

## The Autograph Book

~ Heather Ramsay

*Go little book on your voyage of pleasure;  
Gather sweet words for your owner to treasure.*

In the weeks before her mother died, she graduated from Okotoks High School, Class of 1926. Some boy drew a flapper with Betty Boop eyes on the silky pages of her autograph book.

*Remember me from far away, if only half awake.*

The next year, she boarded at the Calgary Normal School and learned to manage students herself. She was 18 and collected more little verses between suede covers.

*Wish I were a china cup, from which you drink your tea.*

I imagine her father, an English-dandy-turned-cowboy, making the book from the hide of his own cattle. He tied it together with a bootlace, and then died in a Calgary taxi in 1928.

*Dear M—: Always be true to your friends. Love Dad.*

In 1931, she and her cousin wore knickers and pussy-bow blouses and drove her Model A to Georgian Bay, ON.

*Be good and you'll be happy, but you'll miss a lot of fun.*

Later she drove to California, bumping over gopher holes, churning up mountains and crossing deserts to see the redwoods.

*Lovers may fade, flowers may die, friends may forget you, but never shall I.*

She returned, after each adventure, to teach in a one-room schoolhouse near the family farm — on land that had once been buffalo-hunting ground. What did she know of that history?

*Never trouble trouble, 'till trouble troubles you.*

What did she think when she picked up her married sister from the mental asylum in Ponoka, and didn't take her home. They went on a road trip to Vancouver instead.

*There is so much good in the worst of us, and so much bad in the best.*

Where did she meet Radomsky, whose fountain pen leaked?

*M—, dearest: Very sorry, but this page is spoiled.*

Or Hank?

*For you've got the pep, the punch and the verve.*

Or Michael, who wrote to her in Latin?

*I'll translate this sometime if you are nice.*

When the pages were almost full, she met a man who worked at a bank in Westlock. They bought a hat shop in Edmonton, had a daughter, then moved to Calgary, ran a rooming house, drank Seagram's, knitted scarves, drove to Banff on Sundays, shoveled sidewalks, ate shrimp sandwiches at Woodward's, subscribed to the Herald, listened to the Ink Spots, volunteered at the thrift store and on it goes.

*He never signed her autograph book.*

