

# Modern Messages from Green Gables on Loving, Living and Learning



# Modern Messages from Green Gables on Loving, Living and Learning:

*The Anne Stories*

By

Robert V. Smith

Illustrations by Dusty Higgins

**Cambridge  
Scholars  
Publishing**



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Cover and interior illustrations by Dusty Higgins

This book first published 2021

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-5275-7414-8

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-7414-4

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*Anne of Windy Poplars* and *Anne of Ingleside* are available in mass market paperback editions from Penguin Random House and in trade paperback editions from Sourcebooks.

To Verna Marie Helly, a thoughtful and caring sister throughout my life  
and as in the style of Anne, an equally devoted and loving mother  
and grandmother to her family.



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## PROLOGUE

Throughout my professional life, I have been impressed by how many people have read and been inspired by the *Anne of Green Gables* novels. A significant sub-set of devotees have read all eight works! Some will exclaim: “I love . . .” or “My children love the Anne books!”

While the Anne stories have been a source of joy and inspiration, I have encountered few readers who know very much about the extraordinary intuition, brilliance, creativity, and productivity of the Anne-author, Lucy Maud Montgomery (LMM). Fewer still understand how LMM was much ahead of her time as a feminist and advocate for women’s roles in society—as reflected in her writings and life story—both of which come together so intriguingly well in many of her creative works.

The above observations led to ideas for this book. Stated differently: consider the Anne books and the messages they portray—embodying reflections, experiences, and convictions of the author. Imagine how LMM’s life experiences influenced “the life of Anne” and LMM’s other heroines as portrayed in her novels and consider how these real and imaginary lives may offer messages for 21<sup>st</sup> century global citizens—their loving, living, and lifelong learning.

Now, take it one step further. Imagine how Anne, revived just over one-hundred years after leaving her literary existence in 1919, might think about her own life stories—fundamentally tied to loving. Imagine too, how revived Anne and her physician husband Gilbert, might review the life, challenges, and triumphs of their creator, Lucy Maud Montgomery, and how LMM’s example might offer messages for us on living and learning. Anne and Gilbert know that LMM was a keen observer of others—akin to many of the characters in her books. She imaginatively captured the essence of the people around her—throughout her life, even though she wrote primarily about Prince Edward Island while living in the smallest (*i.e.*, PEI) and second largest (*i.e.*, Ontario) provinces in Canada. She also brilliantly portrayed the bigotry, sexual repression, and small mindedness common in the times that her characters populated. We see in her works references to Catholics versus Protestants, Methodists versus Presbyterians, Christians versus agnostics, Blacks versus Whites, Canadians versus Americans, men versus women, adults versus children, among others. The revived Anne

and Gilbert have used the present book to illuminate these matters in their assessments of LMM and her Anne writings.

While the Anne books may have been of greater appeal to women historically, it is my hope that this work may spark interest among all genders and various gender-identity groups. Additionally, I hope that this work's accessibility might reinvigorate interest in the Anne books and their author at least among some members of younger generations and perhaps citizens of generations to come. Moreover, I can envision this work serving as a platform for dialogs that may assist people of good will in loving, living, and learning throughout our modern lives—contributing positively to our global neighbors and the planet's survival.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Numerous people have contributed to my understanding of the Anne stories and the impact that these marvelous works have had on their perspectives about human development. I am also grateful to the many wonderful scholars who have written about Lucy Maud Montgomery (LMM) and her extraordinary literary works.

Other colleagues and friends I have known through my university faculty and administrative career of 45 years, were of specific help. I single out Valerie Paton and her adult daughter Melody Paton Borchardt who were early sources of encouragement and wisdom. Melody, in particular, read draft material and offered sage advice on the likely readership of the final work.

Barbara Harbach and Thomas George were especially supportive of my efforts to bring the Anne stories and experiences of her creator to life in unique ways. When the manuscript was ready to be considered for publication, Barbara wisely steered me to Cambridge Scholars Publishing (CSP) and Commissioning Editor Adam Rummens. My interactions with Adam and CSP helped me to further crystalize my thoughts on the likely value of the final work on reading lists in introductory courses in Canadian literature and creative writing, women's studies, and human development (esp. child development), educational psychology, and personality psychology. And certainly, in studies of children's literature, as well.

I also wish to acknowledge the wonderful graphic illustrations of Dusty Higgins who has now been a contributor to six of my books. Dusty is a creative artist and professional par excellence.

Finally, and as suggested in the book's dedication, my thoughtful and caring sister has been an inspiration throughout my life, and one who has served as a real-life Anne exemplar.



## INTRODUCTION

It is fascinating to think about the great number of people who resonate immediately to the title, *Anne of Green Gables*. If they haven't read the original book themselves, they may have a child or other close relative who has, or perhaps they have seen one of the several films produced based on the story of the orphan girl whose gifts of imagination, intuition, and spunk helped her overcome obstacles and find love and happiness in the world.

In many ways, the "Anne stories" may be seen as reflections of the extraordinary life and times of their author, Lucy Maud Montgomery (LMM). Somewhat akin to Anne, LMM was functionally an orphan, with a mother dying when she was only twenty-one months old and her father leaving her in the care of her maternal grandparents while he sought new vistas for jobs and personal fulfillment. LMM faced many challenges early on, especially with aging grandparents who were not thrilled by the prospects of raising an "unwanted child."

LMM's life in adolescence and beyond would be compounded by conflicted romances, bouts of depression and related maladies, difficulties with the births of her children and the raising of her two sons, and a long-term marriage fraught by emotional ambiguity, anxiety, and anguish brought on by a chronically depressed and otherwise psychologically challenged spouse. Stepping back, we can imagine how LMM might have responded to such challenges in life. She could have acted as though there was nothing she could do about her life and just let "fate take over." Alternatively, as in the case of many women of her times, she could have completely submitted to her husband and let him direct what would likely have been in LMM's case, a more difficult and unfulfilling existence. Indeed, the record reveals that LMM's husband, Ewan Macdonald, reacted at least one time to her struggles with depression by offering the awful advice that she give up her creative life as a remedy for her ill health.

Fortunately for humanity, LMM crafted an approach to life and its challenges by blending her creative talents with acquired strengths and steadfastness. Thus, we find in her resilience, an introspective orientation as manifest in her extensive journal writings, a love of reading across a broad expanse of topics and most especially in the humanities, goal orientation and keen time management skills, and a commitment to and cultivation of creativity. Simultaneously, we see how LMM was able to integrate her

talents, skills, and interests into a personality that had legendary attraction to people across the global socioeconomic spectrum. In other words, she embodied a combination of graciousness, intuition, and gravitas that supported all aspects of her creative and day-to-day life.

A number of literary critics have characterized the Anne works as children's literature. But literature hallmarking the development of children is often as meaningful to adults as it may be for youngsters. Consider other examples, such as the works by Lewis Carroll (the Alice stories), L. Frank Baum (the Oz books), and Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (*The Little Prince*). Certainly, the Anne books, however they are characterized, appeal to children and adults alike.

The above thoughts and background understanding served as a platform for this book, which is organized around two major sections: 1) a review of the Anne stories from the unique perspective of the fictionalized character; 2) a survey of LMM's life and her experiences as portrayed by arguably LMM's most famous characters, Anne Shirley Blythe and Gilbert Blythe—all with explication of the possible lessons in the stories and the biography of their author for love, life, and learning in our modern lives. While affecting these syntheses, I have relied on personal interpretations and that of others of the Anne and related novels. I have also drawn heavily from the extensive biographical material developed on LMM, including especially the seminal works of Mary Henley Rubio, Irene Gammel, and Benjamin Lefebvre, among numerous others. Additionally, I have reviewed sections of LMM's journals, which are powerfully insightful.

My hope is that this unique work will not only inspire but also stimulate interest in the Anne novels and their marvelous creator—Lucy Maud Montgomery—most particularly among members of younger generations and perhaps citizens of generations to come.



# PART I:

## LOVING & THE ANNE STORIES

### Preface

Anne Shirley Blythe, her life and times, were vividly created and developed by Lucy Maud Montgomery (LMM) through eight novels. Three derivative works (*Chronicles of Avonlea*, 1912, *Further Chronicles of Avonlea*, 1920, and *The Blythes are Quoted*, published posthumously in 1974 and appearing in its entirety in 2009 with Benjamin Lefebvre's brilliant interpretive contributions) were composed by LMM primarily from previously published work and are only tangentially connected with Anne's life saga and not treated substantially in this book.

For the purpose of referencing the Anne books in this Part I (ordered chronologically based on the life of Anne), the following abbreviations have been used: *Anne of Green Gables*, 1908 (AGG), *Anne of Avonlea*, 1909 (AAvn), *Anne of the Island*, 1915 (AIsI), *Anne of Windy Poplars*, 1936 (AWP), *Anne's House of Dreams*, 1917 (AHD), *Anne of Ingleside*, 1939 (AIng), *Rainbow Valley*, 1919 (RV), and *Rilla of Ingleside*, 1921 (RIIng).

Reading the primary Anne works in the chronological order of the heroine's life provides a marvelous journey into the compassion, imagination, good humor, resilience, and grit of a character that offers much to reflect on in our own lives. Moreover, we are reminded by descriptions of the lives of Anne's husband Gilbert, their children, and their neighbors, friends, and relatives (and their children) about how mortals' fortunes may turn in extraordinary ways.

Anyone familiar with the Anne stories knows that they occur almost exclusively on Prince Edward Island (PEI), the smallest of the ten Canadian Provinces, and one of three original so-called "Maritime Provinces" (New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and PEI) on the east coast of Canada and bathed by the Gulf of St. Lawrence, the Bay of Fundy, and the Atlantic Ocean. A visit to PEI offers a magical adventure within its gorgeous environs, one that has touched the hearts and minds of global visitors, due as much to its natural beauty as the charm brought to it by LMM through the Anne stories and other tales.

Our journey through the land, love, and life of Anne is offered through a series of “unusually developed summaries” of LMM’s eight Anne books, along with quotes that help bring to life this impressive fictional character and the wisdom of her creator as a set of corresponding chapters, one through eight. A last chapter offers perspectives from our current day as described below.

The nine chapters in this Part I were largely composed from a set of extended summaries of the Anne books as offered in the fully referenced Appendix A and are intended to serve as reminders of the full-length works. But the summaries should not take the place of reading the original works, which offer rich descriptions of the landscape, fauna, and flora of PEI, all interwoven with intriguing characterizations of the eccentricities, dialects, prejudices, humor, and mostly the love that permeated the island’s populous in the “time of Anne” (i.e., approx. 1865-1919).

As for the “unusually developed summaries” alluded to above and found below, following is some forethought.

Consider Anne, who was created in or around 1905 and subsequently developed during 1905 to 1939, but as a literary character lived in the period of 1865 through some portion of 1919. Now, imagine a revived Anne being given the opportunity to tell her story considering all that has happened in a little over one-hundred years since Anne “left her literary stage.” What wisdom might the Anne character have to share with us, given the significant challenges she faced yet overcame to lead a love-laced life for more than fifty years? Below is a somewhat surrealistic depiction of the hypothetical situation outlined with the purpose of suggesting speculatively how the Anne messages may have meaning in our modern lives.

## THE ANNE STORIES IN HER OWN WORDS

I, Anne Shirley Blythe, welcome the opportunity to share elements of my life and modestly offer suggestions of how my experiences may be of some value to those of you who seek truth, wisdom, and love in the twenty-first century.

The first decade of my life was spent primarily in foster homes and an orphanage in Nova Scotia (NS) caused by the untimely deaths of my parents, Bertha and Walter Shirley (I love their names!), when I was a mere baby born in March of 1865. It wasn't until I turned twenty and finishing the second year of my B.A. program at Redmond College in NS that I learned of my parents' life through the goodness of my classmate, Philippa (Phil) Gordon, and her encouragement to visit both her home and the one where my parents lived twenty years earlier in Bolingbroke, NS. The then current resident of the latter abode very kindly gave me a packet of twelve letters written by my parents to one another during their courtship. After visiting my birth home and reading the letters I remarked to Phil:

“This has been the most beautiful day of my life . . . I've *found* my father and mother. Those letters have made them *real* to me. I'm not an orphan any longer. I feel as if I had opened a book and found roses of yesterday, sweet and beloved, between its leaves.”

The separation of children from their parents and the trauma it inflicts, whether through natural or unnatural causes, should be of great concern to all people of good will—for all time.

But I digress. I want to return to the time when I was eleven and spared from the trials and indignities inflicted during my years in foster homes and the NS orphanage.



## CHAPTER 1

### MY EARLY LIFE AS ANNE OF GREEN GABLES<sup>1</sup>

A twist of fate caused my passage to the home (Green Gables) of brother and sister, Matthew and Marilla Cuthbert, in Avonlea on the north central coast of PEI. My first impression of Green Gables was that of “heaven” but I soon found out from Marilla that she and Matthew had expected the orphanage to send them a boy to help the aging Matthew with farm chores. While Matthew was flexible, Marilla was adamant that I be sent back to the orphanage. The situation was complicated by my temper and expressions of outrage, including fateful insults of Marilla’s close friend and neighbor, the opinionated and condescending Rachel Lynde. At end, however, the saintly Matthew saved my fate and I wound up staying at Green Gables for the following seven years.

During the first five of those years at Green Gables, I developed endearing and enduring friendships such as those with my bosom friend Diana Barry and Diana’s Aunt Josephine Barry who I thought of as a kindred spirit. And, how could I forget my second teacher, Miss Muriel Stacy, who encouraged my best qualities and talents and helped me convert from an early view of my life “as a perfect graveyard of buried hopes” to one in which “I would dearly love to be remarkable.”

While others will judge any claim to “remarkableness” I admit that my early Green Gables’ years helped me to develop compassion and a commitment to service, due in part to Marilla’s incredible change of heart and her support along with that of friends, all of which were critical to my future success as a teacher after completing my year of teacher training at Queen’s Academy on PEI. I even began to become more tolerant of Gilbert Blythe, despite his earlier cruel teasing during our pre-academy schooling in Avonlea.

Briefly, I learned that putting yourself in others’ shoes is critical to understanding people of varied backgrounds and persuasions. Moreover, I began to better understand my own faults and how to work compassionately in difficult situations. The latter was particularly important after several

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<sup>1</sup> *AGG*, 1908; 11-16 years old, 1876-1881.

highly embarrassing incidents including: my inadvertent baking of a cake with an anodyne liniment instead of vanilla extract and subsequently serving it to a visiting minister and his wife (Reverend and Mrs. Allan), cracking my writing slate over Gilbert's head, and causing Diana's inebriation by mistakenly serving her a home-made current wine instead of a raspberry cordial, which infuriated Mrs. Barry, who subsequently severed Diana's and my relationship.

While the friendship fracture caused by the latter incident was reversed after my saving the life of Mrs. Barry's youngest daughter (Minnie May) through the use of ipecac syrup to treat a potentially fatal attack of croup. But additional mortification resulted from the frightening of Diana's Aunt Josephine Barry through Diana's and my nighttime hijinks even though I would later befriend the well-to-do lady.

Additional personal embarrassments included injuring myself during a fall from a roof after taking a dare to walk a ridge pole and having to have my life saved by Gilbert from drowning following a boating escapade. In short, I learned to put my own foibles and frailties into perspective and develop a sense of optimism or as I once noted to Marilla after the "tainted cake incident" with Reverend and Mrs. Allen:

"isn't it nice to think that tomorrow is a new day with no mistakes in it yet?"

While I anticipated going on to pursue a B.A. at Redmond College in Kingsport, NS after completing my program at Queen's Academy, my beloved Matthew passed away around this time and understanding Marilla's recently failing eyesight, I postponed my Redmond plans to remain in Avonlea. Around this time, Marilla confessed her long-developed but previously unarticulated love for me:

"Oh, Anne, I know I've been kind of strict and harsh with you maybe—but you mustn't think I didn't love you as well as Matthew did, for all that. I want to tell you now when I can. It's never been easy for me to say things out of my heart, but at times like this it's easier. I love you as dear as if you were my own flesh and blood and you've been my joy and comfort ever since you came to Green Gables."

And if that wasn't enough to reflect upon, given Gilbert's most generous gesture to give up his own teaching assignment in Avonlea, I was able to take his place to remain at Green Gables to care for Marilla. Fortunately, Gilbert found a second teaching post in White Sands, not far from Avonlea, and his benevolence strengthened our emerging friendship.

As a bonus, anticipating my first-year teaching at the Avonlea School, I soon learned that my treasured friends from Queen's, Priscilla Grant and Jane Andrews, would be assuming nearby teaching posts at the

Carmody and Newbridge Schools, respectively, beginning in the fall of 1881. Thus, my support system—fortified by the Marilla’s love and that of many dear friends—made me truly embrace “love” as the key component of the lives of all decent souls in our world community.







## CHAPTER 2

### LATER LIFE AS ANNE OF AVONLEA<sup>1</sup>

Overall, I was now set to spend the next two years at Green Gables, ready for new friends, experiences, and excitement. One new friend materialized as Mr. James Harrison who came from New Brunswick and purchased an adjacent farm occasioned by the passing of the wife of our former Green Gables' neighbor, Mr. Robert Bell. Rachel Lynde characterized our curmudgeonly and eccentric new neighbor as a "town crank" following Mr. Harrison's disparaging comments about the faults he found in Avonlea.

After an initial encounter resulting from a misunderstanding of the behavior of my cow, Dolly, I began to see unappreciated goodness in Mr. Harrison, despite his pet parrot Ginger spouting "Redheaded snippit" each time it spotted me. In any case, the earlier conversations allowed me to share my dislike of "places or people . . . that haven't any faults" and proffered the idea that "a truly perfect person would be very uninteresting," and followed-up with my assertion that:

"the trouble is that you and Mrs. Lynde don't understand one another. That is always what is wrong when people don't like each other. I didn't like Mrs. Lynde at first either; but as soon as I came to understand her I learned to."

I sincerely believe that understanding and kindness among diverse people is and will always be critical for future peace and happiness.

Before school was set to start, Marilla agreed to become the guardian of six-year-old twins, Davy and Dora, who had become orphans due to the passing of their widowed mother, Mary Keith, who had been married to Marilla's third cousin. The two children were quintessential opposites: Davy was mischievous while Dora was exceptionally well behaved. Nevertheless, Davy was curious, creative, and became very affectionate towards me. He also came up with the most amusing questions, such as:

"Where does the dark go, Anne? I want to know."

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<sup>1</sup> *AAvn*, 1909; 16-18 years old. Timeline of novel: 1881-1883.

In short, I came to especially love Davy and developed a sense of gratification that I would be able to assist Marilla in raising the twins.

My satisfaction in continuing my life at Green Gables was augmented by generally positive experiences with my pupils, despite some exceptions including the infamous Pye family progeny, and witnessing the students' growth and development during the school year. I was especially intrigued by a Paul Irving who had recently come to PEI from the U.S. and was extraordinarily imaginative and creative in his oral expressions and writing.

The 1881-1882 school year was also memorable for two other reasons. First, Gilbert declared his intention to become a physician. Second, Gilbert and I would join mutual friends, including Diana, in founding the Avonlea Village Improvement Society (AVIS), which would help to spearhead some major community projects along with inspiring positive involvement by town citizens.

Davy and Dora became pupils in the Avonlea School during the following school year when I would become further bonded with my students.

In October 1882, Diana and I came upon a charming cottage while on an errand path during a walk to a friend's home. We would soon learn thereafter that the cottage, dubbed "Echo Lodge," was inhabited by a reclusive but charming Miss Lavendar Lewis who had lived there for twenty-five years after an aborted engagement with a Stephen Irving, the father of my prize pupil Paul. To make a long story short, Miss Lewis and I became fast friends, and I had my inaugural chance at matchmaking by first introducing her to Paul and then serving as the go between of Miss Lavendar and Stephen who would wind up marrying in August of 1883. You can probably imagine my delight in learning that the newly married couple, though moving to Boston, would retain ownership of "Echo Lodge" so they could comfortably return to PEI for vacations.

During June of 1883, Rachel Lynde experienced great sorrow in the passing of her husband Thomas, which was about the same time that Gilbert resigned his post at White Sands and announced his intention to attend Redmond College in the fall. Marilla, understanding Rachel's impending loneliness, invited her to live at Green Gables.

Immediately thereafter, Marilla encouraged my attendance at Redmond in the fall, much to my surprise and delight. As I offered to Marilla:

"I feel as if somebody had handed me the moon and I didn't know exactly what to do with it"

but it was important for me to go.

When I told the students of my decision, they were crushed along with my bosom friend Diana who would not be accompanying me and commented about all the opportunities I would have to make new friends at college. In response, I suggested that:

“making new friends help to make life very fascinating. But no matter how many new friends I make they’ll never be as dear to me as the old ones . . . especially a certain girl with black eyes and dimples. Can you guess who she is, Diana?”

My advice paralleled that of the prominent Welch composer, Thomas Parry (1841-1903), who was known to admonish:

“Friendships that have stood the test of time and change are surely best.”



## CHAPTER 3

### OFF TO REDMOND AND NEW ADVENTURES<sup>1</sup>

Anticipating my imminent departure to Redmond, friends held a very nice farewell party where Gilbert and I were especially honored for our work with AVIS. And, in mid-September, Gilbert and Charlie Stone, who I thought of as a “goof,” and I left on the boat train for NS. When we arrived at the Kingsport station, my dear friend Priscilla Grant was there waiting for me, and we immediately headed off to the boardinghouse where we were planning to stay for the year. The place was not very inviting, not least of all because of its proximity to the Old St. John’s cemetery, but Priscilla was supportive and the next day we registered for fall classes at Redmond, which was off-putting because of it seeming like a “cattle call.”

Afterwards, and with Priscilla’s encouragement, we found solitude by walking through a nearby cemetery where we met Phil Gordon, who despite her apparent shyness, turned out to be bright, extroverted, socially well-connected, and a member of a prominent family in Bolingbroke, NS. Phil, you will recall, is the person who would help me “find my parents.” Thus, Phil became a very good friend of Priscilla and me.

Besides Phil’s enriching our social life, Gilbert too had become a prominent student at Redmond including his being elected president of the freshman class. But our studies were not neglected and at the end of the term Gilbert, Phil, and I would lead our class academically. Priscilla would also do well. Charlie just passed.

At the end of the first semester, Phil pleaded with me to visit her and her family at Bolingbroke. After graciously turning her down so I might return to Green Gables, she proffered how the sojourn might be boring to which I noted:

“but I’ve left out the transforming thing. There’ll be love there,  
Phil—faithful, tender love, such as I’ll never find anywhere else  
in the world—love that’s waiting for *me*.”

---

<sup>1</sup> *AsI*, 1915; 18-22 years old, 1883-1887.

Some years later (actually in 1900) L. Frank Baum would have Dorothy exclaiming the joy of “going home” in his stellar, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. I certainly felt the same pull.

While at Green Gables, I visited with my friend Jane Andrews, who of all things, shared a proxy marriage proposal from her “round-faced, stupid, perpetually smiling, good-natured” brother Billy who I could never imagine loving, no less marrying him. I was initially annoyed and mortified, especially given that it was my very first marriage proposal, but the next day it stimulated a good laugh. Unfortunately, there would be other similar experiences during my time at Redmond, including one during the next term. That time from Charlie Sloane who I couldn’t stomach.

In contrast, things were going better on the academic and residency fronts. Inspired by a letter and proposal from Queen’s classmate, Stella Maynard, who would be joining Redmond in the fall, Priscilla and I began looking for a house to lease. Fortunately, we had earlier found an idyllic cottage on a walk in November 1883. During the spring quest, we were fortunate to find it available for rent and its owner, Miss Patty Spofford, took a liking to me. After some discussion, Miss Spofford agreed to lease the house to a group of us including Priscilla, Stella, and her aunt Jamesina (who had offered to live with us and care for the home), and Phil. The home, dubbed “Patty’s Place” along with its furnishings (including two large green and white Staffordshire Dogs—named Gog and Magog—that guarded sides of the fireplace) and its availability during the next two-to-three years while Miss Spofford and her niece planned an extended European trip—was perfect! We were all thrilled and looked forward to the fall, especially with the news that I had been awarded the Thorburn Scholarship that I had worked so hard for during the spring semester.

There were two highly significant events that occurred during my 1884 summer at Green Gables—both being somewhat sad but each instructive—relative to my future. The first involved extended conversations with my dying friend Ruby Gillis who would confess to me her fear of death. But, our discussions, particularly those connected with Ruby’s wish to reconcile a former misunderstanding with her friend Em White were fruitful and I believe I was able to assist her passing away in peace.

Of additional importance, Ruby helped me gain a deeper understanding of life’s difficulties as reflected in one of the last comments I shared with her:

“Most of the trouble in life comes from misunderstanding, I think.”

The second event involved my first formal attempt at story writing. I crafted a piece titled *Averil’s Atonement* about the love of Averil and Perceval Dalrymple whose earlier romance was challenged by an evil