

social roles for women, which associated women working outside the home as a symbol of family breakdown.[44] Pasolli contextualizes B.C.'s childcare policy within the concept of social citizenship, which was defined as a right to an equal earning capacity within this context.[45] Pasolli argues that to have achieved equal social citizenship for mothers, they "must include social programs to ensure that women's roles as mothers and caregivers do not hinder their equality in the labour force."[46] Within the context of McCrae's experiences, Pasolli's analysis claims "the feminization of poverty and the particular trials of poor mothers helped to establish childcare's association with other welfare initiatives."[47] Like welfare support, childcare was understood within a paternalistic ideal that promoted women's place within the home.

Like Pasolli, Christie suggests that welfare policy in the first half of the twentieth century was developed as a response to fears of family breakdown.[48] Increasing rates of divorce and women working outside the home was seen as family breakdown, and it was believed that these needed to be fixed. Social policy which aimed to enforce traditional gender roles were created with the intention to keep women married and in the home. Christie identifies one of the main characteristics of postwar power dynamics as paternalism and argues that the construction of the welfare state was based on men's right to work rather than the rights of women. Women's rights

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[44] Pasolli*, Working Mothers and the Childcare Dilemma*, 6.

[45] Pasolli, *Working Mothers and the Childcare Dilemma*, 10.

[46] Pasolli, *Working Mothers and the Childcare Dilemma*, 10.

[47] Pasolli, *Working Mothers and the Childcare Dilemma,* 108.

[48] Nancy Christie, *Engendering the state: family, work, and welfare in Canada* (1st ed.), University of Toronto Press, 2000, 4.

at the federal level were based on their role as a wife, rather than rights for themselves.[49] The postwar period marked a unique shift away from children and wives working to supplement income, and instead idealized a single income from a male breadwinner.[50] Instead, newly developing welfare policy, as Christie argues, was the legacy of male work during the Great Depression.[51] The development of the welfare state through the second world war continued to be influenced by "the notion that welfare was primarily a private and family responsibility."[52] These two sources together identify a paternalistic formation of policy, which places the work of men at the top of the hierarchy. In many cases, the role of the welfare state was to act as the breadwinner when a family did not have one or where the income was insufficient.

In order to analyse the impacts of the developing social welfare state on working class women, this analysis focuses on a collection of letters McCrae sent to her aunt Alice McCrae, who lived on the Queen Charlotte Islands, between 1955 and McCrae's death in 1966. 106 of these letters were kept by Alice and passed onto Jacklyn's children. A careful analysis of her everyday life reveals how working-class women made ends meet for their children through a variety of means. In addition to these letters, I have collected a series of newspaper and magazine articles from the time to find other cases of working-class women managing the household economy to make ends meet for their families.

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[49] Christie, *Engendering the state:* 253.

[50] Christie, *Engendering the State*, 14.

[51] Christie, *Engendering the State*, 6.

[52] Christie, *Engendering the State,* 4.

McCrae's letters will be mined in this thesis to reveal the social world she lived in – including her kin and non-kin relationships –and her methods to make do within those circumstances. McCrae's social world was complicated by her relocations through the years. In the period covered by her letters, McCrae moved five times, two of which moved her hundreds of kilometres away from existing communities and support. Her access to community support and family was affected by these moves. Nevertheless, McCrae was able to maintain a network of relationships in these years and these relationships were key to her ability to manage the family economy. She regularly sought and received the assistance of friends and family. She borrowed the neighbours' phone, was given money by her aunt, and was provided help moving and with money by friends.

Deeply important to McCrae's circumstances, both economic and social, were her romantic/spousal relationships. Her marital status changed on four occasions covered by the letters: she was initially married to Vincent Shannon; she was a single mother after she left him; she became a common-law wife to Roy Ridler; and, after the breakdown of her relationship with Ridler, she was a single mother until her death. These shifts need to be understood in the context of laws and social acceptance of divorce and common-law marriages in this period and they influenced her access to social welfare, shaped her decisions about where to live, and to some extent the community of relationships she maintained. McCrae's letters indicate that one of the ways she managed the household income was to control the income made by Ridler, the father of her youngest two children. Using the income of the male breadwinner, she juggled both the formal money brought in through his paychecks, the state support they received, and took on other tasks to ensure adequate finances, such as taking on boarders or babysitting for neighbours.

McCrae's relationships to her children were fundamental to the functioning of her family economy. Meeting the needs of her children, the letters suggest, was a constant focus for McCrae and in its pursuit she endured many challenges. While caring for her children, McCrae faced several health issues and illnesses. McCrae had a continuous struggle to access appropriate health resources and living conditions. The health of McCrae and her children was a continuous struggle, as illness prevented her from working even in the informal economy, while medications placed an additional financial burden on her. For McCrae, state support, both through welfare services and the family allowance, were an important piece in balancing the family economy. State support was not sufficient to cover all of McCrae's needs, but for a low income family, the additional support would have been welcomed and was combined with other strategies to provide for the family's needs.

McCrae's letters suggest that her main task was making ends meet. This involved, at different times, managing the income of the male breadwinner, gifts and loans from family, informal work, state support, and simply delaying her purchases. McCrae's experiences as a single mother of six exemplifies how postwar Canadian women managed the household economy through formal and informal work, support from kin networks, state welfare, buying on credit, and working-class mobility. McCrae's experiences indicate that even increased state support was not sufficient to support working class families. Rather, families like hers incorporated welfare support into strategies for managing the household economy that had been deployed by working class women for decades.

Chapter 1: The Social World of Jacklyn McCrae

The letters of Jacklyn McCrae paint a vivid portrait of life in the middle of the twentieth century. The preserved letters McCrae wrote to her aunt Alice between 1955 and her death in 1966 reveal a web of social and familial connections that she built and drew upon as she and her children navigated difficult economic circumstances.

McCrae did not move through her life alone in spite of moving multiple times. While we cannot be certain that aunt Alice McCrae was Jacklyn's primary confidant, the letters suggest that Alice must have been a valuable source of emotional and personal support for Jacklyn since the two women communicated consistently even when, from 1961-1966, they were living a considerable distance apart. Born in January 1907, Alice Kathleen McCrae, was the older sister of Jacklyn's father, Jack McCrae, and lived much of her life in Port Clements, on the Queen Charlotte Islands. Alice did not have any children of her own, but was a consistent supporter and maternal figure for McCrae from 1955 to 1966. McCrae often looked to her for support, both emotional and financial.

McCrae's own mother did provide some support to McCrae, but it was rather inconsistent and it appears to have only been financial. One such gift was a cheque for $160 for McCrae's dental work. The gift of her teeth was a significant benefit to McCrae, but contact with her mother was not a common occurrence.[53] When she had come to visit McCrae in February of 1965, McCrae's children "didn't take to Mom like [she] expected but not seeing her before and for such a short time [she] sure didn't blame them" for not warming up to her mother.[54]

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[53] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, February 16, 1965.

[54] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, February 16, 1965.

McCrae's mother had been "so nervous around them and they seem[ed] to sense" that.[55] Both McCrae and her children's lack of comfort around her mother indicates that while she provided an essential financial gift to McCrae, her support, or even visits to her daughter were so inconsistent that her grandchildren did not know her.

Unlike McCrae's mother, Alice provided financial support to McCrae consistently, but in significantly smaller amounts than McCrae's mother had when paying for her dental work. This is likely because of her financial status. The letters suggest that Alice was working class. McCrae commented in September 1964 that Alice "sure sound[ed] busy with all [her] boarders."[56] Housing multiple boarders in 1964 is indicative of Alice's class status and limited income. This occupation was a regular one for Alice: again in June 1965, McCrae asked Alice; "Does Cliff have a car? Or any of your boarders?" when trying to determine how she could get to Alice's for a potential visit.[57] Alice's working class status is also indicated in a letter in which Jacklyn McCrae promises to return the money she was lent by Alice "as soon as possible as [she] kn[e]w [Alice] need[ed] it as bad as" she did.[58]

McCrae's letters to her aunt often discussed Roy Ridler, McCrae's common law partner from 1961 until March 1966. Ridler was the father of McCrae's two youngest children, Christine Ridler, born in 1962, and Robin Ridler, born in 1964. During their common law union, Ridler worked as a labourer, often in jobs at the sawmill, in forestry or as a firefighter. Ridler's

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[55] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, February 16, 1965.

[56] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, September 19, 1964.

[57] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, June 14, 1964

[58] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, June 23, 1965

employment was precarious and he was often out of work, or changing jobs. Ridler lived in Quesnel from at least 1955 until he moved to Terrace in April 1965 for work.[59]

Ridler's employment prospects might have been hampered by his criminal record. Ridler's manslaughter conviction was reported in the Quesnel *Cariboo* on 7 June 1956. Ridler, 27, was identified as a Quesnel district mill worker who had been at fault in a highway accident involving eleven people and resulting in the death of M.J. Clingham in July 1955. During Ridler's trial in Prince George, it was "contended by the crown that he had been drinking to such an extent that he was incapable of driving a motor vehicle."[60] The jury found Ridler guilty and the judge "imposed a sentence of six months in jail. In addition he was deprived of his right to drive anywhere in Canada for ten years."[61]

In November 1957 McCrae explained these details to Alice. The timing of McCrae's letter indicating her familiarity with the case is possibly significant. That she relayed news about Ridler's crime and sentence more than a year after the fact suggests that McCrae had some reason to learn of or recall this news at that later date and that she passed it along to her aunt suggests that Ridler was quite possibly a person known to them both.

Ridler, it seems, was a complicated person who at times made poor decisions and acted badly. His relationship with McCrae was flawed; alcohol, employment, housing and money were consistent struggles. While the relationship was not always a happy one and ended with McCrae kicking him out of the shared home, McCrae's letters indicate they had moments of joy and love at times when they worked together to better their situation for the children. After Ridler and

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[59] "Ridler Guilty of Manslaughter," *Quesnel Cariboo*, June 7,1956, 10.

[60] "Ridler Guilty of Manslaughter," *Quesnel Cariboo*.

[61] "Ridler Guilty of Manslaughter," *Quesnel Cariboo*.

McRae's relationship ended in March 1966, Ridler quickly became involved in another common law union. Yet, after McCrae died in October, 1966, Ridler did not get custody of any of her children. Whether this was because he did not seek custody or because he was found in some way unsuitable is unknown. His previous criminal record was likely to have been a factor. His two children were placed in foster care along with McCrae's three daughters whose father was her first husband Vincent Shannon.

Vincent Shannon was McCrae's legal husband and the father of her four oldest children. McCrae married Shannon when she was only seventeen years old, while he was thirty. Her oldest child, her daughter Kathy was born on July 6th, 1956, a year after McCrae and Shannon were married, with their other three children born in quick succession. Darlene was born on July 13th 1957, Donna on December 10th 1958, and her son Joey on September 2nd 1960. McCrae wrote very little to Alice during her relationship with Vincent Shannon, but the existing letters suggest a troubled relationship, which McCrae left in early 1961. When McCrae wrote about Shannon, she expressed feelings of resentment towards him. Alcoholism was a consistent issue in the marriage, and was likely a contributing factor in her decision to leave.

Tracing McCrae's life through her letters involves following her through time, but also through space. As was the case for many working class individuals and families, McCrae and her family would frequently relocate, both in order to find employment and to find more affordable housing. From 1961 to 1966, McCrae moved five times. During her marriage to Vincent Shannon, McCrae lived on the Queen Charlotte Islands, presumably in Port Clements, where her husband continued to live after their separation. After McCrae left Shannon in January 1961, she traveled to Terrace, British Columbia, four hundred kilometres from Port Clements. The exact length of time McCrae spent in Terrace after her separation from Shannon remains

unknown. McCrae's letters from January and February 1961 are written on paper from the Terrace Hotel, indicating that she spent some time living there. Her next preserved letter, from May of 1961 comes from Quesnel. Hence, it is not clear whether she stayed in Terrace very briefly on her way to Quesnel, or if she stayed there for a period of several months. Quesnel is a distance of 1094 kilometres from Port Clements, based on modern day roads. To travel from Port Clements to Quesnel involves passing through Terrace, and hence Quesnel may have always been McCrae's destination.

While living in Quesnel from 1961 to 1965 with her common-law partner Roy Ridler, McCrae writes about living at two separate addresses, having moved once. Until September of 1964, they lived in a smaller unit on Abbott Heights, an area near Quesnel's city centre.[62] McCrae lived on the outskirts of Quesnel from September of 1964 until the family moved again to Terrace in 1965. Roy Ridler went to Terrace first, leaving on April 28th 1965, a Wednesday, and was planning to " be starting work on Mon. morning." [63] Since Ridler left to go to Terrace months in advance of McCrae and the children, it is likely that he left first in order to start working in Terrace before McCrae and the children followed. Ridler had left the previous day, April 28th, McCrae remained in Quesnel until the end of June, with Ridler sending " some money" in May while continuing to work in Terrace.[64]

While McCrae remained in Quesnel with her children before leaving to meet Ridler in Terrace, she had to move one more time for a few days. As of late June 1965 she had moved in

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[62] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, September 8, 1964.

[63] The following day, McCrae noted that Ridler "left yesterday and phoned her today that he got to Terrace". Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, April 29, 1965.

[64] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, May 18, 1965.

temporarily with friends, explaining to Alice that for the time being"[she was] staying at a good friends of [hers] place as [her] rent was up yesterday."[65] The same friends assisted McCrae in travelling to Terrace on the following Saturday when they drove her and the children to Prince George. McCrae planned to "[go] on the train from there" up to Terrace.[66] The move from Quesnel to Terrace was a distance of approximately 691 kilometres, a significant distance, especially when travelling with small children. In the first months after McCrae arrived in Terrace, she, Ridler and the children stayed at the "Hideway Motel" while they looked for a place to rent.[67] Once McCrae and Ridler found a place to rent in September 1965, Roy Ridler's brother Pete Ridler boarded with them.[68] Pete continued to board with them until McCrae and Ridler's separation.

Initially after the separation, she had considered waiting until the end of the school year and then going "back to Quesnel. [She had] a lot of friends down there and [she] like[d] the place."[69] This move never happened. Instead, McCrae remained in Terrace with her children after her separation from Ridler. After her death, her belongings and remains were returned to her estranged husband and, ultimately, he was buried beside her in Port Clements.

McCrae's ongoing relocations affected her relationships. While in Quesnel, McCrae was part of a community where she both provided support and received support. McCrae had provided childcare for financial compensation for the schoolteacher Jean while in Quesnel, in

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[65] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, June 23, 1965.

[66] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, June 23,1965.

[67] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, June 29, 1965.

[68] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, October 4, 1965.

[69] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, March 16, 1966.

December of 1963, receiving $7 a week from her.[70] In another instance, McCrae looked after the home and children of one of her friends, who had to go to Vancouver to care for her sick father in 1964.[71] As mentioned above, McCrae's friends offered her shelter and transport after Ridler had moved to Terrace.

Once McCrae and the children followed Ridler to Terrace in June 1965, her access to this support system changed. While in Terrace, much of McCrae's support network was connected to Ridlers. Aside from their boarder, Pete, another of Ridler's brothers and his sister in law, Harry and Lorraine, were a source of support for McCrae in Terrace.[72] Shortly after her arrival, she mentions going "over to Lorraine and Harry's to wash" since there was a lot of dust in Terrace.[73] While settling into Terrace from Quesnel, Harry, Lorraine and Pete Ridler provided McCrae with "quite a lot of company."[74] Unlike Quesnel, the community available to McCrae in Terrace largely consisted of Ridler's relatives in the early months of her move.

During this time, McCrae also had support from outside of Terrace. McCrae communicated with and received packages from other women while living in Terrace. She "Got a big parcel from Margaret, kids clothes and shoes. And a big parcel from Faye. 2 nice grey blankets (new) and some towels, tablecloths etc."[75] Both of these women were from the Queen

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[70] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, December 1, 1963.

[71] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, September 8, 1964.

[72] A 1965 voter registration for the Skeena area lists Lorraine Ridler as a housewife and Harry Ridler as handyman. 1965 voter registration In a letter referring to Harry, and Pete who boarded with Jacqueline and Roy in the early months of 1966, McCrae describes the men as " both Ridlers" suggesting that they were two of Roy Ridler's brothers.

[73] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, August 28, 1965.

[74] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, July 6, 1965.

[75] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, November 20, 1965.

Charlotte Islands, and appear to be family or close family friends who knew Alice as well. While these women were a support system for McCrae, they could not be relied upon for other forms of assistance, like caring for McCrae's children, and sending goods became more difficult and expensive, since they would need to be sent a considerable distance.

Similar to Montreal during the Great Depression, living in close proximity to family "made it easier to exchange favors, which could also be more varied: babysitting during childbirth or in case of illness and swapping or giving clothing" was more common when living nearby.[76] While these were all tasks done by McCrae, they were limited by the distance between herself and support networks. While these gifts of clothing were incredibly useful, they would have been more difficult for Margaret and Faye to send to her, since it required spending additional postage than if they had been in the same locale.

In another instance, McCrae writes about a friend of hers, Jessie, who lived in the Queen Charlotte Islands, whose husband had been hospitalized. McCrae asked Alice not to say anything to anyone, as Jessie didn't "want anything to get back to Clark," her husband.[77] However, McCrae's knowledge and empathy for Jessie's situation shows a friendship between the two. McCrae knew private details of her life, including that Jessie "just had another miscarriage," and that Jessie's husband "Clark was so mental and the booze that was always given him sure didn't help either."[78] Social networks, for McCrae, were not limited to just to the area she resided. Instead, she maintained relationships with friends and family who lived a far distance from her.

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[76] Baillargeon, *Making Do*, 156.

[77] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, December 4, 1965.

[78] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, December 4, 1965.

Another support to McCrae after separating from her common-law partner Ridler was her friend Annette Ridler. Annette Ridler is mentioned in seven letters after McCrae's separation. When McCrae became sick with the flu, "Ann Ridler has been up staying with me as I was laid up with the flu! She's real good around the house. Good company too!"[79] Ann's assistance around the house often included cleaning. She and McCrae together "did all the spring cleaning "at McCrae's home. [80] Ann came to stay with McCrae since "Roy and george were up bugging me so [she] asked her to come back" after they had "came in a taxi about 3 o'clock in the morning but I wouldn't open the door."[81] McCrae indicates that Ann had stayed with her several times after her separation from Roy. While Ann Ridler was likely related to McCrae's ex-partner, she was a consistent supporter for McCrae. Within a community largely made of Roy Ridler's family, McCrae still received support after their separation.

Wife

Changes in McCrae's romantic relationships played a key role in her experiences. In the period covered by the letters, Jacklyn McCrae had two conjugal relationships and spent months between and after living as a single mother. Her decision to leave her marriage, her inability to obtain a divorce, and her subsequent common-law relationship with Ridler should be seen in the context of her times.

McCrae's decision to leave Shannon bucked social expectations of the time that called upon wives to accommodate themselves to the behaviours of their husbands. As explained by Purvey in "Must a Wife Do All the Adjusting?: Attitudes and Practices of Social Workers

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[79] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, March 27, 1966.

[80] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, April 10, 1966.

[81] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, August 5, 1966.

Towards Wife Abuse in Vancouver, 1945 to 1960," women were often blamed for wife abuse, spousal alcoholism and marital discontent.[82] Male violence and alcoholism, Purvey notes, were socially acceptable aspects of masculinity.[83] Interpersonal conflict in the household, cases of spousal abuse, sexual problems and other issues were understood to have resulted from mental ailments of the wife.[84] McCrae's separation from her legal husband, Vincent Shannon in January 1961 broke the established expectation that it was a wife's responsibility to conform within her marriage. Few of McCrae's letters were written before she left Shannon and these do not discuss the state of her marriage. This is likely because McCrae at this time lived in close proximity to her aunt Alice, making it possible to discuss in person. Her later letters do give a sense of some of the issues that led to her decision to leave the marriage. After her separation from Shannon, McCrae explains how she is much happier, since she does not "have to contend with the liquor problem" as she did during her marriage to Shannon.[85]

McCrae's letter to Alice after she left Shannon, on February 20 1961, suggests that she feared her Aunt might think ill of her as a result of her decision to leave. In her letter, she tells her aunt that she hopes Alice is not too angry, but "life is too short to live like that."[86] McCrae's

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[82] Diane Purvey, "Must a Wife do All the Adjusting?: Attitudes and Practices of Social Workers towards Wife Abuse in Vancouver, 1945 to 1960, In *Child and Family Welfare in British Columbia,* eds. Christopher Walmsley, and Diane Purvey (Detselig Enterprises, 2005).

[83] Purvey, "Must a Wife do All the Adjusting?," pg. 260.
Primary sources used by Purvey were focused on social work students at the University of British Columbia, indicating that these constructs of wives' failure was directly from social workers' perspective. These were the people that McCrae would have been directly dealing with, and who- would have had control over her access to welfare support.

[84] Purvey, "Must a Wife do All the Adjusting?," 265.

[85] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, September 19, 1964.

[86] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, February 20, 1961.

hope for forgiveness from her aunt suggests that her aunt might have expected McCrae to conform and adjust to preserve the marriage. McCrae did not do so. Instead, McCrae tells Alice "I am not sorry I didn't go back."[87] In spite of the social expectation – to which Alice may have subscribed – McCrae was unrepentant about her decision to leave Shannon. While McCrae's letters never directly tell her Aunt of the treatment she experienced in her marriage, her comments "life is too short" and "I am not sorry," give some indication of the difficult circumstances in which McCrae had been living within her marriage.[88] To some extent, McCrae's unwillingness to discuss the issues she had faced in her marriage to Shannon could be because of whom she addressed her letters to. When writing to her Aunt, it is possible that she did not want to disclose details about the relationship, to prevent worrying Alice.

As late as May 1964, in a letter written ten days after the birth of her youngest son, Robin, she wrote that she hoped "Vince will want a divorce one of these days."[89] McCrae's access to divorce was limited by her financial hardship, Shannon's unwillingness to get a divorce, and divorce law of the time. Before 1968, divorce in Canada required a matrimonial offense, adultery, abandonment or cruelty. Without being able to prove one of these cases, divorce was not available.[90] For women, marriage was commonly seen as a source of economic stability.[91]When this source of stability left because of the end of a marriage, poor women would

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[87] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, February 20, 1961.

[88] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, February 20, 1961.

[89] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, May 20, 1964.

[90] Margrit Eichler, "Divorce in Canada," Canadian Encyclopedia, September 19, 2016.

[91] James Snell, *In the Shadow of the Law: Divorce in Canada, 1900-1939*, (Toronto; University of Toronto Press), 1991. 161,https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442676060.

often have to find support thorough their families or remarriage, both legal remarriage and common law unions like McCrae.[92] As Snell explains; "Women, especially working-class women, who usually lived close to the poverty line, could view marriage in very hard terms: an exchange of sex and home management in return for support."[93] Because of strict and limiting divorce laws, when women got divorced or simply left their marriage, finding the financial support of a man was a necessity. Even if McCrae was able to prove matrimonial offense, she would have needed to be able to afford to go to court. It is likely that the reason McCrae hoped "Vince will want a divorce" was to make the process possible.[94] Her changing situation was also likely part of the reason McCrae sought a divorce in 1964. By that time, McCrae had two children with her common law partner Ridler. As Snell found, one of the most common reasons for a divorce to be sought was so that the petitioning party could get remarried. This was especially common for farmers, who often needed the labour of their wives to ensure the farm would survive.[95] Perhaps this was a factor in McCrae's wish.

McCrae's decision to leave her home without her children and travel hundreds of kilometres away is in some respects congruent with what *Chatelaine Magazine* called a "Poor Man's Divorce." This occurred, the magazine reported, when a man desired a divorce but could not afford to legally obtain one. Instead, he would fake his own death, or simply leave for work

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[92] Snell, *In the Shadow of the Law,* 161.

[93] Snell, *In the Shadow of the Law*, 164.

[94] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, May 20, 1964.

[95] Snell, *In the Shadow of the Law*, 161.

and never come back.[96] In some ways, this pattern was similar to McCrae's separation from her legal husband, Vincent Shannon insofar as it involved leaving an unhappy marriage unexpectedly and not obtaining a legal divorce, due to financial hardship. A key difference, however, between a 'poor man's divorce' and McCrae's case, is that she did remain in contact in with Shannon in some ways, which were connected to her hope to regain custody of her children. Unlike the men described in *Chatelaine* who abandoned their families entirely, McCrae wanted to take her children with her. She initially left Shannon in January of 1961 and went to Terrace herself. Shortly thereafter however, she wrote to her aunt about how she was planning to "phone Vince… and see if [she] can get the kids" to take with her.[97] While she was unable to get custody of her son Joey, she was reunited with her daughters Kathy, Darlene and Donna.

Much of McCrae's contact with Shannon was through her Aunt Alice. In a letter dated December 18 1965, McCrae tells her aunt that in the package she sent, that there was "a small gift [she'd] like [Alice McCrae] to pass on to Joey."[98] This indicates that much of the contact between McCrae and Shannon, especially regarding their son Joey, occurred through Alice McCrae who lived in proximity to Shannon and Joey. This appears to be a common method of communication between McCrae and Shannon, as her February 20 1961 letter asks Alice to "find

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[96] "Poor man's divorce," as characterized by Bodsworth, the author of the Chatelaine article, explains that this occurs when a husband deserts his wife and children, either by simply leaving, or creating a staged crime. A social worker from Ontario explained that this was usually done by men who made between thirty and forty-five dollars a week; those who made enough to have a small savings, but did not make enough to conduct a legal divorce. In the article, "welfare workers point out that frequently the wife is far more to blame than the deserting husband himself." Statistics from welfare administrator George Reed of Timmins Ontario suggested that urban men were twice as likely to desert their wives than rural men, for unclear reasons. *Chatelaine*, Jan 1951, pg. 12, 13, 61, 62.

[97] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, February 20, 1961.

[98] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, December 18, 1965.

out what Vince did with all [her] belongings." And if Shannon was willing, for Alice to "ask him to leave them at [Alice's] place."[99] While the continued contact with Shannon was often indirect, it is still unique when compared to a 'poor man's divorce'. In that instance, the husband would simply leave without any contact with his wife or children. By fleeing or faking their death, the family would have no knowledge of where the man went, or in some cases if he was even alive. For McCrae however, Shannon had contact with McCrae, who knew with some certainty what had happened.

McCrae was far from alone in her experience of leaving an abusive husband and being subsequently unable to obtain a legal divorce. Barbara Croft's *"*I am A Common-Law Wife," an article published in *Chatelaine* in May 1965 tells the story of 'Kay Clefton,' a pseudonym used to protect her identity.[100] Like McCrae, Clefton left her legal husband due to his drinking and feeling unhappy in the marriage.[101] The article was published while Clefton was living in Toronto, but many of the experiences described occurred when she was living in British Columbia, including Vancouver, and later in an unnamed small town in British Columbia.[102]

Kay Clefton, like McCrae, was in an unhealthy relationship with her husband, Bill. Clefton describes the nights "filled with vicious and baseless accusations by Bill, with foul language when the babies cried or demanded my attention, even sometimes with physical

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[99] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, February 20, 1961.

[100] Kay Clefton, "I am a Common Law Wife," *Chatelaine*, May 1965, 32, Proquest.

[101] Clefton, "I am a Common Law Wife," 96.

[102] Clefton, "I am a common Law Wife," 94.

assault."[103] Clefton explains how her husband's drinking, which was originally fun socially, became problematic, leading to loss of employment, and general unhappiness in the home.[104] McCrae hints at similar unhappiness in her marriage to Shannon as noted earlier.

For both McCrae and Clefton, a 'poor woman's divorce' was more complicated than a 'poor man's divorce' because of their continued ties to their children, who made it harder to flee a considerable distance and, in McCrae's case at least, kept her in contact with her legal husband, first when seeking custody of all her children and in later attempts to stay in touch with her son Joey who was in Shannon's custody. Since Shannon had legal rights as the father of the children, McCrae had to establish custody of the children with him. While she did not get custody of their son Joey, McCrae, unlike men who obtained a 'poor man's divorce' tried to maintain a role in her child's life.

McCrae and Clefton had the capacity to leave the relationship, both indicated that due to divorce laws, they were unable to legally divorce their estranged husbands. Clefton explained how she wished to get legally married to her common-law partner, but was unable to, since she "had no grounds for suing Bill- he'd become sullen, a solitary drinker, and wasn't interested in women, but he refused to set [her] free."[105] If Bill had become involved in a relationship with another woman, it would have given Clefton the matrimonial offense she required to procure a divorce. Without a legal divorce, Clefton instead chose to pursue a common-law relationship, much like McCrae did with Roy Ridler. A Common-law union is a conjugal relationship where

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[103] Fred Bodsworth, "Runaways From Marriage: This year 2,000 Canadian wives will be left to fend for themselves and their children. What can be done to halt "the crime most easy to commit"?" In *Chatelaine*, January 1951, 96.

[104] Bodsworth, "Runaways From Marriage," In Chatelaine, January 1951.

[105] Clefton, "I am a common Law Wife", 99.

the partners usually live together for minimum one year first. For McCrae common-law was accessible when partners cannot be legally married because of an existing marriage to another, for the man, woman, or both.[106] This is how Clefton understood her 'marriage' to her common-law partner. The two could not be legally married since they were both legally married to other people,and could not get divorced because of Canadian divorce law.

Common-law unions were the only spousal relationship possible for women when legal divorce was inaccessible. These relationships could be ended, as McCrae's with Ridler ultimately was, without pursuing legal divorce. The fluidity of common-law relationships did, however, have the potential to further disadvantage women, as Clefton explains. Clefton describes a case in her community, where the common-law husband died, and his 'wife' had no legal rights to any of their shared belongings.[107] One of Clefton's neighbours remarked, "She asked for what she got. Can you imagine any woman being as stupid and immoral as that?"[108] Clefton certainly could imagine a woman in this situation since it mirrored her own, a fact she hid from her neighbors.

While larger social constructions of marriage excluded common-law partnerships, the women themselves often treated common-law partnerships as an accessible form of union.[109] Lori Chambers examines motherhood, common-law partnerships and poverty in *Misconceptions: Unmarried Motherhood and the Ontario Children of Unmarried Parents Act 1921-1969.* As

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[106] Clefton, "I am a Common Law Wife" 32.

[107] Clefton, "I am a Common Law Wife", 32.

[108] Clefton, "I am a Common Law Wife", 32

[109] Chambers, Lori. *Misconceptions: Unmarried Motherhood and the Ontario Children of Unmarried Parents Act, 1921-1969*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007, pg 143.

Chambers explains, cohabiting women, like McCrae, had more than one child in a common-law union in eighty-four percent of cases in Ontario.[110] While women in common-law unions were considered unmarried in the eyes of the law and heavily scrutinized for immoral behaviour, evidence suggests that women in these unions often exhibited precisely the traits of "restrained heterosexuality, domestic monogamy and honest motherhood" that was expected of legal wives.[111]

While their family status was untraditional, women in common-law unions nevertheless often conformed to social ideals of femininity and motherhood. Chambers' evidence indicates that in 41% of cases in which women in cohabitation relationships had children from previous marriages, the children were taken care of by their mother with support from the common-law partner almost exclusively.[112] McCrae's experiences as a mother in a common-law marriage follow this pattern to some extent, since Ridler did serve at times as a male breadwinner for both McCrae's children from her earlier marriage and her children with him. As Chambers explains, for women leaving a relationship, "a woman's best route out of poverty was often to cohabit with someone else, either informally, or when possible, in legal marriage."[113] While of course Ridler's wages did not lift McCrae and her children out of poverty, it is probable that the additional income was welcomed.

McCrae would have been categorized as a common-law wife during her relationship with Roy Ridler, the father of her two youngest children. As a common-law wife, McCrae's

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[110] Chambers, Misconceptions: *Unmarried Motherhood*, 142.

[111] Chambers, Misconceptions: *Unmarried Motherhood,* 145.

[112] Chambers, *Misconceptions: Unmarried Motherhood,* 142.

[113] Chambers, *Misconceptions: Unmarried Motherhood,* 162.

experiences while separating from Ridler differed from her separation from her legal husband Shannon. McCrae separated from Ridler in March of 1966, after she kicked him, along with their two boarders, out of the house.[114] The incident occurred because Ridler, and the two boarders, Pete Ridler and George Whalen left the home on a pay weekend, and did not return until “all were broke with no groceries or fuel or bills paid," leaving McCrae to rely on welfare services for groceries and fuel.[115] McCrae’s decision to kick Ridler out of the home seems to be because of his failure to provide for the children on a consistent basis. Rather than rely on an inconsistent breadwinner, McCrae chose to support the children herself, since it would give her control of the income, and insure that it would be spent appropriately. This was likely because of a deeper analysis for McCrae, who carefully measured her options, and chose to protect her children from financial abuse. When McCrae separated from Ridler she stayed in the residence. Unlike her leaving her legal husband Shannon, McCrae kept her belongings and some of the communal property.

For both Clefton and McCrae, a concern while in a common law relationship was for them to be able to access their shared property in the case of a separation or death of a spouse. Since there were very limited legal protections for common law spouses at the time, McCrae and Clefton themselves had to ensure that they would maintain legal rights and access to property in the case of the end of the relationship. For Clefton, this was through creating legal documents that ensured in the case of her common law husband's death, she would be entitled to their communal property, which were listed under her legal name.[116] McCrae explained that during

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[114] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, March 16, 1966.

[115] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, March 16, 1966.

[116] Clefton, “I am a Common Law Wife”, 99.

the separation between herself and Roy Ridler, they had determined that the shared debts between them would be split, with Ridler taking on the Niagara loans and other debts, and McCrae paying off the stove and vacuum cleaner.[117] As McCrae writes, she kept the stove and vacuum, and "had the contract changed to 'SHANNON' ".[118] This is the only place that she refers to herself using a specific name in her letters.[119] By using her married name on the contract, McCrae marks a clear distinction between her legal husband, Vincent Shannon, and her common-law husband, Roy Ridler. Changing the name on her contract could have potentially been done to prevent Ridler access to it. Since these appliances were household necessities for McCrae, it seems logical that she would ensure she kept them.

McCrae's highlights how easily these common law unions could be created or ended. When writing to her aunt, McCrae writes that "Roy is 'married' again."[120] This occurs only two months after she kicked him out of the shared home. While Roy Ridler had only been in the relationship for a short period of time, McCrae referred to the union as a marriage. The common law marriage provided a unique space for women like McCrae. Other cases of common-law marriage indicate that women did not wish to be in the arrangement. Clefton, for example, remained in a common law marriage with her partner, since her estranged legal husband refused

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[117] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, April 10, 1966.

[118] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, April 10, 1966.

[119] Previously, during her relationship with Ridler, evidence suggests that she had used his last name. Voter registration information from 1965 lists her as "Ridler, Jackalyn, Nel, housewife, general delivery." This is the same person as McCrae, as her middle name was Nellie, shown in an abbreviated form. The registration was for the Skeena, which included Quesnel, where they were living at the time and Terrace, where they had moved later. The same list identified Roy Ridler and his brothers, Harry with his wife Lorraine, and his brother Malcolm. Skeena Voter Registration, *Newspapers.com,* 1965.

[120] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, May 9, 1966.

to grant her a divorce. Common-law unions were an alternative method to a male breadwinner when a woman was unable to procure a legal divorce.

Mother

While McCrae was a niece, a friend and a wife, the role of mother was one she focused on in the letters. Roy Ridler and McCrae had two children together, Christine Marie Ridler in 1962, and Robin Michael Ridler in 1964 who joined the household alongside McCrae's three daughters. McCrae's letters during her 'marriage' with Ridler suggests providing for her children was a continuous struggle. McCrae's experiences with motherhood were not easy and a few of her letters express hesitancy about having more children, while showing a great deal of care for the children she had. When McCrae received a letter of congratulations from her Aunt for her last pregnancy in January 1964, she expressed her concerns about becoming a mother again. She wrote that: "I guess I was pretty discouraged to know another baby would be coming. I don't mind once they arrive as they are so sweet but it's the waiting. I had quite a bad time with Chris[tine] too so I'm a bit leery."[121] Christine, at the time of this letter, was about two years old.

While McCrae's discouragement at having another child is indicative of some of her struggles as a mother, other letters indicate her deep emotional bond with and continuous care for her children. Her love for her son became apparent once Robin was born. Ten days after his birth, McCrae wrote to her aunt to let her "know all is well."[122] McCrae goes on to tell her aunt that "Robin sure is a good baby. Never says 'boo' unless he's wet or hungry. He sure has a good

[121] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, January 24, 1964.

[122] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, May 20, 1964.

appetite."[123] While McCrae was understandably apprehensive about expanding her already large family, McCrae's letters suggest that once her children were born she treated them with love and care.

McCrae's experiences with poverty were connected to and shaped by her role as a mother. Poverty, for McCrae, was felt most in relation to its impact on her children. One of the most prominent concerns McCrae wrote about to her aunt is affording or getting gifts and necessities for her children. For example, in April of 1963, McCrae thanked Alice McCrae, for the two dollars she had sent in time for Easter, as she "had exactly 6 cents and nothing for the girls."[124] McCrae describes instances in which she and Ridler were willing to sacrifice their own comfort for the sake of their children. When McCrae and Ridler moved together to Terrace in June of 1965, they struggled to find somewhere to rent.[125] This led them to rent a one bedroom accommodation with a large sunroom. To ensure her children had the most comfort possible, McCrae wrote that the "four girls sleep in the bedroom and Roy, Robin and I sleep on the couch."[126] Rather than prioritizing herself, McCrae focused on the comfort of her four daughters. Prioritization of the children's comfort was presumably common for working-class mothers. The needs of women, such as clothing, or in McCrae's case, the families' sleeping arrangements prioritized the children. With a limited budget, proper clothing was often given to the children first, with the women's needs being the last need met.[127]

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[123] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, May 20, 1964.

[124] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, April 19, 1963.

[125] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, July 6, 1965.

[126] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, June 29, 1965.

[127] Baillargeon, *Making Do*, 109.

In all likelihood, economic factors influenced McCrae's decision to become a common-law 'wife' to Ridler. In early 1961, McCrae fled from her marriage to Shannon in Port Clements B.C. to Terrace B.C., temporarily leaving her children behind. Shortly thereafter, as of the end of January, McCrae was apparently living as a single woman and wrote to her aunt, relieved that "I am definitely not pregnant. I don't intend to get that way for a long time either, if ever."[128] Yet, a letter dated three weeks later reveals that she had no intention of abandoning her children permanently and was worried about them and actively trying to regain custody of them.

That night, she wrote her aunt that she would phone Shannon to "see if I can get the kids down here with me. I sure miss them. If he will give me custody of them will be going up real soon for them. You write and tell me how they are." [129] McCrae had an employment prospect that would allow her to support herself if she had not gotten custody, as "they [were] hiring at the hospital and it is good pay."[130] If McCrae ever worked at the hospital is unknown, but by the time she wrote to her aunt again three months later, she had obtained custody of all but one of her children and was living with Ridler in Quesnel, signing her letter ""Love Jackie, Roy and the girls."[131] While McCrae was able to get custody of her three daughters, Donna, Darlene and Kathy from Vincent Shannon within a few months, Shannon retained custody of their youngest, Joey.

Through her letters to Alice, McCrae often inquires about and refers to her son Joey. In August 1966, a person named Trudy was taking Joey on a trip and McCrae suggests part of the

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[128] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, January 31, 1961.

[129] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, February 20, 1961.

[130] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, February 20, 1961.

[131] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, May 25, 1961.

itinerary was to bring Joey to visit with his mother.[132] As she wrote, Trudy had yet to bring Joey, but McCrae remained hopeful that "maybe she'll call in on the way back." McCrae suspected that the reason Trudy had not brought Joey to see her was because "she's afraid I'll take Joey if she comes down."[133] While she did not get custody of Joey before her death in 1966, she made a series of attempts to connect with her son. Her letters indicate her love and care for her children, even while they were not in her custody.

While McCrae struggled to regain custody of her children with Vincent Shannon after her separation, the situation was different when her relationship with Ridler ended. After McCrae kicked Ridler and their two boarders, Pete and George out in March of 1966, she became a single mother with five of her children in her custody. Unlike her previous separation, McCrae stayed in the marital home and Ridler continued to provide financial support. McCrae, now living as a single mother, noted to her aunt that she was able to make ends meet because "Roy [was] also giving [her] $80.00 a month for Christy and Robin," the two children they shared.[134]

McCrae was not concerned about the possibility that Ridler would take their children, from her. Even when Ridler expressed intent to regain custody of his children with McCrae, the threat did not appear to be a serious one. In May of 1966, McRae described to her aunt how "Roy showed up with his new 'shack up' and he caused quite a commotion. He phoned the welfare and tried to get [her] in 'hot water' on the pretense of wanting Chris + Robin."[135]

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[132] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, August 5, 1966.

[133] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, August 5, 1966.

[134] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, March 16, 1966.

[135] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, May 29, 1966.

Language used by McCrae in this passage indicates that while Ridler had attempted to get her in trouble with "the welfare," it had not seemed to be a legitimate threat for her.

In her letter, McCrae suggests Ridler's attempt to pursue custody of the children was not sincere, but rather an attempt to cause McCrae problems with the welfare office. Even her language calls attention to the intentions of Ridler's call to the welfare office as to cause issues for McCrae rather than to have gotten custody of his children. McCrae herself even referred to it as a 'pretense'. In contrast to her previous letter, McCrae calls Ridler's new partner a 'shack up' instead of saying that Roy was 'married.' This is probably written out of anger at the situation. McCrae's interactions with Ridler as a single mother indicates her focus on keeping custody of her children.

Her letters suggested that Ridler's indications of wanting custody of their children was not a threat to her motherhood. A key difference between McCrae's experiences as a mother when in a common-law marriage, and when she is a single mother is who McCrae relies on for financial support. While Ridler was providing some financial assistance for the two children he shared with McCrae, the majority of her financial support came from welfare services. McCrae was receiving $225 a month from welfare in May of 1966.[136] Unlike when McCrae was living with a male breadwinner, she was the one taking the steps to ensure an income. She no longer had to contend with unemployment or poor spending habits that Ridler had during their union, which had ultimately led to McCrae kicking him out.

Motherhood also limited McCrae's ability to pursue paid work outside the home. In the course of her letters, McCrae did not give any indication that she had formal employment. While attempting to get custody of her children after her separation from Vincent Shannon, McCrae

[136] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, May 3, 1966.

told her aunt; “I plan to go to work here if I can’t get the kids. They are hiring at the hospital and it is good pay.”[137] McCrae only planned to go work at the hospital if she was unable to get custody of the kids. This suggests that McCrae’s lack of formal employment was not because she chose not to work, but that caring for the children prevented her from doing so. McCrae’s letter indicates that it was not an unwillingness to work, but a lack of ability to do so in her circumstances. McCrae was not alone in these circumstances. A 1967 article from the Daily Colonist explains the plight of women on welfare, with one of the women proclaiming “I’m 39, deserted and have five children. Where am I going to work?”[138]

In addition to her role as a mother, McCrae’s ability to work or procure an income was influenced by the health of herself and her children. Illness frequently visited McCrae and her children. Of McCrae’s 106 surviving letters, 16 mention cases of sickness, and three others describe doctors’ visits. The frequency with which McCrae and her children were beset by illnesses was quite likely indicative of and connected to their poverty.

It seems probable that living in cramped quarters, and for a period of time without running water, had negative impacts on the family’s health. While living in Quesnel in 1964 McCrae wanted to move, since “[they] weren't going to put in another winter on abbott heights without water”[139] After they had moved on 8 September 1964, McCrae explained:

> It is sure great to have a nice house and water. It was awfully cramped + miserable with no water at the other place. We were just paying rent there $40 a

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[137] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, February 20, 1961.

[138] “Social Workers: Welfare Too Low,” *Daily Colonist*, March 21, 1967.

[139] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, September 8, 1964.

> month with option to buy but we won't keep it now. If we could have got water it would have been ok.[140]

While the physical space of the previous accommodation was clearly an issue for McCrae and her children, her letter indicates that the greatest issue was the water. Without access to running water, McCrae and her children would have been at a considerable disadvantage in terms of maintaining personal hygiene and halting the spread of communicable illnesses. In addition, McCrae's domestic work would have been made more difficult, as the process of getting water and heating it in order to do laundry would have been a time consuming task. Especially with her young children, since having laundry would often become a daily task instead of a weekly one with an infant.[141] Her youngest Robin was around four months old at the time, so frequent washing of baby clothes was likely.

Just a month before McCrae wrote about her lack of access to running water, she and her children came down with the mumps. In, July 10 1964 she notes that "Christy had come down with the mumps." and by "Thursday Donna had them & on Fri Kathy got them."[142] Given the close proximity of the children, the speed with which the illness was spread throughout the household is no surprise. Within the week, McCrae herself caught the mumps also.[143]

McCrae's bout of illness did not end with her catching the mumps. On August 6 1964, sick with bronchitis, she said that she "should phone the Dr. and get some penicillin but [was]

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[140] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, September 8, 1964.

[141] Baillargeon, Making Do, 135.

[142] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, July 13, 1964.

[143] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, July 16, 1964.

trying to hold off till payday."[144] If McCrae's illness' origin was connected to her circumstances, her treatment options to lessen its duration was also limited because of financial constraints. A 1965 article from the *Globe and Mail* critiqued the "hodge podge of services to look after the sick in Canada," which relied on support from many services, such as welfare departments, provincial health plans, and charitable organizations.[145] Public health coverage in British Columbia had not been consistent up to McCrae's time. The first implementation of the Medical Services Association in 1940 did not provide coverage for mothers like McCrae.[146] Improved coverage was not introduced until the Social Assistance Medical Services Fund was introduced in 1949.[147] In addition to providing coverage to those who were unemployed, benefits were available to purchase based on family income.[148] This suggests that perhaps McCrae had access to some form of medical coverage even before Ridler was unemployed or they were on welfare.

Nevertheless, eventually, McCrae was able to access some forms of healthcare. After McCrae's continued bouts of illness, she underwent an x-ray in November of 1964, which found pleurisy, a type of inflammation in her left lung.[149] As a result, she "has to take it easy as Dr says a chill could cause it to come back again. He told me no more washing clothes at home til' spring

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[144] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, August 6, 1964.

[145] Joan Hollobon, "The great gaps in medical services" *Globe and Mail*, February 20, 1965.

[146] Brad Fritz, "The origins of publicly funded medical care in BC and the BCMA's contributions," British Columbia Medical Journal, September 7, 2015.

[147] Fritz, "The origins of publicly funded medical care."

[148] Fritz, "The origins of publicly funded medical care."

[149] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, November 18, 1964.

as it will help avoid both the arthritis in my hands and the chest condition."[150] With the arthritis in her hands, and the lung inflammation, McCrae's ability to take on other tasks would have been severely impacted. Her poor health was especially unusual considering her age. She was twenty-six at the time, so her illnesses cannot be attributed to old age.

The following year, McCrae's mother – with whom she was not in frequent contact – made a substantial gift in an effort to improve her daughter's health. In February 1965, McCrae's mother and her husband came to visit, and "They bought gifts for all and presented [McCrae] with a cheque for $160.00 to buy" her dentures.[151] The couple took McCrae "down to the dentist to take the impressions" for them.[152] Purchasing McCrae a dental plate would have been a significant expense for her mother Ellen Miles, but it would have given McCrae a great improvement in her quality of life in terms of her health and ability to eat. McCrae was able to try on her dental plate on March 19th 1965. She hoped she would not "have too much trouble getting used to them. [She'd] been 17 months without teeth" by that time.[153]

The long wait for her dentures was presumably because of her finances. $160 for McCrae would have been over half of Ridler's biweekly paycheque, which was already needed elsewhere. For McCrae, one of the primary reasons she looked forward to getting her dental plate was to make it easier for her to eat. On 17 March 1965, McCrae "weighed 104 lbs" but was hoping "to gain up to about 110-115 lbs."[154] Her final plate was delayed, with more fittings

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[150] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, November 18, 1964.

[151] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, February 16, 1965.

[152] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, February 16, 1965.

[153] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, March 18, 1965.

[154] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, March 17, 1965.

occurring until her "dentures came in this morning" on 4 June 1965.[155] Her next weight, from 18 May 1965, put McCrae at 98 pounds, having lost an additional six pounds in two months.[156] This appears to be a common issue, as McCrae described this weight as "isn't too bad for me."[157]

Her struggles with her teeth, and waiting longer for her dentures, was likely a factor in her struggle to maintain or gain weight. McCrae's doctor, "Dr. Rahay said [she'll] probably put on more weight once" she got her "teeth in."[158] For low income women, there was a direct correlation between health and income. As one woman explained in the *Daily Colonist,* she believed that "both medical and dental bills could be cut down if [they] could afford proper food."[159] A lack of access to healthy, consistent food, in addition to McCrae's struggles to afford to see the dentist would be likely culprits in her fluctuating low weight.

Illnesses faced by McCrae and her children did not end when they moved to quarters with running water. Her youngest child Robin, only five months old, was ill again at the end of October 1964. McCrae told her aunt that "Robin is at home again and feeling quite a lot better"[160] McCrae's assertion that her son was back home again suggests that perhaps he had been in the hospital, as she later stated that "the Dr. figured its a virus of some sort" that had caused the illness.[161] Not only was her son Robin Ridler brought to the doctors for his illness, but

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[155] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, June 4, 1965.

[156] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, May 18, 1965.

[157] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, May 18, 1965.

[158] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, May 18, 1965.

[159] Nancy Brown, "Bad Guess Means Hardship for Mother, Seven Children," *Daily Colonist,* November 13, 1966. pg 15.

[160] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, October 30, 1964.

[161] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, October 30, 1964.

he had to be on "2 different kinds of medicine [he had] to take for at least a month," including an antibiotic.[162] From July to October of 1964, consistent illnesses occurred in McCrae's household. During this time, McCrae's ability to work, both formally or informally would have been severely limited. As will be discussed below, one source of income for McCrae was informal work through babysitting other children. While caring for her own sick children, McCrae was likely unable to babysit other children.

Her letters from July and August of 1964, the times when she and the children had the mumps, then again when she had bronchitis, do not give any evidence that she was caring for other children. Her September 8th letter, however, explains how she had taken care of her friend Shirley's household while she went to Vancouver to her very sick father.[163] McCrae "took care of her home, 4 kids, her husband" while "Shirley was gone 7 days."[164] In this instance, McCrae's letters do not indicate that she or her children were ill in September of 1964. While caring for Shirley's children, McCrae was caring for her own five children, Shirley's four children, and managing both households. As her letters indicate, this was an intense task which made McCrae "glad when [Shirley] came home last wed."[165]

Illness was a continuous problem for McCrae. Her ability to manage her household, hold informal employment and care for her children would have been affected by the health of her and her children. Within McCrae's struggle with illness is the financial strain it caused. Being ill

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[162] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, October 30, 1964.

[163] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, September 8, 1964.

[164] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, September 8, 1964.

[165] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, September 8, 1964.

caused additional financial strain, while her poverty was likely a contributing factor in her health. While there was some provincial health care available to her, it was rather limited. Buying prescription medications often required work from McCrae to afford them, or she simply had to wait until payday as shown above.

McCrae's ability to get by was heavily influenced by her social world. The physical space she lived in influenced not only her access to welfare services, but her support networks and their ability to help her when she needed it most. Much of her support came from her Aunt Alice in the Queen Charlotte Islands, which placed a significant limitation on the type of support she could provide, and how often it could be provided. Other social supports were precarious; often connected to her common-law partner and where she was living at the time. Ridler himself was a unique case in terms of support. Of course, the benefit of his financial support is evident, but it was inconsistent if provided at all. Because of the economic importance of a male breadwinner, McCrae's relationship with her common-law partner, Ridler, was an important piece of her experiences.

As evident in her letters, the relationship was a complex one, both because of her common-law status since she was not divorced, and because of the volatile nature of the relationship. Since McCrae was unable to procure a legal divorce from Vincent Shannon before her death, she faced a unique set of circumstances. In some ways like a 'poor man's divorce' McCrae leaving Shannon was done by her leaving without procuring a legal divorce. Of course, McCrae's experiences as a poor woman were quite different, especially in the case of her children. Much of her separation with Shannon focused on her gaining custody of her children. It seems, from her letters, that one of the most important pieces of McCrae's experience was her

role as a mother. Even through difficult circumstances, McCrae's care and focus on the wellbeing of her children is evident. Even her son Joey, who she did not have custody of, McCrae appears to have made several attempts to visit and send gifts to him. One of the predominant issues McCrae and her children faced was continued bouts of illness. Illnesses were an issue for McCrae, since her poverty was a factor in her illness, and the added financial strain caused by purchasing necessary medications. Another health issue central to McCrae's experience was her teeth. Affording dental work was only made possible by her Mother's gift. Her dental health, however, had greater impacts on McCrae's general health. All of these experiences were integral to interpreting how she managed the household economy. Her ability to afford necessities, get help from her community, access welfare support, and place in society were dictated by these experiences. Without interpreting McCrae's moves, lack of divorce and common-law status, her motherhood and her health, understanding how she managed the household economy is unclear.

Chapter 2: The Economic World of Jacklyn McCrae

Like the experience of working-class women before her, McCrae used the tools available to her to 'make do' for herself and her children. McCrae used several sources of income and limited her expenses to manage the family economy. During Ridler and McCrae's relationship, the family allowance, babysitting money and Ridler's formal income were managed by McCrae. The family allowance payment allowed McCrae to purchase groceries for her children, and to pay her debts.

McCrae also had occasional additional financial support from friends, family and neighbours. This came, largely, in three forms: gifts, loans, and babysitting. These supports were made available to McCrae through her community, both from women who lived in proximity to her, and those like her Aunt Alice, who lived a considerable distance away. While gifts of money did not require any labour from McCrae, babysitting required a time commitment and loans required careful management of future income to ensure she could repay them. Unlike other forms of income in her household, money from community and kin relations seems to have been money that was entirely within McCrae's control.

While managing her own work in the informal economy, McCrae did often manage the disposition of Ridler's income. Her management was limited both by her access to his paychecks, and how consistently he was working. Similarly, financial support through the state, such as welfare payments were dependent on if she was living with a male breadwinner and how much other income was coming into the household. Since McCrae did not appear to engage in formal work from 1955-1966, her involvement in the informal economy provided her the ability to work and gain an income herself.

There is evidence of five instances where Jacklyn McCrae received money without the expectation for it to be given back. In four of these instances, Alice McCrae, the recipient of the letters, sent her money. Unlike loans of money, which Alice also sent McCrae, the amount of money was often much lower. This likely is because of two potential reasons. First, that Alice was less concerned about being repaid for smaller amounts of money which were gifts that she could afford. And second, these gifts were sent when McCrae had no prospect of paying back a loan, coming in one instance when McCrae had found herself stuck, and unable to " ask for anymore assistance" from welfare.[166]

Alice sent Jacklyn McCrae one such gift of money for Easter 1963. McCrae wrote thanks "for the $2 [Alice] sent the girls for Easter. What a life saver that was! [She] had exactly 6 cents and nothing for the girls."[167] Aunt Alice also sent small gifts of money directly to McCrae's children. McCrae's daughter Kathy was "ever pleased with [her] letter and the $3.00" Alice had sent in March of 1965.[168] McCrae explained how Kathy" [had] it tucked away in her purse," suggesting that it would not be used for regular household expenditure.[169] While these gifts were small amounts of money, they were important for McCrae to afford goods for her children. Since the only instance where Alice sent McCrae money in connection to a holiday was this particular Easter, Alice's gifts were not necessarily connected to conventional occasions. Instead, it is likely that Alice sent money when she could afford to do so, rather than in relation to holidays.

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[166] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, June 14, 1965.

[167] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, April 18, 1963.

[168] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, March 12, 1965.

[169] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, March 12, 1965.

For instance, when Alice sent three dollars, which was given to McCrae's oldest daughter, Kathy, it was not around Kathy's birthday.

Another person who gave McCrae money was Annette Ridler. Interestingly, Annette Ridler gave McCrae money *after* her separation from Roy Ridler. She acknowledged that "Ann ha[d] been giving [her] $10 or $15 out of her every cheque" on 28 August 1966, over five months after she had kicked Roy Ridler out of the home.[170] Not only was McCrae being given money by someone who was likely related to Ridler, this happened a significant period of time after the deterioration of the relationship. These smaller gifts of money were an important tool for McCrae to purchase goods she otherwise would not have been able to afford.

While McCrae received some small financial gifts, she was also doing other work to manage the household economy: housing boarders and babysitting. The family often was boarding Ridler's brother Pete or a man named George Whalen. Whalen boarded with McCrae and Ridler several times. Whalen had boarded with them not only in Terrace, but before in Quesnel as well. In March 1965 McCrae explains that they had " George Whalen back with" them.[171] "He ha[d] boarded with us 3 or 4 times in the last few years" so his presence in the family home would not have been uncommon.[172] Whalen was "an elderly man, very nice and good to the kids" while he was boarding with them.[173] His boarding with them was beneficial financially, as Whalen was paying "$15.00 a week" at the time since he was not working, but McCrae explains how "he pays $20.00 when he's working" which "really help[ed] with the

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[170] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, August 28, 1966.

[171] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, March 18, 1965.

[172] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, March 18, 1965.

[173] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, March 18, 1965.

bills."[174] The additional income, especially when McCrae was already facing financial hardship would have been greatly beneficial.

In addition to housing boarders, McCrae was bringing in money through her work as a babysitter. One such instance was in December of 1963, while McCrae was living in Quesnel, she babysat "for Jean, the school teacher."[175] She did so "only from 8:30 to 12:30 or 1," and was paid "$7 instead of six" for the week.[176] The next week, she estimated her "babysitting money [would] be about $8.00."[177] McCrae continued to babysit through January 1964. In a letter of 24 January of that year, she had received a "letter note of congratulations" from Alice on her pregnancy.[178] Despite her pregnancy McCrae was "still babysitting. [She] sure hate[d] to quit as the extra $7 or $9 a week sure [came] in handy."[179] With the $6 she had made babysitting from the week, McCrae purchased a bedspread, since she had "wanted a new one for so long. [Her] old yellow one ha[d] just about come to an end."[180] For McCrae, her babysitting money gave her the ability to purchase goods the household needed but she could not afford otherwise. The consistency of McCrae's babysitting also suggests that other working mothers consistently required informal childcare in her community.

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[174] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, March 18, 1965.

[175] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, December 1, 1963.

[176] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, December 1, 1963.

[177] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, December 6, 1963.

[178] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, January 24, 1964.

[179] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, January 24, 1964.

[180] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, January 24, 1964.

Since there were incredibly limited licensed spaces to provide childcare in this period, women would often find informal means such as babysitting to fulfill the necessity. Pasolli explains how in the late 1950s to early 1960s, there were never more than 35 licensed care homes in British Columbia.[181] "In Vancouver, the Point Grey study group of fifteen women has learned that over 6,000 children 'desperately need day care' and only 503 are in licensed day-care centres."[182] Since there were often more day care centres available in major cities than rural areas, the statistics for Quesnel and other smaller communities were probably even lower.

In 1966, *Chatelaine* noted the general paucity of child care facilities especially outside of metropolitan areas, noting that while "Canada [did] have some nurseries," including Gordon Neighbourhood house in Vancouver, they were almost exclusively "in other big cities."[183] The lack of public support for day care facilities, Pasolli notes, was connected to "the feminization of poverty and the particular trials of poor mothers" which worked to "establish childcare's association with other welfare initiatives."[184] Because of the social stigma for working mothers, and the association with welfare services, the state was reluctant to provide greater access to child care. As a result, women would use informal childcare services, like the school teacher Jean, who had McCrae babysit for her. For many working women in these years, the method

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[181] Pasolli, *Working Mothers and the Child Care Dilemma*, pg 104,

[182] Margaret Kesslering, "Canada's Backward Thinking on Day Nurseries: We applaud well-to-do parents who send their tots to enriching nursery schools at top fees. Yet we let working mothers leave their children in the streets or in makeshift "homes." Why?" In *Chatelaine*, April 1966, 68.

[183] Kesslering, "Canada's Backward Thinking on Day Nurseries," pg 68.

[184] Pasolli, *Working Mothers and the Child Care Dilemma*, 108.

they used to care for their children was to leave them in the care of another adult, or simply an older child.[185]

McCrae looked after "3 extra little ones" for her friend Edna, their mother at the end of May through early June 1965.[186] McCrae was "babysitting 3 extra kiddies [that] week as Edna, [her] friend just had her 6th baby."[187] The additional children in her care were Edna's three youngest, " One age 5 one 3 and one 16 months," which had McCrae "kept pretty busy" caring for the children.[188] While McCrae had expected to only care for the children for a short period of time, this ended up extended: "Edna was supposed to be home today but she phoned me a few minutes ago and her Dr. said she can't come home til' Thurs or Fri. Her baby isn't doing very well."[189] McCrae ended up babysitting the children for nine days. She was "making $3.00 a day so that [helped] the grocery bill along."[190]

Yet, in this particular instance, the financial benefits of babysitting were, at least, delayed. With Edna in the hospital, McCrae presumably had not yet received payment and for that period, the three young children were additional dependents for whom she needed to provide care. At this moment, she was so short of money that she had to ask Alice for a loan on 1 June 1965, indicating that she had run out of money. Then, as often, McCrae's household economy was precarious – stretching dollars until Ridler's next pay, the next family allowance cheque, or

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[185] Kesslering, "Canada's Backward Thinking on Day Nurseries," pg 68.

[186] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, May 31, 1965.

[187] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, May 27, 1965.

[188] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, May 27, 1965.

[189] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, June 1, 1965.

[190] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, May 27, 1965.

until her friend was able to pay her for her childcare labour. When stretched too thin, McCrae would turn to welfare or to the benevolence of her aunt Alice to provide for her family.

When times were especially hard for McCrae, she asked Alice for a loan, likely because she had run out of other options. Money loans for McCrae were often of a higher amount than the gifts to her were. This is likely because there was a significant financial need for McCrae to have justified asking to borrow money, and because there was an expectation that it would be returned. Since Alice herself was working-class, she most likely could not have afforded to simply give McCrae significant amounts of money. Most of the informal loans came from her Aunt Alice. McCrae might have borrowed money from other people and not mentioned them in her letters, but since she was writing to Alice, McCrae was more likely to discuss Alice's money she borrowed or had been given.

McCrae asked Alice to lend her money in this instance because she "really [was] stuck."[191] At this time, McCrae's common-law partner, Roy Ridler had moved to Terrace from Quesnel, presumably for work, while McCrae and her children remained in Quesnel. She had already received welfare, which " paid the rent and gave [her] grocery order but that's all used up now."[192] McCrae could not "ask for anymore assistance as Roy [was] working."[193] Her next option was to "phon[e] and ask[] [Alice] to send [her] what [she] can spare."[194] Even though McCrae "really felt horrible about phoning" Alice to ask if she had any money to spare, she did so to provide for her children. McCrae assured Alice she would pay her $20 back when Roy was

[191] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, June 1, 1965.

[192] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, June 1, 1965.

[193] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, June 1, 1965.

[194] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, June 1, 1965.

paid ten days later, or "on family allowance day."[195] McCrae's promises to pay the money back to Alice continued throughout the month of June. She aimed to repay not just the loan, but even for the phone call she made to Alice when she asked to borrow money. McCrae requested that Alice "let [her] know how much that call was [she] made to [Alice] that day and will pay for it."[196] This was three days after the initial letter about repaying the loan.

By June 14th, after Roy received his paycheck on the 11th, McCrae had not yet been able to repay Alice.[197] McCrae promised her Aunt that she would "get it returned as soon as possible."[198] Eight days later McCrae once again thanked Alice "for the $20," which, she insisted, she would "be returning it as soon as possible as" Alice " need[ed] it as bad as [she did]."[199] The recognition on McCrae's part that Alice needed to be repaid and, too, had need of money suggest why this was a method of making ends meet that McCrae would resort to in only very difficult circumstances, when neither Ridler's wages or welfare support were sufficient to pay for necessities. In other words, asking Alice for money was her very last resort.

In most cases, larger amounts of money sent by Alice were loans rather than gifts, but there was an exception in 1964. Then Alice sent McCrae thirty five dollars, much higher that the two or three dollars she had sent her in three other instances. However, it still appears to have been a gift, as typically when McCrae received a loan, she would explain she would be able to pay the money back, as above. This money order sent by Alice came on 19 September 1964,

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[195] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, June 1, 1965.

[196] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, June 4, 1965.

[197] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, June 14, 1965.

[198] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, June 14, 1965.

[199] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, June 23, 1965.

after she had moved on 8 September. It is possible that this was a form of housewarming gift. McCrae explained to Alice how she spent the money she had received. She used "$10 for groceries $10.00 for kids clothes $5.00 for show, taxi home etc. And the other $10 [she had] left."[200] McCrae had taken the girls to see a "show" called "the Laughing Dog".[201] In this particular case, the gift from Alice came after there was an issue with the family allowance cheque.

On 19 September 1964, McCrae "was over to call for [her] family allowance cheque" but "something happened and they didn't come in."[202] The delay of McCrae's family allowance cheque placed her in a tight bind, left with only " 3¢ in [her] purse."[203] McCrae had already noted to her aunt that she "didn't get very many groceries from Roys small $97.00 cheque," and had been expecting the additional income from the family allowance to make ends meet.[204] McCrae was thus forced to find other means to buy groceries for her children. The monthly family allowance cheque, evidently, had become a regular part of McCrae's planning to maintain the household economy.

While McCrae lived with Ridler, the combination of McCrae's family allowance cheque and Ridler's pay cheque was a regular pattern that allowed the family to manage debts and meet expenses. On 19 February 1965, McCrae noted that it was both " family allowance day and also

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[200] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, September 19, 1964.

[201] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, September 19, 1964.

[202] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, September 19, 1964.

[203] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, September 19, 1964.

[204] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, September 19, 1964.

Roy's payday." This, it seems, was an opportunity to get caught up on deferred purchases and payments.[205] She planned to meet Roy " after work at the P.O. to do some shopping and bill paying" with his cheque.[206]

The next month, similarly, McCrae planned to "meet[] [Roy] down town at 5pm" since it was his payday.[207] Like the month before, it was "also family allowance day," so McCrae had both sources of income coming to her at once.[208] In her management of the household economy, McCrae had planned "to get all [her] mail ready and the bills ready to send money orders" so they could be sent as soon as the family allowance and Ridler's paycheck were deposited.[209] McCrae, evidently, at this juncture was counting on both Ridler's pay and the family allowance in order to meet the family's monthly expenditures.

The original intention of the family allowance when it was created was to support the "maintenance, care, training, education and advancement of children."[210] Scholars such as Raymond B. Blake also argues that the intention of the family allowance was primarily to act as a tool of nation-building.[211] The universal nature of the family allowance was especially important to nation-building, since it was seen as a way to keep national unity, especially with Quebec.[212] This type of system, however, was not particularly effective in benefitting low

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[205] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, February 19, 1965.

[206]Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, February 19, 1965.

[207] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, March 17, 1965.

[208] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, March 17, 1965.

[209] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, March 17, 1965.

[210] "Children's Allowance, A Children's Charter," *Similkeen Star*, May 24, 1945.

[211] Blake, From Rights to Needs, 16.
[212] Blake,From Rights to Needs, 18.

income families.[213] High costs of a universal program prevented adequate increases to benefits. For example, "to maintain the purchasing power they had in 1945, the average family allowance benefit per child in 1966 should have been $11.01 rather than the $6.76 it was."[214] For working class families like McCrae's, the most pressing use for the family allowance was not the advancement of the children, but instead to provide the most basic necessities for the children, most commonly groceries. Since there were no other funds available to cover these expenses, the family allowance became a necessary form of income to support the family. Evidently, this was essential to the survival of the family.

Welfare, for McCrae, was distinct from other forms of government financial aid, such as the family allowance. The family allowance was seen as a right for all Canadians, whereas local welfare payments were reserved for low-income families. British Columbia was unique in this sense as their Mothers' Pensions were at times understood differently to the Mothers' Allowances of other Canadian provinces. In comparison to other provinces, B.C. policy was more supportive to single mothers like McCrae. Welfare in the decades before McCrae was incredibly new. Welfare support for women was the result of lobbying by middle-class women who sought government responsibility for mothers.[215] Support for women, however, was specifically supported by these women's groups when they reinforced traditional gender norms, which kept women in the home.[216] Welfare policies were especially detrimental for single mothers, since welfare policies reflected social norms of the time, which cast moral judgement

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[213] Blake, From Rights to Needs, 13.

[214] Blake, From Rights to Needs, 188.

[215] Little, No Car, No Radio, No Liquor Permit, 6.

[216] Little, No Car, No Radio, No Liquor Permit, 6.

on single or unmarried mothers. One reason for this, as identified by Finkel, was that "state payouts on childcare, social assistance, and housing could be reduced if the women requiring these services were defined as violating desirable social norms."[217] For women like McCrae, who in many respects did not follow these desirable social norms, judgement and perceived immorality would have made welfare policies less suited to their needs. In many instances, especially in Ontario, ideas of improving the welfare state often "favored a policy that would include detailed investigations and moral guidance of recipients," meaning that financial welfare support was heavily tied to morality of those who received benefits.[218] Welfare policy was centered around the idea of gender difference, suggesting that the 'natural' role of women was in the home, and for the man to be the breadwinner, ideals which policies aimed to reinforce.[219] In cases where there was not a male breadwinner, or at least not a consistent one, the state became the breadwinner.

When informal income, family allowance, and Ridler's wages did not adequately pay for their rent and groceries, McCrae went to 'the welfare' to get enough money to ensure these essentials were covered. McCrae's interactions with welfare came in two different situations: welfare she received as a common-law wife to Roy Ridler, and welfare she received as a single mother after their separation. The instances where McCrae received welfare while in a common-law marriage took place in June 1965, in Quesnel, right before they left for Terrace. There was a limit on the support she could get, and in her moment of crisis in June 1965 when she had asked

[217] Finkel, Social Policy and Practice in Canada, 143.

[218] Little, No Car, No Radio, No Liquor Permit, 14.

[219] Little, No Car, No Radio, No Liquor Permit, 9.

Alice for a loan, as mentioned above.[220] Her May 27 1965 letter likely referred to the same instance when "the welfare gave [her] the rent money and a big grocery order", since the letters were written only five days apart.[221] This was the only recorded instance of McCrae receiving welfare while living in Quesnel. Interestingly, however, McCrae justifies her use of welfare by explaining that "everyone also gets them so figured [she]'d join them" in receiving welfare.[222] In this, McCrae indicates that while she was in Quesnel at least, a significant percentage of those around her were also receiving welfare.

Since Ridler was working, it indicates that McCrae had not gone to the welfare office because she did not have any income, but because their only income was short of their needs. Because of the struggle to piece together enough resources, McCrae had to rely on Ridler's income, the family allowance, the welfare, babysitting and loans from Alice to 'make do' in June 1965. The family economy was quite precarious at this time for McCrae, requiring her to utilize all tools available to her in an effort to survive. This reflects the experiences of working class families before the expansion of the Canadian welfare state, where women would carefully balance multiple income sources for their families.

McCrae had also struggled to afford medical services at least in part. It seems that welfare paid for McCrae's prescription medications both while she was with Ridler and after. In January of 1966, McCrae was still in a common-law relationship with Ridler. Because of McCrae's consistent health issues with her lungs, and her wrist arthritis, "[she had] to take

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[220] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, June 1, 1965.

[221] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, May 27, 1965.

[222] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, May 27, 1965.

antibiotics for [her] chest and cortisone for [her] hands indefinitely."[223] In order to ensure her access to the medication she needed, "the health unit [was] going to supply it," since she "just [could not] afford it otherwise."[224] The health unit mentioned by McCrae was likely the health unit within welfare services. This was while she was living in Terrace, whereas McCrae had struggled to afford antibiotics previously while in Quesnel, presumably because of the different municipalities managing welfare services.

McCrae received welfare after Ridler and their boarders Pete Ridler and George Whalen, spent all their cheques without paying any bills. McCrae kicked all the men out of the home, then went to the welfare office to get the money to pay the bills. They had not paid for any groceries, bills or other necessities. Since the men had returned with no money, "no groceries or fuel or bills" McCrae "went to the welfare and got groceries and fuel."[225] In this instance McCrae was not yet a single mother, still in the process of kicking Ridler and their boarders out but was not in a relationship with him either. From a welfare perspective however, Ridler's income was clearly an expected part of McCrae's family economy, since her management was based on the assumption that Ridler's payday was coming, and when it failed to do so, she had to go to the welfare instead. After McCrae kicked Ridler and the two male boarders out of the home, her primary income became welfare, with babysitting money, family allowance and family support in addition.

Welfare payments were likely more consistent than Ridler's pay cheque, since it would not have been limited to when he was working steadily, or when he used all the money without

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[223] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, January 23, 1966.

[224] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, January 23, 1966.

[225] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, March 16, 1966.

covering groceries or bills, but the amount was much less. In July 1965, McCrae records that "Roy makes pretty good wages here" in Terrace, totalling "about $215 every two weeks."[226] This wage appears to be consistent while he worked in Terrace. In November 1965, four months later, Roy "makes 2.92 an hour."[227] Assuming a forty-hour work week, Ridler's total income for two weeks work before taxes would have been approximately $233.60, which would be consistent with McCrae's earlier account, when taking into consideration times when he was not working steady, or taxes taken off. When McCrae was on welfare in May 1966, she was making "$225 a month" in addition to her medical "be[ing] covered through welfare," including prescriptions.[228] The $255 a month McCrae received through the welfare was significantly less than Ridler's income, at least while he had been working steady. Even with the medical and prescription coverage, that was a dramatic reduction in her income.On one hand, she had a consistent, monthly income coming in that was entirely in her control. In comparison to Ridler's income, however, it was considerably less, close to half of Ridler's pay.

In order to ensure she got her payments properly, McCrae would "go back to the welfare" at 10:30am every two weeks to receive her cheques.[229] McCrae was still able to make do with the limited financial resources given to her by welfare through planning and allocating money and delaying spending. She received her next cheque on June 2nd, with which she "paid all [she]

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[226] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, July 24, 1965.

[227] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, November 12, 1965.

[228] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, May 3, 1966.

[229] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, 3 May 1966 and 15 April 1966.

could and got groceries."[230] After she did so, she had "$15.00 to do me till' the 19th so [she] should get by ok."[231]

The shortcomings of the British Columbia welfare program were recognized by social workers themselves. Bridget Moran, a social worker was suspended from her work "until she agree[d] to stop criticizing the B.C. *Department of Welfare* in public" after she attempted to put pressure on the provincial government for better welfare support for recipients.[232] A social worker from Prince George, Moran describes the conditions as "just not good enough."[233] One such inadequacy identified by Moran was "that her caseload of 205 persons was too large for her to perform anything but an emergency service."[234] Constraints on the system were visible not only to recipients, but social workers themselves too.

In another instance, a 1964 article from the *Daily Colonist* writes about British Columbia's social workers signing a declaration, which argues that "welfare payments in the province are too low to permit normal decent living for recipients."[235] The social workers released a statement, that; "many professional studies have shown that rates of payment over the last five years have been so low as to cause extreme hardship for the recipients" of welfare in British Columbia.[236] Even amongst the best welfare services available in the country, British

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[230] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, June 3, 1966.

[231] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, June 3, 1966.

[232] "B.C. Social Worker Demands Law Change," *Globe and Mail* March 14, 1964.

[233] "B.C. Social Worker Demands Law Change," *Globe and Mail* March 14, 1964.

[234] "B.C. Social Worker Demands Law Change," *Globe and Mail* March 14, 1964.

[235] "Social Workers: Welfare Too Low," *Daily Colonist*, December 19, 1967.

[236] "Social Workers: Welfare Too Low," *Daily Colonist*, December 19, 1967.

Columbians on welfare, like McCrae, were still subject to "extreme hardship" in their efforts to make do for their family.[237] Statistics from those protesting welfare conditions claim that "rates were shown in 1958 to be 30 per cent below the dignity level and are yet maintained" at the same rate.[238] The *Labour Statesman* indicated that "welfare payments are from 21 to 50 percent below the minimum required for bare subsistence" in 1959.[239] Which suggests that multiple accounts identified the shortcomings of the British Columbia welfare system.

The welfare available to McCrae in British Columbia would have been more sufficient than if she had lived in another province. While it is clear that there was still a significant struggle to make ends meet for herself and the children, the welfare system in British Columbia was recognized and praised for being the best in Canada. A 1957 article from the *Globe and Mail* examining provincial hospital insurance remarked how "this province will set the pace for all of Canada in establishing future social welfare measures."[240] In comparison to welfare services made available in other Canadian provinces, those in British Columbia were remarked as exceptional at the time. These health services, which according to *Globe and Mail* cost the province 20,800,000 in 1956, provided women like McCrae with "mothers allowances and special medical services and drugs" in addition to old age and disability benefits.[241] Services like coverage for prescription medications helped McCrae afford necessary goods that she otherwise would not have had access to. Social welfare services in British Columbia, while greater than

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[237] "Social Workers: Welfare Too Low," *Daily Colonist,* December 19, 1967.

[238] Kenneth Russell, "Ten Clergymen Join Mothers," *Daily Colonist*, March 21, 1967.

[239] "The Plight of those on Social Assistance," *The Labour Statesman,* September 30, 1959.

[240] "Many Drawn to B.C. by Welfare Benefits," *Globe and Mail,* April 23, 1957.

[241] "Many Drawn to B.C. by Welfare Benefits," *Globe and Mail,* April 23, 1957.

other provinces, still left McCrae looking to other sources of income to ‘make do’ including the family allowance.

McCrae continued to rely upon the family allowance to make ends meet once she and Ridler separated. Welfare, supplemented by family allowance, allowed McCrae to sustain herself and her family while she was living in Terrace as a single mother, from the time of her separation from Ridler in March 1966 until her death on 16 October 1966. Because of how low the support was, McCrae required both services, in addition to informal work, to provide for her children. It seems likely that the family allowance for McCrae was probably factored into her welfare benefits. This would contribute to how low the welfare was. Since she was receiving $80 a month from Ridler and the family allowance, these factors would likely be calculated in the welfare she received. Since state support through welfare often acted in replacement of a male breadwinner, the support from Ridler as the father of McCrae’s two youngest children would be factored into this calculation of state intervention. If Ridler was atleast partially fulfilling this role as the breadwinner for McCrae, it seems likely that less would have been expected from the state.

McCrae’s management of money remained centered on providing the best she could for her children. When explaining to Alice McCrae how she spent her welfare money, Jacklyn McCrae wrote about paying her rent, her debts, groceries, and buying goods for her children. Similarly, McCrae again "used [her] family allowance for groceries."[242] McCrae’s management of her own welfare and control over the finances without a male breadwinner are important themes in interpreting her as a single mother. Unlike when she was in a common-law relationship, she maintained complete financial control over the family income.

[242] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, April 26, 1966.

Much like her experience as a common-law wife, McCrae's work to manage the household economy continued as a single mother. In the same way as previously, the family allowance for McCrae was a reliable income that was used to pay debts and purchase groceries. In July 1966, she explains how she had "made alot of the payments with [her] family allowance and babysitting money." [243] During this time, like during her relationship with Ridler, the family allowance was a consistent payment she could count on when managing her household economy. In the same letter, she reassures her Aunt that she will manage financially, since she had " $10.75 to do me til' family allowance day for groceries."[244] In another instance, in April of 1966, McCrae had "used [her] family allowance for groceries" for herself and her children in the same way.[245] For women like McCrae, all financial resources available to them were essential to the care of their children.

The inadequacies of the program were shown when a mother of three spoke out in *Chatelaine* magazine, explaining how her welfare payments left "the grand sum of $1.03 per day per person" excluding rent in 1969, only three years after McCrae's death.[246] She describes the importance of "the life saving family allowance cheque" which gave her an extra twenty cents a day.[247] While it was insufficient to provide adequately for the children, working class mothers like McCrae found the extra income to be 'life saving' when trying to make do for their children and should not be discredited as an important part of McCrae's financial management.

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[243] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, July 11, 1966.

[244] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, July 11, 1966.

[245] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, April 26, 1966.

[246] "It's Hell on Welfare," In *Chatelaine,* May 1969.

[247] "It's Hell on Welfare," In *Chatelaine,* May 1969.

McCrae's experiences demonstrate the methods used by low-income families to 'make do' for their children. It was often the case that McCrae had to use more than one method to provide. For McCrae, 'making do' was a careful practice of grafting together income and support resources to provide for her household, when none of them were sufficient alone. But there were also strategies that women like McCrae used to reduce expenditures. When income was insufficient for McCrae, she used credit to make purchases, or simply avoided purchasing at all. In some instances, McCrae' would simply delay purchasing necessary goods until more income came in. As a consumer, McCrae's balancing the family economy is shown in two major ways; her planning and delaying purchasing goods until more income was available, and purchasing on credit when it could not be delayed.

One of the ways she made do was to delay purchasing shoes for her children. She explains that "The kids need[ed] shoes but they [would] have to wait until next month."[248] Since she faced a limited budget, McCrae had to manage her spending in order to make ends meet. She clearly recognized that her children needed shoes, but did not have the money at the time, so she had to plan to purchase them the following month. As a mother, McCrae recognized that new shoes were a requirement for her children, but within her financial constraints, she simply could not afford to buy them at the time, so she instead hoped that the next month she would have enough to purchase the shoes.

It was very much the same case when McCrae was purchasing clothing for her children. McCrae had asked her aunt Alice "send for" articles of children's clothing (presumably ordering them from a catalogue), but then changed her mind, telling her; "Just as well you wait

[248] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, June 3, 1966.

til' the end of the month to send for jeans and t-shirts as we are short" on funds.[249] She had planned the budget with the expectation that "After the end of the month [they]'ll be caught up tho' and can start sending off a few of the smaller debts" she and Ridler had accumulated.[250] McCrae had carefully budgeted the money she had with Ridler both through buying on credit, which had resulted in these debts, and by delaying purchasing goods.

Another instance where McCrae and Ridler accumulated debt in an effort to purchase necessities was their visit to Niagara Loans in 1965. After several delays preventing McCrae from sending for their other belongings to Terrace from Quesnel, McCrae and Ridler "went to Niagara loans and borrowed the money" they needed to get their goods sent.[251] Delaying these goods any longer was not possible, since the girls' winter clothing and other important items were in storage. McCrae had made several attempts to send for the goods before, but with her financial limitations, just could not manage it until she and Ridler took the loan in November. McCrae and the children had initially moved in June, so it had been five months of them living in Terrace without having all of their belongings from Quesnel.

A few months earlier, in August 1965, when McCrae and Ridler had found a space to rent after moving to Terrace. McCrae explains that "in order to rent this place [she] had to get some furniture."[252] McCrae and Ridler "were almost broke" at the time.[253] Because of the financial

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[249] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, March 18, 1965.

[250] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, March 18, 1965.

[251] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, November 16, 1965.

[252] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, August 9, 1965.

[253] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, August 9, 1965.

state they had found themselves in, McCrae “went to niagara loans and borrowed $185.00” to furnish the home.[254] With the $185.00 loan, McCrae bought;

a nice red chesterfield chair $10.00

An old cabinet style radio $10.00

A … table and 6 chairs $16.00

A rangette (electric) $10.00

A set of bunkbeds and mattresses $45.00

A double bed $20.00[255]

McCrae could not live in the home with her children without any furniture, but could not afford to buy it either. So, she and Ridler instead decided to buy the furniture on credit, hoping that they could afford to pay the debt at a later date in smaller increments. For McCrae, part of her management of the household economy was centered on her balancing of debt: both in when to take on debt to afford necessities and how to manage repayment of loans. McCrae and Ridler choosing to buy on credit was a common narrative for working class families, who like them, had no other choice but to either wait, or to take a loan if waiting was not an option.

Because of her limited financial means, McCrae’s ability to borrow money was curtailed when her relationship with Ridler ended. Purchasing on credit was not exclusively on her own credit. Since she was working class, and was on welfare consistently through 1966, she had a limited ability to get credit to make purchases. When McCrae herself could not get the credit herself to purchase a chest of drawers in August 1966, she instead asks her Aunt Alice to do so for her. McCrae wrote to Alice, and asked her; "I am wondering if you'd get this chest of drawers

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[254] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, August 9, 1965.

[255] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, August 9, 1965.

on it for me and have it shipped directly to me at Terrace. I'll send you $10 right away and another $10 on the 1st of sept. and the balance on the 10th of oct. if you could. I tried to change it myself but they wouldn't accept my application as I'm on welfare. And I can't afford to put out the $31.48 all at once."[256] For McCrae, buying on credit allowed her to access necessary goods that she otherwise simply could not afford.

As a single mother, McCrae's experiences demonstrate the work of British Columbian women to manage their household through many methods to manage the household economy. Even with all available methods; formal and informal work, support from kin, state welfare, family allowance, moving, and changing consumer habits, the resources available to McCrae were consistently insufficient to the needs of herself and her children.

Even with the work McCrae put into balancing the family economy and providing for her children, it often proved to be insufficient to their needs, leaving them to go without. Even though welfare and state support available to McCrae was an improvement at the time, it was not sufficient for McCrae's working class family. Because of her limited financial resources, McCrae resorted to other methods in an effort to provide for her children's necessities. When all of these failed, McCrae was simply left to buy her necessities on credit, or delaying buying them until she could afford it at a later date.

While buying on credit was more characteristic of the postwar period than before, the methods used by McCrae largely reflect common themes that had been used by working class families before the development of the Canadian welfare state. Buying on credit, while it was a tool for McCrae to purchase necessities, still had lasting financial strain for her, as repayment

[256] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, August 8, 1966.

required careful balancing of future income. When McCrae had asked Alice to purchase a chest of drawers on her credit, she had planned when she would be able to make payments on them, months in advance.[257] The development of the Canadian welfare state, through the family allowance and additional Provincial welfare services were vital for McCrae's survival. But, she was still required to do much of the same work that working-class families had done before its implementation.

McCrae's experiences largely reflect similar methods employed by working-class women before the development of the Canadian welfare state. While the implementation of welfare policies provided much needed support to McCrae and her children, they were not effective in providing adequate support, leaving McCrae to fall back on other ways to provide for her children. Rather than replacing informal methods to supplement the family income, welfare services in the postwar era instead became one of many methods McCrae employed. The postwar era was unique, as the new implementations of welfare services were unfounded at the time, but with little actual change for the poorest of working-class families.

[257] Jacklyn McCrae to Alice McCrae, August 8, 1966.

Conclusion

While the postwar era is renowned for the implementation of welfare reform, working class families did not fundamentally alter the strategies they used to support themselves. Women like McCrae continued to use methods of managing the household economy that had been practised before. These practices were necessary to ensure her children would be provided with the most basic necessities. Like Baillargeon identified in Montreal, mothers "had to move mountains to manage to feed their families" within their financial constraints.[258] McCrae still had to utilize all opportunities available to her in an effort to 'make do' for herself and her children. Undoubtedly, any source of income would have been welcome, especially for families like McCrae's. State support, such as the family allowance, became a staple in McCrae's household. But rather than lift the family out of poverty, as intended, it seems that the family allowance simply became incorporated in a household economy that hovered around the subsistence level. While the postwar period is associated with the development of a social welfare state, McCrae's experiences suggest that working-class families still relied on methods to get by that had been used before. Even with all of the additional financial resources available to McCrae, there was a consistent struggle to manage the most basic needs for herself and her children. While policy makers implemented these policies with the idea that they would improve lives for working class Canadians, their aspirations were not effective in the policies they enacted.

Methods used to get by largely remained the same for McCrae as they had been before the development of the welfare state. She carefully managed all sources of income - male breadwinner's pay, informal work, social welfare payment, and boarders - to survive both as a

[258] Baillargeon, *Making Do*, 149.

single mother, and during her common-law union with Roy Ridler. While Ridler's income was greater than what McCrae received in welfare as a single mother, she had still had to rely on loans, family allowance, support of family and other methods in an effort to survive. The greatest support for McCrae, outside of Ridler's income, was Alice's gifts and loans of money. Evenith the support of Ridler, Alice, the family allowance and babysitting money, McCrae still often found herself struggling to cover her necessities. As a single motherMcCrae no longer had access to Ridler's paycheck, so she was left to cover the bills using welfare and other informal work like babysitting and receiving loans, in addition to voluntary financial support from Ridler and family allowance.

McCrae's health, motherhood, relationship status and community were consistent factors in her ability to cope. Her health was both a factor and symptom of her poverty; since poor health in turn both limited her ability to procure income, and treating her and her children's illnesses were a financial strain. Even though McCrae died at the age of 28, she had a significant number of health issues and illnesses, especially for a young mother. McCrae required dentures at 27, after she had been without her teeth for over a year. For McCrae, her lack of access to dental care further influenced her poor health. As she explained, one of the causes for her being underweight was struggles to properly eat without her teeth. McCrae suggested that her weight was likely to improve once she got her teeth properly fitted, helping with a long standing health problem she faced.

McCrae often went without her necessities largely because she prioritized the needs of her children first. Much of her focus when balancing the household economy was not for herself, but the goods her children needed to survive. Prioritization of the children where there was an insufficient budget was a common working class strategy. McCrae's letters demonstrate a clear

love and care for her children. Motherhood, for McCrae, was not easy. Financial limitations, concern for her children, and a struggle to survive characterized her experiences through 1955 until her death in 1966. She was a woman who, like many, greatly loved her children, even under less than ideal circumstances.

Part of McCrae's experience of motherhood was connected to her complicated relationships with the fathers of her children: her husband Vincent Shannon and common-law partner Roy Ridler. McCrae was unable to procure a legal divorce before her death which left her connected to her estranged husband without the opportunity to end the union in the manner she sought in the years after she left him. Her relationship with Shannon influenced McCrae's relationship with Ridler. As a common-law wife, McCrae's access to support and social standing were influenced by the legal ramifications around divorce and separation. Because of the social circumstances McCrae lived in, she faced social stigma, and more importantly, limited legal protections for herself and her children. Divorce was inaccessible for McCrae due to the financial cost. For her, divorce was a continuous consideration, something that she planned for if she would have had the money to do so.

McCrae's access to income was a significant factor in not only her inability to get divorced, but also where she and Ridler had lived during their common-law union. Moving and relocating for McCrae was often caused by circumstances and income. McCrae and Ridler moved when Ridler changed work or sought employment, when better accommodations became available to them, or through necessity. Finances are an important factor in many of McCrae and Ridler's moves, since better employment and more hours provided better accommodations, and a lack of employment would force Ridler to look for work elsewhere. This is especially true

considering that Ridler and McCrae did not have a car until October 1965, both because of the financial cost, and Ridler's ten year ban on driving in Canada.

Moving not only influenced McCrae's financial situation, but her social one. The Queen Charlotte Islands, Quesnel, and Terrace are a significant distance apart from each other. McCrae lived a considerable distance from Alice, her greatest support system. Much of her work and efforts to 'make do' were influenced by the work and help she could receive, especially in relation to her female support networks. The women she had around her were sources of income, through babysitting their children, loans and gifts of money they gave her, in addition to the emotional and social support they provided her. When moving considerable distances across Northern British Columbia, McCrae's access to these supports shifted and changed.

McCrae's experiences as an impoverished mother identify the work and struggle of women to 'make do' for their families. Her case offers insight into the life of a mother who challenged the social norms around motherhood and marriage. Her way of life as the mother of six children, who had a romantic relationship with two different men resulting in the birth of a child, makes her an interesting case for historical study. Her life, which had many challenges, struggles and efforts to 'make do' give insight into the role of working-class women and the family economy. McCrae' experiences, however, were not hers alone. Even with the growing and developing welfare state, other cases of impoverished women demonstrate that McCrae's struggles were not unique. Instead, McCrae's experiences give insight into the everyday experiences of working-class mothers in Northern British Columbia, a group of women whose experiences are largely found outside the traditional archival material.

With all of the support available to McCrae, including the newly developed welfare state, which provided welfare benefits and the family allowance to McCrae, she still faced continuous

struggles and limitations in her efforts to ‘make do’ for her children. While the support was considered unprecedented at the time, it was not designed for women like McCrae who did not consistently have a male breadwinner to rely on. Instead, because of her circumstances, McCrae used all sorts of methods to gain income. Balancing the family economy was a complex task that involved careful management of intermittent formal work by a male breadwinner, babysitting, housing boarders, loans from financial institutions and family, the family allowance, welfare, buying on credit, delaying purchasing, gifts from family and friends, and moving accommodations. In the end, McCrae made do for herself and her family through whatever means were necessary. Her life provides insight into the impact of government policy, legal status around marriage and divorce and an ever changing social safety net on working class women and their families in mid-twentieth century British Columbia.

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