

According to Baba

*A Collaborative Oral History
of Sudbury's Ukrainian Community*

Stacey Zembrzycki



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Introduction

WHEN I THINK ABOUT the afternoons I spent in 2004-05 with my Ukrainian Catholic grandmother, my baba, conducting interviews with her friends and acquaintances in Sudbury, I can now smile and even laugh out loud. Looking back, I can see that our experiences together were hilarious. In those moments, however, they were often frustrating, emotionally charged, and exhausting. Every interview seemed to present new challenges, especially because I was constantly struggling to juggle my roles and responsibilities as both an oral historian and a granddaughter. Sometimes the two were compatible, but in other instances, they were not. The line between the personal and the professional was always blurred. Although this project required a great deal of hard work, our tenaciousness, a trait that Baba and I share, forced us to go on. Her goal was to interview as many Ukrainian men and women as possible.¹ Mine was to complete my studies. “We’ll get there!” Baba would say. And eventually, we did.²

My research was about the social history of Sudbury’s Ukrainian community between 1901 and 1939. Baba was supposed to be just another interviewee, but when no one responded to my advertisements for interviews, she became an integral part of the project. To put it simply, the project would not have existed without her. Our work together was deeply collaborative, filled with trials and rewards. This book uses Baba’s narratives to form the historical backbone to the story of Sudbury’s Ukrainians, but it also provides a frank account of my efforts to share authority with her. It is not a conventional oral history but a reflective one that seeks to place practice and process at the centre of the discussion. It is about giving up control and discovering where that leads, an often frightening and disconcerting process. Sharing authority with Baba

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required constant negotiation; what I initially deemed to be mistakes were often later revealed as important lessons about the theoretical and methodological foundations of oral history.

Our afternoon encounters began and ended with a car ride. After scraping the ice and snow off my windshield, I would drive across the city to pick up Baba; Sudbury, a working-class mining community in northern Ontario, tends to have incredibly bright but bitterly cold, dry winters, and that of 2004-05 was no exception. Sometimes she was ready to go, standing in the window and waiting for me to pull into her driveway, and other times, I waited for her to make herself presentable. “Is it cold outside?” she would ask. Depending on my answer, she either grabbed the jacket she had worn the day before or searched for gloves and a scarf to be worn on her head, in typical *babushka* fashion. As I waited impatiently, checking my watch and warning that we would be late for our interviews, I scanned the Post-it Notes on her kitchen table, trying to ascertain what appointments she had booked for the rest of the week. Baba spent most evenings on the telephone, convincing her peers that they ought to be interviewed and arranging meeting times. She often referred to herself as “my secretary” and unabashedly joked that, at the end of the project, she would earn a PhD. When we finally made it out of her postwar brick bungalow, Baba would lock the back door, check and recheck it, and ensure that her keys were safely in her purse before heading toward the car. After unlocking the driver’s door, I would press the button that automatically unlocked the passenger door. “It’s open,” I would call out. Without fail, Baba lifted her door handle at that precise moment, preventing the automatic locks from working. “It’s locked!” she would answer. I would roll my eyes, and we would repeat this process a number of times before Baba actually got into the car. Then there was the seatbelt. As she tried to buckle it up, it would partly lock into place, and then slowly, as we drove away, wind back across her body and into its holder. “Baba, just make sure it clicks!” I would remark after pulling over to the side of the road and reaching across to buckle her in. Often Baba would try to be sneaky, pretending that the belt had clicked into place. At some point, usually when she was tired of holding it, the belt would snake back across her waist. She hoped that I wouldn’t notice, dodging

the exasperated “Baba!” that would invariably fly out of my mouth. We did seventy-two interviews together, and she never managed to buckle herself in! Thankfully, she did figure out the door locks – well, most of the time.

After going through these motions, Baba and I would start talking about our interviewees. As she briefed me on some of the stories that I could expect to hear, she craftily managed to weave herself into the narrative, telling me about her relation to the interviewees and the role they played in her past. In many respects, listening to Baba was like conducting pre-interviews, allowing me to prepare my questions in advance and making me aware of any issues that required sensitivity. Whereas oral historians meet with interviewees prior to pressing the start buttons on their recorders, my pre-interviews took place in my car with Baba. They were a mixed blessing – the talking never seemed to stop. I either listened intently, bearing in mind that I was lucky to have such an engaged grandmother, or I fixated on my feelings of anger and frustration, focusing on my inner monologue rather than the one uttered by Baba. For her part, Baba was often oblivious to my feelings. As she spoke, she stared out the passenger window, watching the world go by. She rarely attached as much meaning to these episodes as I did. They were just a part of everyday happenstance, a regular exchange between the two of us. And, ultimately, she was not the one trying to write a book about these moments.³

Her stories continued as we moved from the car and into interviewees’ homes. When she interrupted them, I would cringe, shuffle in my seat, and glare at her before trying politely and subtly to get the conversation back on track. My actions either silenced Baba or encouraged her to go on. Listening to others was difficult for her and sometimes seemed futile to me, especially when she insisted on sharing stories that contradicted those told by interviewees. In other instances, however, her perspectives on the past were welcome additions to our conversations, encouraging people to expand on their remarks. There were definitely benefits and drawbacks to collaborating with Baba. By offering readers a play-by-play of the conversations that occurred during some of our interviews, this book shows how the dynamics of our relationship and the ways that we interacted affected how others remembered the past. When Baba

decided that she had had enough of these “visits,” we packed up our things and returned to the car. My desire to leave or our interviewees’ fatigue rarely had an effect on her decisions.

When I was irritated, I dreaded the car rides home. This was when my bad behaviour reared its ugly head. There was never any time to stop and reflect on what we had heard. Baba always had an opinion, and she insisted on voicing it, whether I wanted to hear it or not. Depending on how an interview had gone, I either bit my tongue or let loose. When I was at my wit’s end, I raised my voice and asked Baba why she insisted on interrupting people. “They have a story to tell too!” I would say. “This project isn’t just about you!” Baba either denied her intrusion or merely stated that she would try to be quieter next time. Then, the conversation would be over. I was her granddaughter, after all, and Baba was well aware of my character flaws and the best ways to appease and tolerate me.

On these kinds of days, I could not get to Baba’s house fast enough, only too happy to pull into her driveway, mumble a quick goodbye, and hammer on the automatic lock button. Baba always managed to free herself from the seatbelt and quickly exit the car. As I threw the car into reverse, wrapped my white fists around the steering wheel, and took in some much needed silence, I often wondered why I was doing this project. What was it about? Who was it for? Sometimes, instead of pulling into Baba’s driveway every afternoon, I wanted to tear past it and leave her at home. I acted on this impulse a couple of times, telling her that I didn’t need her in the interviews. This approach was always temporary. Before long, I would find myself back in the car with Baba, picking up where we had left off.

I went back for two reasons. She was my grandmother and our relationship always came first. We had “put up” with each other for twenty-plus years, and this project was not going to tear us apart. We are, I now realize, very much alike, and we knew just which buttons to press, so to speak. To be fair and balanced, I must point out that the car rides were filled with lots of pleasant moments too. We had many wonderful conversations that helped me make sense of the stories our interviewees told us. There were also lots of memorable side trips on the way home – we would go for late lunches, shop, and sometimes wander through the region’s many cemeteries. Gravestones served as memory aids for



FIGURE I.1 Olga and Stacey Zembrzycki, c. 2008. Baba and I pose for a photograph after our final formal interview together; this exchange is discussed in depth in Chapter 6. *Photo by Stacey Zembrzycki*

Baba, prompting her to tell new stories and giving her ideas for expanding our interviewee list. Baba brought Sudbury's Ukrainian community to life in these places, reminding me of the important role she played as a gatekeeper of its memory. This is, therefore, a book about working with my Baba and listening deeply to stories about her home, her identity, and ultimately her community. Our entertaining and troubling process is just as important as the outcome, demonstrating the contested ways that we negotiated and eventually arrived at this narrative. It was necessary for us to wear each other down in the car and to wrestle in the interview space if I were to understand who Baba was and why she saw the past as she did. This is where the hard work of sharing authority took place, her experiential authority coming to blows with my scholarly expertise.

Coined by Michael Frisch in 1990, "shared authority" is a neat term that captures the essence and highest ideal of the oral history enterprise. Emphasizing the collaborative nature of the discipline, it forces us to

think about making oral history a more democratic cultural practice.⁴ Developed at a time when social history was revolutionizing history departments, the term referred to the interview itself: “the dialogic nature of the interview, in the history-making offered by both interviewer and narrator, [and] in the answer to the always appropriate question ‘who is the author of an oral history?’”⁵ In the years since, practitioners have adopted a more expansive understanding of Frisch’s term. Shared has become “sharing”: whereas “sharing authority is an approach to doing oral history ... a shared authority is something we need to recognize in it.”⁶ When it comes to sharing, interviewers make “a deliberate decision to give up some control over the product of historical inquiry,” involving interviewees in decisions about the research, interpretation, and presentation phases of their projects.⁷

In many respects, sharing authority has become both a “mantra” and a black box among oral historians.⁸ Although it is often invoked, practitioners rarely offer the transparency and reflection that this imperfect process demands.⁹ Collaboration is personally and intellectually demanding work that, depending upon the project, can produce mixed results.¹⁰ This book shows how issues pertaining to authority, both shared and sharing, come up in practice inside and outside the interview space. Given the flexibility and creativity that every oral history project demands, I cannot offer a model on the best ways to share authority. Instead, I provide an honest reflection on how my particular process, my attempts to balance my scholarly authority and Baba’s experiential authority, evolved over time, warts and all. This book is about the perils, pitfalls, and potential of collaborative practice. It is about the give and take – the power struggle – that is central to this methodology. Some of the interviews that Baba and I conducted were better than others. But since there is no right or wrong way to either listen or share authority, I view our blunders as lessons, not mistakes. As Baba says, “We didn’t know what we were doing! We were fumbling along the whole time!” Indeed. Being honest and self-critical about these sorts of challenges does not compromise our scholarship. Rather, it makes it more realistic and rigorous.¹¹

Although I recognized that collaboration was central to the interview process – namely, the co-creation of the interview itself – I did not

plan to share authority with interviewees in any other way. A lack of funding, and hence limited time, forced me to establish a clear set of priorities. I wanted to conduct one hundred single life story interviews with fifty Ukrainian men and fifty Ukrainian women during a one-year period; these oral histories would supplement the limited written records in the public archive.¹² It was not until I placed my first advertisement in the bulletin at Baba's church, St. Mary's Ukrainian Catholic Church, and failed to receive a single response that my priorities changed. Whether I wanted to or not, I would, in the end, learn to share authority with Baba. My methodology evolved from necessity, as a result of the circumstances I faced in the field.¹³

I grew up in Sudbury in a home with two working parents. Fortunately, my maternal and paternal grandparents lived in the city, so there was never any need to send me to a babysitter. I developed close relationships with all my grandparents but spent most of my time with Baba, my paternal grandmother. As a result, my first words were in Ukrainian. Although Baba was born and raised in Sudbury, her immigrant father insisted that his children speak Ukrainian in the home, stressing that they ought to know where they had come from. Like her father, Baba believed that I too must learn the language, so she spoke only Ukrainian when she babysat me. Because I had a difficult time transitioning from Ukrainian to English when my parents arrived home from work, these early language lessons ended soon after I began to speak.

My memories of the time we spent together come into focus around my sixth birthday. Baba and my grandfather, my Gigi, lived on Marymount Hill, a neighbourhood overlooking Sudbury's Downtown. We were close to everything, so Baba and I walked everywhere together. Unless the weather was inclement, we strolled downtown every afternoon, whether Baba needed something or not. This was a social outing, an opportunity to get out of the house and pass the time. Baba is an outgoing and active lady, a lifelong member of St. Mary's and various volunteer organizations within it, and thus she has always known many Sudburians. Wherever we were, she always seemed to meet someone with whom she could chat, sharing the latest news and reminiscing about the past. After she introduced me to them, and finished dotting over me,

I would stand to the side and listen as they talked. Clearly, our afternoon interview sessions, and the power dynamics that ordered them, were firmly rooted in this well-established routine.

Baba's stories were the best part of these daily excursions. As we walked down the hill, through the shopping centre, and then back up the hill and home, she told me exciting stories about when she was young, transporting me back to a time and a place that no longer existed. Although I never forgot these stories, as I grew older and spent more time away from Baba, I also distanced myself from them. Returning to them, viewing them "intellectually rather than emotionally," would take time.¹⁴

Unlike Baba, I was not an active member of Sudbury's Ukrainian community. I attended Ukrainian language school in the basement of St. Mary's for a number of years, but like so many other Ukrainian Canadian children from third and fourth generations, I became involved in other activities, effectively dissociating myself from my ethnic roots. My connection to the community and my knowledge about it were therefore premised upon Baba's memories. I participated imaginatively in her world and shared her vision of the past.¹⁵ Historically, Ukrainian grandmothers have acted as important storytellers in their families. Custodians of traditions, arts, and culture, they have played central roles in defining the Ukrainian identities of their descendants.¹⁶ Had it not been for Baba, I would not identify as a Ukrainian today. Her role in my life, her experiences in the Ukrainian Catholic community, and her stories about the past formed the basis of my identity and my imagined Ukrainian community. When I began this project, I believed that I was both a community insider and an outsider, maintaining not only a subjective connection to it through Baba, but also a real distance from it because I had not participated in it. I was a Sudburian too, so I knew what it was like to grow up in this small and somewhat insular mining community in northern Ontario. I hoped that my familiarity with Sudbury and my family's ethnic roots would help me solicit interviewees. In hindsight, I was naive to believe that people would throw open their doors and welcome me into their homes. I quickly realized that interviewing Baba – my first subject – would be nothing like those to come.¹⁷ Whereas we spent a couple of hours easily conversing about the past, others were not

as forthcoming. Before I could address the dynamics in the interviews, however, I had to deal with the fact that no one answered my call to participate in this project.

My first response was to panic. My ethnicity and my relationship with Baba would not necessarily help me forge an easy connection to this community. After all, my link was an imagined one, grounded in Baba's stories rather than my own participation. I was a stranger to those with whom I wanted to speak. This was certainly not the sole reason why no one came forward. Shyness, apathy, and a tendency to devalue personal stories were among the other reasons. If I were going to continue with this research, I needed help from someone whom community members trusted. I turned to Baba. She was eager to help, highlighting names in the church directory and constructing a list of her friends and acquaintances. I called a handful of these individuals but few wanted to participate. Fearing that the project would end before it began, I asked Baba how to proceed.

She had done pastoral visits at local hospitals and nursing homes on behalf of the church for thirty-five years, and she offered to help me approach their residents. She was happy to facilitate these meetings, hoping that we could replicate our own positive interviewing experience of a few weeks earlier. These people were friendly and thrilled to have visitors. Baba would greet them, introduce me, and then describe my project. They often insisted that we sit down and do the interview right there and then, rather than waiting until another day. Although I had intended to return later, without Baba, I did not want to miss the opportunity to speak with them. Many were quite sick, so if they were feeling well on the day of our visit, we just stayed and interviewed them. Many of these individuals passed away shortly afterward, a fact that reinforced the time-sensitive nature of the project.

Sharing authority with Baba began immediately, although I must admit that, at the outset, it often felt more like giving up authority. She spent the first part of these early interviews getting caught up with her friends and acquaintances, asking how they were feeling, if they had had many visitors, and whether they enjoyed living in a long-term-care facility. They complained about their age and then started to reminisce about the good

old days. Having Baba there put them at ease and often made the interaction feel like a meeting between old friends rather than a formal interview. There was no need to build trust; it was already there. The problem, however, was that Baba and the interviewees would get swept up in their conversations. They told anecdotal stories while I sat on the sidelines and watched. I was actually quite powerless during these times, feeling more like that young child holding Baba's hand in the middle of the shopping centre than a trained historian. To be honest, I worried that Baba was ruining my project. In my mind, there was a right and a wrong way to do oral history, and this was definitely not the right way. Would our interviews have any historical worth? The project always seemed to teeter on the brink of disaster. Although I jumped into the conversations from time to time and asked questions, people would answer them and then proceed to speak with Baba, not me. At other times, I asked questions, interviewees answered them, and then Baba would answer the questions as well, telling and retelling the stories I had heard throughout my life and in our interview together. Instead of remembering their own experiences, people became wrapped up in Baba's story. By interrupting them, she dominated the discussion.

Coming home and listening to the interview tapes was difficult and frustrating. Instead of hearing new stories, I heard those recounted by Baba. Feeling as if I were outside the interview space listening in, I tried to regain authority by excising her stories and frequent interruptions from my transcripts.¹⁸ When I did this, the interviews felt more legitimate. This was my way of salvaging the worthwhile pieces of the project. After a couple of these interviews, I began to think about the roles that Baba and I had played in them. I had to establish, with her and interviewees, that I was not just a granddaughter. I had to figure out how authority could be shared. Collaboration "does not require agreement in all things, but a mutual commitment to talk things through, to reach a common understanding, and to respect considered differences."¹⁹ Baba and I had to learn how to collaborate before we could listen to interviewees. We had to share some of the same purposes if we were going to move forward.

Henry Greenspan states that "a good interview is a process in which two people work hard to understand the views and experiences of one person: the interviewee."²⁰ In this case, Baba and I had to come together

to appreciate the significance of the stories that interviewees recalled. In the car ride home, after we had conducted nearly a dozen interviews, I worked up the courage to face Baba and tell her how she was both helping and hindering the process. One interview, in particular, brought me to this point. “Helen” was a difficult person to read.²¹ From the moment she opened her door to the time we left, she was quiet, reserved, and for the most part, unwilling to discuss the past in any depth. I wondered why she had agreed to talk to us. Was she doing Baba a favour? Did she know what an interview entailed? She constantly brushed my questions aside, quickly answering them and then refocusing our conversation on the present. She wanted to catch up with Baba, making it clear that in recent years she had become quite lonely and detached from the community. For her part, Baba did not disappoint. She and Helen had a lovely talk about the church, their grandchildren, and their health. I tried to interject many times, but nothing I said made Helen want to share her memories with us.²² In the car afterward, I was careful but deliberate in my remarks to Baba, speaking about the trust she brought to the interaction, the implicit power struggle between her and me and the interviewees, and her frequent interruptions during our interviews. Baba did not see things in quite this light. She was only trying to help, she shot back, and there was no problem with how the interviews were going. For her, they were conversations among friends, not formal oral history interviews with all their inherent academic baggage. However, she did respect my feelings and my desire to adhere to the “rules” I had learned during my training, vowing to listen more and speak less in the future. Despite this “understanding,” Baba continued to behave in the same manner. Ukrainian grandmothers have been characterized as stubborn, highly individualistic, opinionated, and at times slightly irreverent beings, and certainly Baba was guilty of possessing all these attributes.²³ I now see that she was sometimes much better at “rolling with the punches” than I was. Whereas I was guilty of over-thinking every conversation, she quickly adapted to challenges in interviews. She is a good conversationalist and a skilled storyteller, so she seamlessly transformed uncomfortable silences and digressions into new threads that enabled us to move past awkward moments. If an interviewee, such as Helen, did not want to talk about the past, she would not push her to do so. This approach had its benefits and

drawbacks. Although silences make people uncomfortable, and we normally try to avoid them, they tend to be incredibly interesting for oral historians. They remind us of the complexities of remembering and give us an alternative point of reference from which to interpret the stories we hear.²⁴ Baba and I discussed this aspect of oral history on a number of occasions, but she had a hard time with it in practice. For her, it was simple. A good interview was about having good conversations about good times.

Given our conflicted understanding of oral history, I began to conduct interviews on my own. However, they were neither as rich nor as detailed as when Baba was present. Speakers were shy, and although they warmed up to me, they did not seem to trust me completely.²⁵ After a handful of these solo ventures, I decided to include Baba once again. I made this decision for a number of reasons. First, she was essential to the project. Without her, these interviews would never have taken place. I also felt a responsibility to enable her as a community historian. Like me, she became obsessed with documenting the history of Sudbury's Ukrainians. During this intense period, we rarely thought about anything else. While I pored over the discoveries I made in local archives and in the basements and attics of our interviewees, Baba kept notes about the memories she had forgotten to tell me in our exchanges and made extensive lists of potential interviewees. She spent nearly every evening on the telephone, calling these people and trying to convince them to be a part of our project. She welcomed the chance to leave her home and visit with friends whom she had not seen in years. Additionally, the project enabled her to establish her place as a caretaker of the community's memory. Baba often declared that few people remembered the past as well as she did. Just as Barbara Myerhoff discovered while exploring the process of aging among a group of elderly Jewish people, I began to see that this was a means through which Baba could demonstrate her existence and worth in no uncertain terms.²⁶ I had no wish to disconnect Baba from this process, so I walked a fine line when addressing her role in the interviews. Emotional attachments were central to the project, and as I stated above, our grandmother-granddaughter relationship had to be maintained throughout, whatever the cost.²⁷

After discussing, yet again, the subtle ways that Baba consciously and unconsciously changed the course of each interview, we decided to give our partnership a second chance. This time we dealt with how the interviews themselves would work and how power could be shared in them. We agreed that Baba would remain silent during the formal part of the conversation, and then, at the end, she could ask questions and add any relevant memories of her own. We decided to keep the digital recorder on throughout this process, so that everything could be preserved. Collaboration had to be structured. Without clear rules, Baba would have continued to act as before. We both came away from this conversation with renewed excitement, knowing that we had a framework to follow as we moved ahead.

Baba and I conducted many interviews before we began to share authority in a fruitful way. Speaking about our rules was one thing, but implementing them was another. Collaboration requires time, patience, and practice to develop, regardless of whether it is with someone you know and love. We never perfected our three-way exchange, but we managed to transform it into a working relationship that eased my frustrations and suited my needs as well as those expressed by Baba and our interviewees. Whereas Baba and I had to learn to work together, I also realized that I had to trust my methodology. Projects often take on a life of their own, whether we care to admit it or not. They evolve organically and out of necessity, and this is acceptable. Unlike anthropologists, historians, who are concerned with maintaining a degree of objectivity, have spent little time reflecting on their experiences in the field.²⁸ Our project taught me that oral history is a subjective craft that is made more interesting when unconventional approaches form its basis. I used to be embarrassed about discussing Baba's role in the interview, worrying about the implications of this personal, untraditional, and seemingly haphazard style, but I have come to see it as a rigorous, authentic, and valid attempt to gain a sense of the past through a process of "knowing with" Baba rather than simply "knowing from" or "knowing about" her.²⁹ The time we spent together changed both of us and deepened our relationship. We came to know each other and ourselves in new ways through our shared experiences.

“Single-session oral histories,” Donald Ritchie writes, “are like ‘audio snapshots.’ It often takes more than one interview just to break the ice. Repeated visits help establish an intimacy that encourages candidness. Both interviewer and interviewee need some time together to develop the rapport necessary to ask difficult questions and to give honest answers.”³⁰ Although I agree with Ritchie and recognize that multiple interviews would have been beneficial, this approach was not feasible and would have completely changed our project and its outcome. That said, Baba brought an unusual degree of trust to interviews. She may not have been a trained historian, but her questions and memories made a difference, enabling interviewees to recall stories, mostly about their childhoods, that my questions did not help them remember.³¹ Also, my conversations with Baba prepared me for the interviews, allowing me to personalize my questions and maximize the time we spent with each person. Certainly, discrepancies between Baba’s tales and those told by interviewees reminded me of the subjective and layered nature of memories, and particularly of the importance of asking how variables, such as gender and class, mould both the construction of historical memories and the telling of stories.³² To this end, they allowed me to identify some of the silences implicit in interviewee narratives. Through her insider knowledge of the time, the place, and the culture, Baba was often able to speak to them, relying on subtle hints dropped during the course of an interview; she became more comfortable and aware of the importance of these moments as the project progressed. With her help, I was able to understand some of these conscious and unconscious gaps in memory.

Although bringing Baba to the interviews had its benefits, it also complicated matters. When she was in the room, some people were quite selective in sharing their memories. For instance, according to Baba, a few individuals had been victims of domestic abuse. Despite the horrendous stories that she told me, they never mentioned this aspect of their lives, choosing instead to focus on the positive nature of their relationships. Even when they hinted at the abuse they had suffered, I chose not to broach this subject. I trusted that Baba would remain silent when it came to interview content, but I did not want to risk ruining interviewees’ reputations. I did not want these sorts of private memories to

become public, something that could potentially slip out in conversations Baba had later with her friends. I was bound by the ethical obligations of my university. Baba was not. Nor did I want to make people uncomfortable by putting them on the spot and mentioning stories that, frankly, could have been wrong, misleading, and even offensive. Had I conducted multiple interviews, the first with Baba and subsequent ones alone, I would have felt more comfortable delving into such issues if the conversations went in those directions. Revealing difficult experiences is often easier when interviewers commit to deep listening. Interviews require us to build relationships, demonstrate understanding, and show compassion; they cannot be interrogations.³³ Baba may have brought trust to the conversation, but this did not always create the conditions that individuals needed if they were to share personal or intimate memories.

Baba was well known to the Ukrainian Catholic community, and her infrequent interactions with members of the Ukrainian National Federation (UNF) and St. Volodymyr's Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Church had allowed her to build relationships among these organizations as well. Thus, she accompanied me to most of the interviews with people from these associations. However, she was an outsider when it came to the Ukrainian Left – a group opposed by members of St. Mary's, the UNF, and St. Volodymyr's – so I tried to speak with these progressives on my own, often taking the time to conduct multiple interviews to develop sound connections with them. I did not want my relationship with Baba, and her Catholic roots, to limit or impede our conversations.

When Baba was a child, her strict Ukrainian Catholic father forbade her from associating with the “communists,” as she called those on the Ukrainian Left, and their Spruce Street Hall; although they formed distinct communities, Catholic, Orthodox, and nationalist Ukrainians sometimes united against the “evil” progressive Ukrainians and their organization, the Ukrainian Labour Farmer Temple Association (ULFTA), later renamed the Association of United Ukrainian Canadians (AUUC). Hearing negative stories about ULFTA members, I assumed that Baba had not formed relationships with them. However, sustained conversations with her revealed that the boundaries of her Ukrainian community were more fluid than I had imagined. Her father's rules had not stopped her from becoming friends with a number of progressives. She interacted

with them in a variety of neutral locations outside the Catholic church, such as schools, workplaces, and shopping centres. Her status as both an insider and an outsider was complex, layered by her experiences and the multiple identities that she assumed over time. A “neighbourhood’s bricks and mortar,” as Talja Blokland points out, can provide “the building blocks for the production of collective memories.”³⁴ These places also offer spaces in which relationships, like those maintained by Baba and a number of progressive Ukrainians, may flourish. In reflecting upon the project, I admit that it was foolish to believe that Baba’s community was simply structured upon equalities and similarities. Her narrative about the past may have excluded progressives, but its silences, and specifically her relationships with members of this community, speak to a more complicated notion of the past and a broad view of the community to which she belonged.

As we engage in oral history, we are often made “uncomfortably aware of the elusive quality of historical truth itself.”³⁵ “Oral sources,” as Alessandro Portelli reminds us, “tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did.”³⁶ In other words, nothing is certain in oral history. It tells us less about events than about their current meanings. Therefore, being objective, neutral, or balanced is next to impossible when it comes to doing oral history. And, rest assured, this is a good thing! In this instance, I not only built subjective links to our interviewees, but also to Baba. Although our decision to share authority was a difficult one to make and to work out in practice, it was absolutely necessary. A messy process, collaboration was demanding, “requiring an ability – even courage – to deal with people and situations that [were] difficult; a certain tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty about how [this] project [would] work out; and a willingness to take risks, not follow established protocols, and make decisions based on the logic of the work itself.”³⁷ Sharing authority, especially with family members who act as both interviewees and interviewers, necessitates dialogue at every stage of a project. Conflict and consensus will result. These are healthy outcomes that allow us to develop relationships and push the boundaries of the discipline.

This book is composed of a number of layers. It reflects on how oral history theory takes shape in practice, and it views Baba’s stories with as

much scrutiny as I am able and willing to provide. All families, as Annette Kuhn demonstrates, have their deep, dark secrets.³⁸ Mine is no exception. I have tried to be a considerate and selective storyteller, mindful of the fact that my ethical obligations as a researcher (namely, issues pertaining to consent, mitigation of harm, and right of withdrawal) are difficult to navigate when working with a family member. This narrative is not about airing my family's dirty laundry. Rather, it is about trying to understand the stories that I have heard throughout my life and why they are important to Baba and to me. They are central to her identity, and they speak to who she is as a Ukrainian Catholic woman, mother, and grandmother. They are also important because they provide a lens through which we can engage with the history of Sudbury's Ukrainian community and understand its complicated dynamics. Ordinary folks, like Baba, can be extraordinary history-makers, and consequently they must be given more space in our work.

Organized both chronologically and thematically, Chapters 1 through 4 each begin with one of Baba's tales, pieced together through our ongoing conversations inside and outside the interview space. Following this, the stories are subjected to a deep analysis, and her memories are connected to the themes that arose during interviews. Chapter 5 employs a spatial analysis to bring together Baba's memories of community. Drawing on my field notes, I reconstruct some of our interviews, providing a sense of their undercurrents and how they affected what people told us. I have used our interviewees' names throughout, unless someone requested anonymity. When this occurred, I created a pseudonym and enclosed it in quotation marks. Oral historians frequently debate and discuss the need to "protect" interviewees through the use of pseudonyms, especially when unflattering and/or controversial remarks are made during an interview. There are two instances in this book where I used pseudonyms for this reason. Sudbury is a relatively small community, so my need to "protect" was great.³⁹

Although I tried to provide a balanced account of the community's history, most of our interviewees were Catholics, limiting the tale I could tell in these pages. Baba's lifelong involvement at St. Mary's Ukrainian Catholic Church and the fact that the church remains vibrant explain my choice. Sudbury's Orthodox, progressive, and nationalist Ukrainian

communities have largely disbanded, so locating willing interviewees was difficult. Another factor that informed my writing is the way in which Baba and I directed remembering during interviews. We adhered to a questionnaire that contained many closed-ended questions (to view it, see the Appendix). Instead of asking someone to tell us about her childhood, for instance, we focused on particular parts of her experiences, leaving little room for her to remember on her own terms. Our approach, and the learning that resulted, is something that I have tried to be honest about here. Explorations into the deeper meanings inherent in stories rarely occur in single interviews, even when trust exists. Instead, we concentrated on mapping the details of interviewees' lives, and unfortunately this left little time for sustained reflection. That said, insights that may have been lacking in interviews were central to my conversations with Baba. This book revolves around her story, an approach that makes the most sense for me, given who I am, my connection to this history, and my decision to include Baba in this project.

The result is a highly personal and collectively constructed social history of Sudbury's Ukrainian community that privileges the stories I heard rather than the records I found in the archive. It uses Baba's gendered memories about home and identity, as well as those shared by interviewees, to demonstrate how the community and its polarized sub-communities developed, paying attention to the impact that social networks and power relations had on evolution over time. This book is set in a period of change for Sudbury's Ukrainians, the region, and the country more broadly. It begins in 1901, a year that marks the onset of Ukrainian settlement in the area, and ends in 1939, a date that symbolizes the conclusion of a distinct phase in both our interviewees' lives, when most became adolescents, and in the community's formation, when the Second World War and subsequent immigration affected its structure. Although this study explores how the community shifted over time and through experience, it also offers new narratives about the First World War, the so-called Roaring Twenties, and the Depression.⁴⁰ Furthermore, this book is the first of its kind to thoroughly examine the Ukrainian Canadian experience outside of Western Canada, departing from the narrow elitist and organizational agendas that typically characterize the literature.⁴¹

Communities must be problematized if we wish to gain a sound understanding of them. Rather than taking a “common sense” approach to community, a view that limits its scope to “the ideas of a shared place and a static, self-contained entity,” we must consider it as an imagined reality, a social interaction, and a process.⁴² Only through the adoption of a fluid model can we begin to understand the varying ways that Baba and our interviewees envisioned their communities. These meanings largely depend upon the social networks to which they belonged and the gendered and politicized experiences they had within them. Catholic, Orthodox, nationalist, and progressive Ukrainian men and women imagined, negotiated, and experienced their communities in distinct ways. An ongoing and ever-evolving process, community was mediated through a range of conflicting and converging factors that changed over time, over space, and over generations.

Social networks, and the gendered identities that people assumed as a result of them, played major roles in creating the contours of this immigrant community and the sub-communities therein. Specifically, they took root in St. Mary’s Ukrainian Catholic Church, St. Volodymyr’s Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Church, the ULFTA Hall, and the UNF Hall, and they largely determined who did and did not belong to the local community as well as to the region and the nation. Places such as these, as Lynne Marks notes, define community, enabling those who functioned both within and outside of it to negotiate membership, respectability, and loyalty.⁴³

Power relations also shaped notions pertaining to respectability and loyalty. The Sudbury area was dominated by mining companies, their long and powerful reach stretching into the public and private lives of each and every resident.⁴⁴ Consequently, those affiliated with St. Mary’s, St. Volodymyr’s, and the UNF Hall, which cooperated with the companies, were respected and valued members of the larger community, vastly different from the ever-reviled progressives, who challenged the mining companies’ hold on citizens. Community was therefore “an exercise in power, of authority, legitimacy, and resistance,” acting to include, exclude, nurture, and alienate.⁴⁵

This book is a journey into my imagined Ukrainian community, Baba’s Ukrainian community, and the communities that other Ukrainians in

the Sudbury region hold dear. True to its nature, the project has continued to evolve over time. Although the book enables me to discuss the choices I made about process and outcomes, I wanted to create a space where Baba and our interviewees could also share their perspectives. A website, www.sudburyukrainians.ca, holds the potential for this kind of interaction.⁴⁶ As you read this book, you can visit the website and listen to the stories that lie at the heart of its narrative. In some of the audio clips, you will hear how Baba and I interacted during interviews. The website also enables Baba to articulate her views on the project, by authoring in sound. The digital revolution makes it possible to continue sharing authority with Baba and interviewees long after our conversations ended.⁴⁷ This is my attempt to extend the conversations and to initiate further community engagement.

Ironically, it took me eighty-two single life story interviews with men and women, and a couple of years spent away from the project, to realize that I was having a deep, textured, meaningful, and ongoing dialogue about the past with Baba; it began in my youth and continues to this day. I had to learn a little bit about each person in order to learn a lot about my own grandmother. When we were interviewing, I passively listened and relistened to her stories but took them for granted. I was too busy fighting for control to realize that this repetitiveness mattered. She told the stories for a reason, and they either encouraged people to go on or silenced them completely. Since I did not spend much time with interviewees, I cannot offer a thorough analysis of their stories and the reasons why, from their perspectives, these dynamics affected their telling. Rather, my focus is on the themes that intersect with those inherent in Baba's tales and how we used the dominant threads within them to piece together a collective narrative about the history of Sudbury's Ukrainian community.