

ACUA VITAE

ALBERTA'S UKRAINIAN ARTS AND CULTURE MAGAZINE

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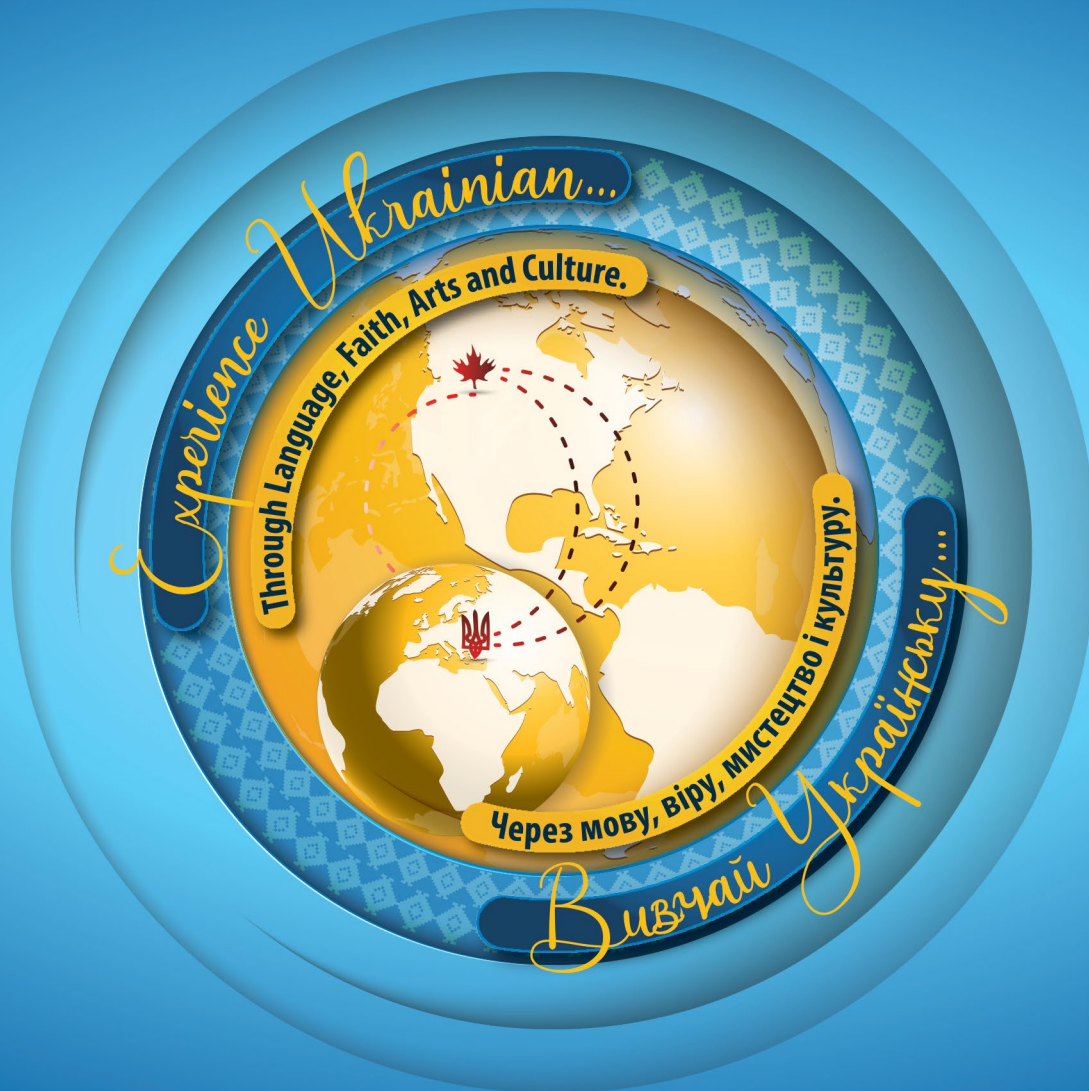
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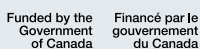
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FEATURES

04 **WRITING IN THE DIASPORA:**
THE LITERARY CAREER OF LESIA SAVEDCHUK

11 **MYRNA KOSTASH INTERVIEW**

20 **RECIPE FOR A COOKBOOK**

DEPARTMENTS

ART & CULTURE

07 Meet the Staff: Leda Tarnawsky

PROFILE

08 Weaving a Tapestry of Change: Penning a Personal Story and Breaking Boundaries

LITERARY ARTS IN ALBERTA

16 It only takes one voice, at the right pitch, to start an avalanche.

18 We Are Our Stories: On Writing, Editing, and the Stuff of Life with Marie Lesoway



ON THE COVER:

ACUA Gallery + Artisan Boutique has proudly showcases a diverse collection of books authored by talented Ukrainian Canadian writers from Alberta and across Canada. From fiction to non fiction, novels to cookbooks, ACUA offers a wide selection of books that promotes the rich cultural heritage of Alberta's Ukrainian community.

Cover Photo by: Larysa Luciw

Writing in The Diaspora

THE LITERARY CAREER OF LESIA SAVEDCHUK

By Isabella Sheptak

Lesia Savedchuk writes in Ukrainian. This may not seem particularly shocking—at first glance—given her Ukrainian heritage. However, the reality is that books written in Ukrainian by Ukrainian-Canadian authors are difficult to come by. While there is a wealth of literature written by Ukrainian-Canadian authors—ranging from language-learning primers to memoirs and picture books to historical fiction novels—much of it has been written in English.



PHOTO PROVIDED

This English-language trend in literature has developed out of the complex linguistic history of the Ukrainian-Canadian community. The children of many Ukrainian immigrants to Canada—especially those who arrived in the first and second waves—found it difficult to maintain their use of the Ukrainian language in the face of English assimilatory forces in the school system

and social pressures in society at large. As a result, although many Ukrainian-Canadians retained Ukrainian cultural identity and traditions, the language found itself falling out of use.

This trend of cultural zeal coupled with linguistic decline was prevalent across the Ukrainian-Canadian community during the first half of the 20th century and primed it for a change. It

came in the 1970s with a push to revitalize everyday use of the Ukrainian language. Multiculturalism was officially adopted in Canada in 1971, and in 1974 Ukrainian-English bilingual programming was established in Alberta. By 1979, Manitoba and Saskatchewan had followed suit. These new programs required new materials, and Lesia Savedchuk's writing career was born.

Savedchuk was approached by the Manitoba Parents for Ukrainian Education (MPUE) in the early 1980s to write a series of Ukrainian-language children's books for the freshly minted bilingual program. Savedchuk wrote nineteen storybooks for young Ukrainian learners tied to themes in the Manitoba elementary curriculum. Printed by Dzvin, the publishing arm of MPUE, the series is known informally as the Dzvin Readers. Titles like *Tomchyk*—with their bright illustrations and familiar gray border on the cover—are instantly recognizable to most alumni of Ukrainian bilingual programs. Their popularity even extends beyond the border! Savedchuk's daughter once brought



DZVIN READERS

a few copies of Savedchuk’s books to a friend’s Ukrainian school graduation in the United States. The friend instantly recognized them, exclaiming, “No way, your mother is Tomchyk’s mother!”

The Dzvin Readers spurred Savedchuk’s passion for writing children’s literature. “If I hadn’t been asked to write those first books for kids,” she said, “I don’t know if I would have gone in the direction of writing for children. It got me on the road to writing for a young audience.” Savedchuk’s childhood and her own children have generated inspiration for her writing. Her father was an actor and often wrote for the stage. Savedchuk acquired some of her humor from him, as well as her first introduction to writing—contributing to theatrical works while a member of Plast. This early dramatic influence would later aid her when she wrote plays in both Ukrainian and English for children in Ukrainian schools and when composing other humorous songs and poems over the years.

The inspiration for her youth novel *Futbolni Detektyvy* came from her son. He was reading the *Screech Owl* books—a series of juvenile fiction novels about a mystery-solving hockey team. Savedchuk thought it could be interesting to write a similar style of novel with a Ukrainian twist. *Futbolni Detektyvy*, written

in Ukrainian, is Savedchuk’s most recent publication and tells the story of a mystery-solving soccer team. It is a juvenile fiction novel written for a more advanced level than *Tomchyk* and the other Dzvin Readers. Savedchuk included school materials

with the book so that it could still be used in a classroom setting, but it was not written for the bilingual program as the Readers were. Savedchuk believes it is important to write books that are not simply educational, but which young people can enjoy outside of school. She aims to write books that generate a desire within children to read in the Ukrainian language and connect with their Ukrainian culture because they find it fun.

Books like *Futbolni Detektyvy* are not easy to come by. The demand for Ukrainian language books by Ukrainian-Canadian authors has changed significantly over time. Although the Ukrainian-Canadian community saw a surge of linguistic revitalization in the 1970s, demand for Ukrainian-language books, especially more advanced novels, has been decreasing over the last three decades. This is reflected, in part, by the closing of the Ukrainian Book Store in 2012—a staple of Edmonton’s Ukrainian community for 98 years. Savedchuk began writing *Futbolni Detektyvy* twenty years before it was published in 2017, and during that period of time the segment of the Ukrainian-Canadian community that consumed such novels diminished drastically. Within the diaspora, many people are learning Ukrainian as a second language, whether as children or adult learners. However, because they are new to the language, they are often consuming literature that is at a beginner level. There is a significantly smaller proportion of Ukrainian-Canadians who read—and are interested in—the more advanced juvenile or adult literature. Even if demand were to increase, there are no longer any Ukrainian-language oriented publishers in Canada. Thus, new writing, Savedchuk shares, would likely need to be self-published—as was her *Futbolni Detektyvy*.

Although the Ukrainian-Canadian community saw a surge of linguistic revitalization in the 1970s, demand for Ukrainian-language books, especially more advanced novels, has been decreasing over the last three decades.



FUTBOLNI DETEKTYVY

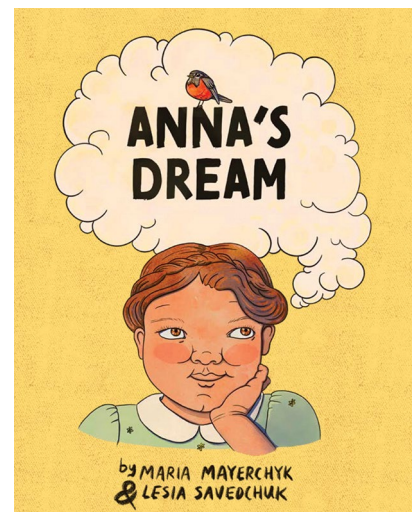
PROFILE

Savedchuk is involved with a community library in Calgary and says there is indeed a huge demand among Ukrainian newcomers for both children’s books and more advanced novels written in the Ukrainian language. Unfortunately, there is still not a great demand for books published in the diaspora. This is due to issues of familiarity and dialect. First of all, Ukrainian newcomers are not familiar with the existing Ukrainian literature in the diaspora as it is no longer readily available. Additionally, they want their children to read the stories they are familiar with—stories published in Ukraine. There is also a challenge posed by the linguistic differences between European Ukrainian and the Ukrainian-Canadian dialect. As such, the influx of Ukrainian newcomers to Canada does not necessarily spell a new market for Ukrainian-Canadian, Ukrainian-language literature.

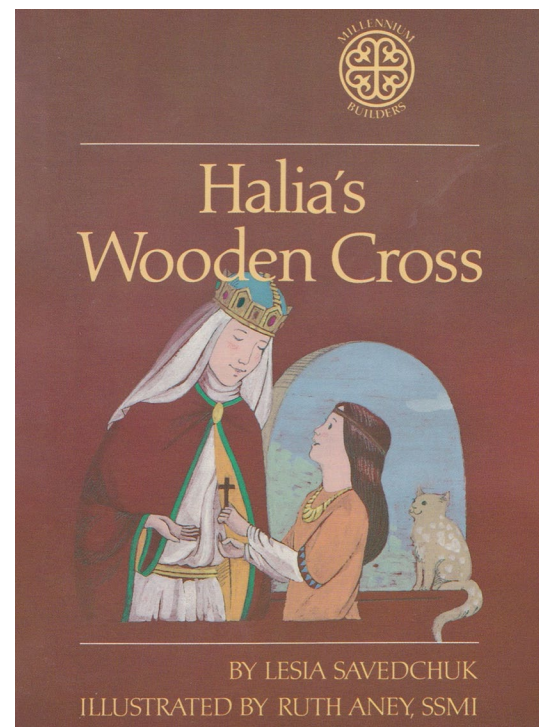
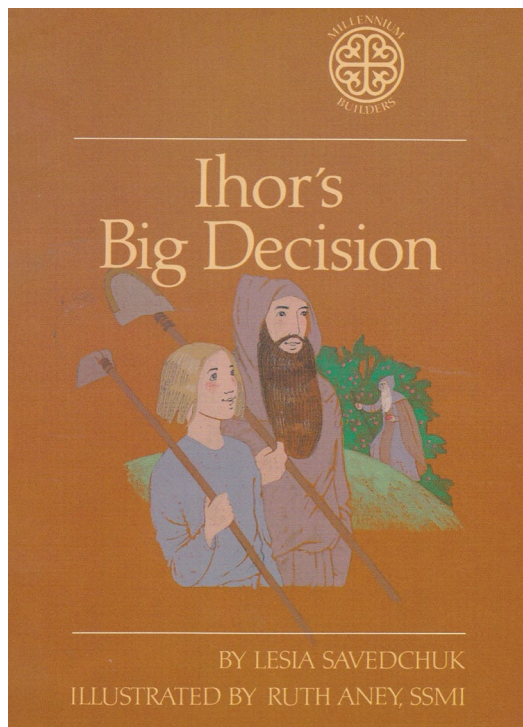
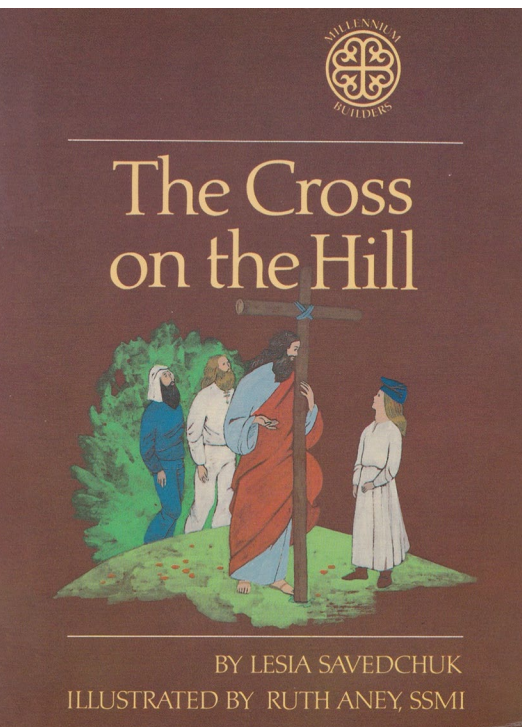
In addition to her Ukrainian-language books, Savedchuk has worked on a Ukrainian-English children’s dictionary and written several English-language books about Ukrainian culture, faith, and history. These have included a series of five upper-elementary level books about Ukrainian saints, and *Anna’s Dream*, a storybook co-written with Maria Mayerchuk and commissioned by the Kule Folklore Centre. However, over the past four years, Savedchuk has moved on to a new project unlike any she has worked on previously. She is developing an annotated bibliography of Ukrainian-language children’s literature in the diaspora. The bibliography will cover all of the Ukrainian children’s literature published outside of Ukraine from 1945 until the present. Savedchuk is proud to have contributed to this wealth of literature as an author but now wants to spend her time sharing this treasure trove of storytelling and linguistic tradition with others. She wants to draw attention to how valuable the Ukrainian literary tradition of the diaspora is, and to invite others to explore it for themselves. ^{AV}



ENGLISH-UKRAINIAN CHILDRENS DICTIONARY



ANNA'S DREAM



ENGLISH LANGUAGE SAINT BOOK

MEET THE STAFF

Leda Tarnawsky

By Joshua Semchuk

When she isn't working with ACUA, dancing with Shumka, or teaching dance, Leda Tarnawsky is a student at the University of Alberta studying civil engineering, allowing her the opportunity to experience her two loves: science and art.

Leda has been a member of the Summer Team at ACUA for five years as a workshop coordinator. She was responsible for organizing the artist-led workshops happening throughout the year, general office administration, *ACUA Vitae* distribution, and ACUA market planning. Because of her half-decade helping ACUA be successful we're featuring her in our magazine.

Leda chose to work at ACUA due to her passion regarding her Ukrainian roots and how ACUA combines both art and culture into opportunities not only for artists to display their works but for communities to witness first-hand the impact of Ukrainian culture. Being surrounded with people who share the same values about art and culture made every day enjoyable at ACUA.

"Not only does ACUA promote Ukrainian arts, but it allows members of the community to get involved and experience the culture first-hand," says Leda. "Anyone can participate in fine art workshops, attend artist talks, shop at markets that support local Ukrainian businesses, or read an *ACUA Vitae* magazine. ACUA provides so many sources and outlets to teach about the Ukrainian culture through art. You don't need to be Ukrainian to experience and appreciate the beauty of the culture."

Leda has fond memories working at ACUA. One of her favourites was organizing the Ukrainian Vintage Sale every year and seeing all the interesting items people found in their baba's basement. The inaugural Perogy Palooza in August 2023 was a highlight as live music and perogies will always sound like a good time to her.

Leda is an artist. She is a dancer with Shumka and shares her passion for Ukrainian dance through her job as a dance instructor at the Shumka School of Dance in Edmonton and the Barvinok Dance School in Fort Saskatchewan.

"The creation of – and participation in art itself – is tradition to Ukrainian-Canadians," says Leda. "It can be used as a story and experience-telling outlet, whether it is the symbols in the writing of a *pysanka*, the patterns in the beading of a *gerdan*, or the colours in the cross-stitch of a *vyshyvanka*. ACUA's mission to foster the growth and awareness of Ukrainian arts in Alberta is a mission that develops the culture and shares the stories of Ukrainian-Canadians itself. Through many lenses, ACUA truly provides a platform for communicating the Ukrainian-Canadian experience." ^{AV}

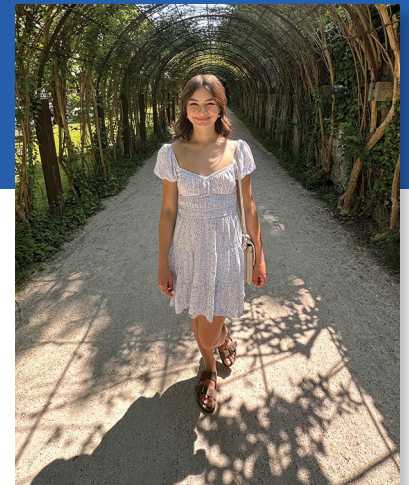


PHOTO PROVIDED

"Not only does ACUA promote Ukrainian arts, but it allows members of the community to get involved and experience the culture first-hand."



PHOTO PROVIDED



WEAVING A TAPESTRY OF CHANGE

PENNING A PERSONAL STORY AND BREAKING BOUNDARIES

PHOTO BY PAUL SWANSON

By Robin McHugh

In the vast realm of literature, where stories shape minds and hearts, few authors embark on a journey as profound and impactful as that of Ruby Swanson. Her narrative transcends borders, cultures, and languages, weaving a tapestry of acceptance, equality, and love for the LGBTQ+ community.



PHOTO BY PAUL SWANSON

Ruby has always had a passion for all forms of literature. She was inspired to write her first book, *A Family Outing*, while she began navigating her and her family's journey. In 2002, Ruby's eldest son came out he was gay when he was in high school. Ruby immediately looked for literature on being a parent of a LGBTQ+ kid. At the time, she found one single book, at Audrey's Books, that had been

published in the 70s. She recalls how reading it made her feel awful. It was outdated and cited a survey on same sex activity in prison populations. She threw the book away and felt she needed to read something positive that spoke to more mainstream experiences.

Ruby and her husband became involved in LGBTQ+ advocacy. For seven years, they were the Edmonton directors of PFLAG (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays), Ruby was the interim Treasurer of Pride Centre of Edmonton, and in 2005 Ruby became involved in the same sex marriage debate in Canada so both of her sons would have the same human rights. All these projects and experiences, and

her own frustration with the limited resources available to her, led Ruby to write about her experiences in hopes to help others like her.

Ruby travelled to Ukraine three times as a Canadian election observer. In 2016, she returned to Ukraine and visited the villages her ancestors came from. During her travels to Ukraine in 2016, Ruby connected with human rights workers at the Canadian Embassy in Kyiv, LGBTQ+ activists and representatives from TERGO, and a support group for mothers who have LGBTQ+ children. She translated three passages of her book into Ukrainian and read them to a group of young people at the Kyiv Pride Centre. This encounter became a beacon

PHOTO BY PAUL SWANSON

8 | SPRING 2024 | ACUAVITAE

of hope for these young individuals, and they begged her to find a way to translate her entire book into Ukrainian. They were inspired by the book and felt like it would be something positive they could give their own parents to read. A few months later, Ruby travelled back to Kyiv to present at an international conference for parents who had LGBTQ+ children. Again was met with positivity, and she was encouraged to translate her book. Parents at the conference appreciated meeting someone with ancestral ties to Ukraine and who was interested in helping them build a democracy where members of the LGBTQ+ community were valued.

Publishing a book in two diverse cultural settings presented its own set of challenges. In Canada, the reception was largely positive; Ruby has presented at Pride Week festivals, schools, bookstores, libraries, and in university classes. However, Ukraine posed a different landscape, requiring a cautious approach driven by safety concerns. Shortly before Ruby published her book in Ukraine in 2019, an incident at a book fair in Lviv led her publisher, *Krytyka Press*, and funder, *Heinrich Boell Foundation*, to a decision to opt for online orders only of her book.

The nuances of language also played a pivotal role in shaping the narrative. Ruby observes varied reactions when reading the same excerpt where she tells her 82-year-old mother she has a gay grandson to English-speaking and Ukrainian-speaking audiences. Reading it to both audiences, her inflections and expressions are identical. However, English-speaking audiences howl with laughter while Ukrainian-speaking audiences have tears streaming down their faces. The stark difference in emotional responses underline the complexities of interpretation. Ruby has also been fascinated with how some passages are better described in Ukrainian than in English, and wonders if it's because Ukrainian is her first language and if today there is still a part of her that still functions in her first language.

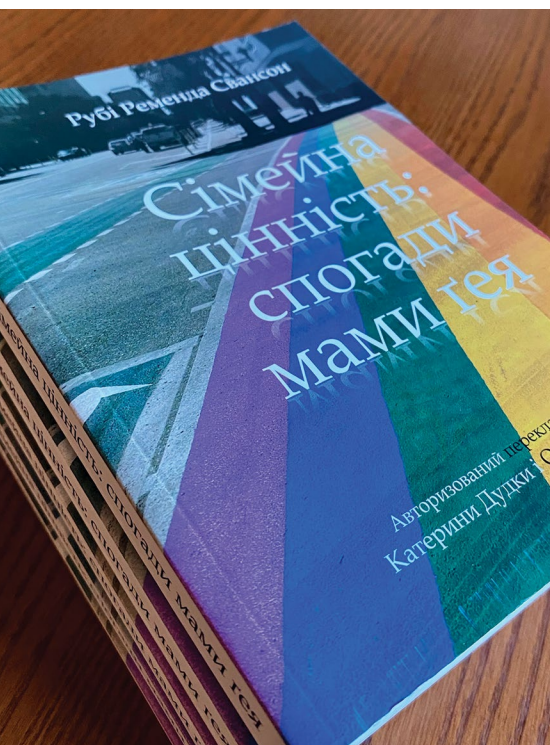
Ruby's journey has not been without its share of hurdles. In the Fall of 2023, she was banned from doing a presentation at her former high school in Humboldt, Saskatchewan even after having worked out all the details of her presentation with two school staff members. After waiting for weeks to hear back with approval from school administration,

she received a terse email thanking her for offering to present at the school, but the school would decline her presentation due to a directive from the Minister of Education. Adversity often paves the way for unexpected triumphs. As a result of national news coverage, Ruby received an email from a 75-year-old man who only came out to his family last year. He thanked her for writing such a positive book and told her if he had read it 60 years ago, his life would have been completely different. His revelation that the book could have altered the trajectory of his life serves as a poignant reminder of the transformative power of storytelling.

Ruby takes pride in knowing that her book made history in Ukraine, being the first of its kind translated and published there. However, she worries about the war in Ukraine and the harm that Putin could potentially cause by abolishing the rights they have gained over the last 30 years. It would also most certainly mean a dangerous future for the LGBTQ+ community in Ukraine.

Looking ahead, Ruby continues her advocacy with a new focus on addressing

PHOTOS BY PAUL SWANSON




PROFILE

extreme poverty in Edmonton. Working with students who arrived as refugees, she confronts the harsh realities of limited resources, language barriers, and the daily struggle for survival. Her commitment to shedding light on these issues reflects an unwavering dedication to social issues.

Aspiring authors seeking to address social issues in their work can draw inspiration from Ruby's journey. Her advice to persevere, celebrate small successes, and be prepared for hard work resonates with the challenges many face when tackling subjects society may prefer to ignore. She has great advice for any aspiring author,

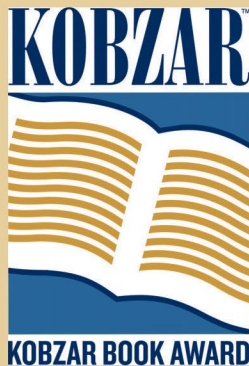
Keep all your drafts. Keep rewriting until you have the final product, then cut. Be ruthless with edits. When your work gets to a publisher be prepared to hear that the entire piece needs to be rewritten.

Ruby's story is not just a personal narrative but a testament to the profound impact one individual can have in fostering understanding and acceptance. Through literature, she weaves a tapestry that transcends borders, languages, and cultural nuances. Her journey from a concerned mother to a global advocate exemplifies the transformative power of storytelling in shaping a more inclusive world.

In a time where diversity and acceptance are more critical than ever, Ruby Swanson stands as a beacon, encouraging others to share their stories and contribute to the ongoing conversation about equality, acceptance, and love. Her journey inspires us to pick up our pens, speak our truths, and continue weaving the tapestry of change, one story at a time. 



PHOTOS BY PAUL SWANSON



Celebrating our Storytellers

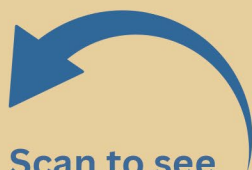
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By Tamara Soltykevych

How much do we really know about our older relatives' and ancestors' lives – of their childhoods, of their pre-married, pre-children selves?

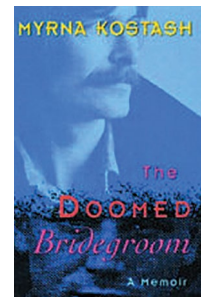
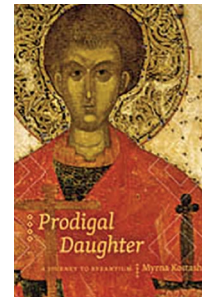


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Sometimes it seems like they only came into existence when we met them, but of course that's not true. What if you could paint a detailed picture of who they were before by weaving together pieces of historical information and speculating the rest to create a rich narrative? That's just what Myrna Kostash does in her latest book, *Ghosts in a Photograph: A Chronicle*.

Myrna Kostash is a literary and creative non-fiction award-winning author with Edmonton roots. After completing her post-secondary education in Toronto, she took off for Europe. While abroad, she sent submissions to Canadian magazines, which were accepted and led to her establishment as a professional writer. Upon her return to Canada, she worked as a freelance writer in Toronto, bolstered by the “golden age of journalism” as she calls it, when there was lots of support for Canadian artistic expression. Myrna wrote for several magazines, including *Saturday Night*, *Chatelaine*, and *Miss Chatelaine*, and penned a recurring column in *Maclean's*.

Some of her initial writing endeavours were spurred by her local Ukrainian Canadian childhood. Throughout her life she was further inspired by her ventures in the United States, Europe, and Canada, by her return to religion and most recently, by her re-education of the relationship between Indigenous Peoples and settlers. She says that each of her books has been written in response to her passions on these topics. Myrna has achieved many accolades, including the Kobzar literary award shortlist in 2018 for *Prodigal Daughter: A Journey to Byzantium* and published over a dozen books, the latest being *Ghosts of a Photograph*.

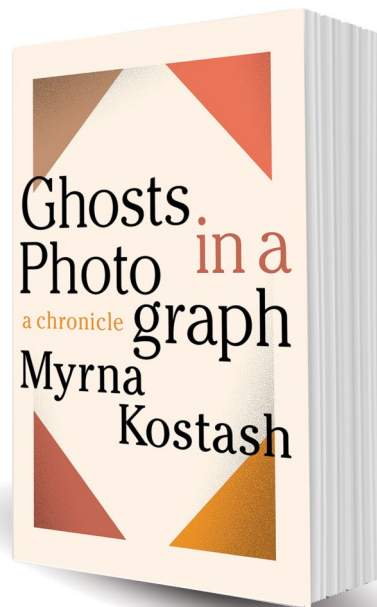


PHOTOS PROVIDED

Initially, Myrna thought to write about her relatives in Ukraine who had fought each other in the aftermath of World War II; one on her father's side in the "Ukrayinska Povstanska Armiya" (UPA) or Ukrainian Insurgent Army, the other on her mother's side a supporter of the Soviet Union. However, upon further reflection, she realized that she did not hear about these stories growing up and knew little of her grandparents' lives before they emigrated as adults. But then, inspiration struck when she came across a photo album at the Edmonton Public Library. The negatives of these photos had been hidden by members of the UPA in World War II. Some of the individuals in the photographs were identified by name (Kostashchuk), and Myrna was taken aback to find one of her relatives, a second cousin about whom nothing was spoken in Canada, in one of the photos. Thus, the seed for *Ghosts in a Photograph* was planted.

Ghosts in a Photograph is an exploration and re-imagining of the lives of her grandparents, as they emigrated from Galicia (present-day western Ukraine) to Alberta. Upon discovering family

mementos, she questioned how little she knew about the lives of her predecessors before they came to Canada. The parts before this were untold and unknown, and she did not have many living relatives that could fill in the blanks. 50 years after the publication of *All of Baba's Children*, Myrna wanted to look again at the lives of her grandparents, this time through the lens of her own experiences and insights of the last five decades. *Ghosts in a Photograph* brings the stories of her grandparents together and fills in the missing pieces through creative (speculative) non-fiction. Her speculations are supplanted by information she found through photographs, old documents, and online. In the book, she explores facets of their lives in the intimate first-person point of view and in-between, she tells stories of other relatives.



Ghosts in a Photograph has a closing section called "Code: On the Land", in which Myrna talks about herself as the descendant of settlers on Treaty Six Territory. She revisits the experience of herself having bought a quarter section just north of Two Hills, repeating what was done so many years ago by her grandparents. The section is her way of accounting for the current discourse and relationship of settlers with Indigenous Peoples.


Readers may wonder why there are no photographs in the book. According to Myrna, the main reason is that the writing should be rich enough for the reader to imagine the scene for themselves. However, she has recently started to compile some of the photographs that were used as materials for the book on her website, *ghostsinaphotograph.com*. Though it is a work in progress, interested folks are encouraged to visit the website to view the photos.

All her books have been non-fiction, created first of all to satisfy herself, and written with the intention of drawing audiences from various backgrounds. With the publication of *Bloodlines: A Journey to Eastern Europe* in 1993 she says she finally wrote, “full-blown creative literary (speculative) non-fiction.” However, her furthest effort at creative non-fiction is her chapter in *The Doomed Bridegroom* (1998), inspired by Vasyl Stus, a heroic but doomed Ukrainian poet who died in the Gulag. Myrna recently became aware of a pattern in her books where she goes back and forth between her “New World” and “Old World” brains. She explores this more in her blog on her website, *myrnakostash.com*. She believes that with the publication of *Ghosts in a Photograph*, she has fused the two versions of her brain.

When asked about her thoughts on how the Alberta literary scene has transformed over the years, she says it’s the changes across the entire Canadian literary/publishing scene that are disheartening in comparison to when she was starting her career. At that time, there were several outlets to tackle assignments; she spoke of being asked to go to Barcelona for

a project at a moment’s notice. Myrna believes that there has been a loss of a national market for writing about ourselves. She says the rise of book megastores came at the expense of small independent bookstores. These bookstores used to feature local writers, but that dissipated when they could no longer compete. Myrna says that when she published *All of Baba’s Children*, she was sent on a coast-to-coast tour to promote her book. That same level of coverage is no longer available to most writers, and there is no national market for book reviews. There is also much more competition than when she started out. On top of all these difficulties to get one’s name established, is the rise of artificial intelligence, resulting in computers creating artistic works.

For upcoming work, Myrna claims she no longer will be publishing any books. However, she is currently working on two projects. One is related to the aforementioned Kostashchuk. He was married to and died with Ivanna Hrankivska, about whom Myrna knows only a few things. On that basis, she is writing a possible answer to: “Who was Ivanna Hrankivska?” She is also working on a long personal essay based on her recent presentation: *The Pushkin Question Or: Shouldn’t You Be Reading Shevchenko?*

Myrna Kostash has accomplished much in her career; she has created several fantastic literary works and *Ghosts in a Photograph* is no different. It is well worth a read and may prompt you to become more curious about your relatives’ lives, which, if they’re keen to share, could open your mind to new perspectives – a win-win situation. 

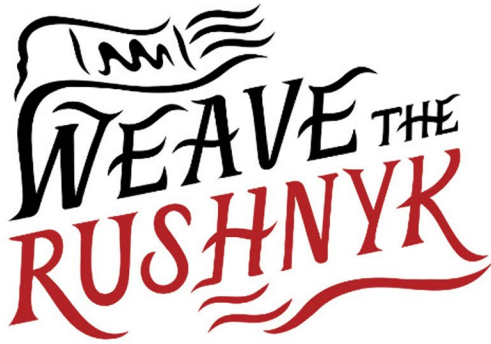


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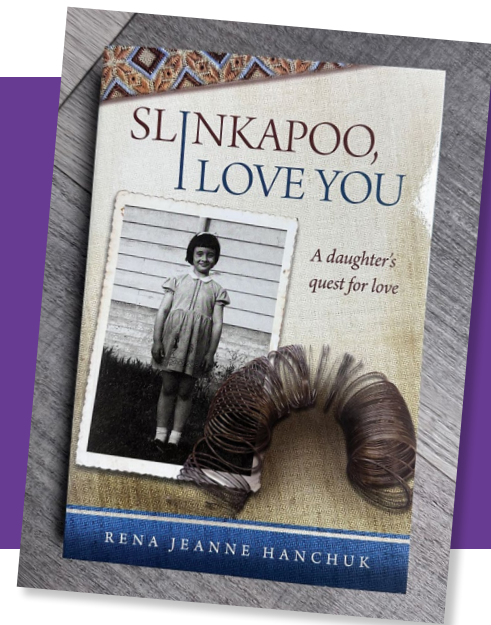
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“IT ONLY TAKES ONE VOICE, AT THE RIGHT PITCH, TO START AN AVALANCHE”

-DIANNA HARDY



By *Lyrissa S. C. Sheptak*



PHOTO PROVIDED BY RENA HANCHUK

Rena Hanchuk, founding president of ACUA, has been involved with the association since its inception over 35 years ago. From the beginning, it has been paramount

for her to give a voice and platform to the artists they feature because in most instances, they work individually. She, of all people, understands the value of ‘voice’— especially the journey in discovering one and then finding the courage to use it.

‘Voice’ is the heartbeat of a thought or a feeling. It is the opportunity to *finally* say something. What good, though, is voice if no one is listening? Afterall, the power is in its receipt. When we listen to a person’s voice (or read it on paper) connections are made and understanding is captured. This knowledge, even if hard-hitting, builds strength. Just as Anita Diamont wrote in her book *The Red Tent*, “The more a daughter knows about her mother’s

life—without flinching or whining—then the stronger the daughter.” This is specifically true in Hanchuk’s life (albeit with her father) as she was forced to reconsider—or finally face straight on—her own childhood and life. The product of her dark nights of the soul is *Slinkapoo, I Love You: a daughter’s quest for love*. This book became the outlet that finally gave ‘Little Rena’ her voice.

A quiet and private woman, Hanchuk has been guarded throughout her life. No one knew her full story, because she revealed it only in pieces. It was her father’s death that put Rena’s life on a trajectory towards fullness. When she was required to eulogize her father, she was set upon a journey unexpectedly, which led her to discover love, and acceptance of self. In doing this, she was finally forced to face her painful childhood and work through the constant rejection and abuse she received from her father, paternal grandmother, and sadly, the many others. Through this experience, she finally made peace with her father. The result was a deep realization that love does, in fact, conquer all—even if the

face of that love doesn’t show itself in the way we’d prefer.

Slinkapoo had its beginnings as a series of short cultural stories that Rena commenced writing after the death of her parents. When she received praise for these stories, and encouragement to write more, she decided to take her works to editor Marie Lesoway (more on p. 18), from Storyphile, to publish as

In this process of telling the truths and stories of Little Rena, Hanchuk was brought steps closer to accepting who she is today— blemishes, beauty, and all. In this process, she realized that no one truly knew her. She needed Little Rena to introduce her properly to the world. But Little Rena couldn’t do it without first finding her voice.

a book. It was her editor's comment of: "You have stories, but you haven't exposed who Rena really is," that begrudgingly compelled Hanchuk to take her work from being mere snapshots of a life, to an exorcism of sorts, where the voice of little, wounded Rena was finally revealed. And in this process of telling the truths and stories of Little Rena, Hanchuk was brought steps closer to accepting who she is today—blemishes, beauty, and all. In this process, she realized that no one truly knew her. She needed Little Rena to introduce her properly to the world. But Little Rena couldn't do it without first finding her voice.


For Hanchuk, writing *Slinkapoo*, was an extremely painful experience. She likens it to visiting a psychologist, where, before the healing is found, one has to unearth the secrets, abuses, and tragedies. It was especially painful revealing herself to her readers through the process. In order for Little Rena to have a voice, and for present-day Rena to be understood, she had to share personal stories of family abuse, addictions, and health problems, amongst other things. Through this purging experience, she felt exposed and vulnerable, and the journey left her feeling exhausted. However, she

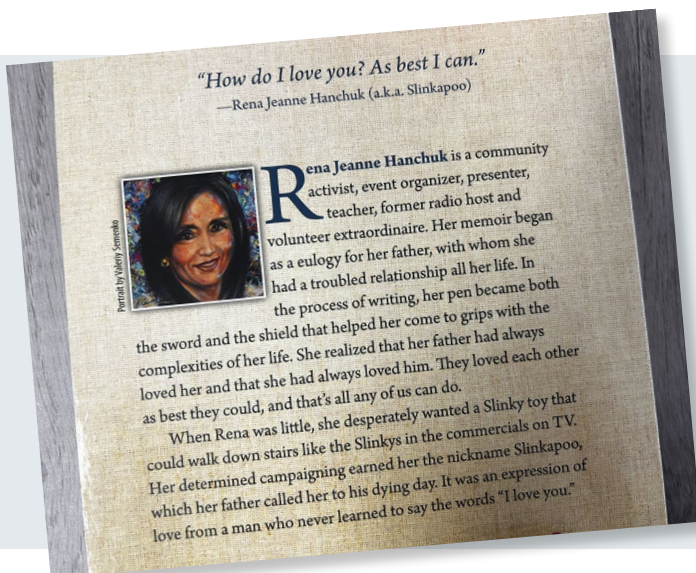
credits her lifelong faith in God to helping her live a full and adjusted life despite the tragedy and torment of her childhood and years after. The voice of God was loud throughout her life and it was nothing other than the Grace of God that helped her get through the devastation and pain. For this she can thank no other. However, she will always hold a deep gratitude for her maternal grandmother's influence in her life, especially in this regard.

In the end, despite it being a cathartic experience, Hanchuk considers the process worth it. It did not take her long to see the response to her book. With Hanchuk's deep connection and love for her Ukrainian culture, many in that community were drawn to her book and have supported her through this journey. Hanchuk was able to consider *Slinkapoo's* impact in a broader sense when she received numerous comments, emails, and phone calls from people outside of the Ukrainian community as well. In listening to their stories of abuse, she realized that *Slinkapoo* resonated with a wider audience on a deeply personal level. Little Rena's voice was able to set their own voices free.

This process of discovery may have demanded much from Rena, but

readers hope that it doesn't necessarily mean she is done with writing. Writers can never truly walk away from their craft, there is always a pull to do more. She is a survivor, after all, so hopefully she will be inspired to share the rest of her journey. Or perhaps she will be motivated to pen other things. At any rate, *Slinkapoo* is hard-hitting, yet engaging, and any future writing would be welcomed by her readers.

Until then, Hanchuk enjoys sharing and discussing her book. When she does, she likes to lead in with Elizabeth Barrett Browning's quote, "How do I love thee? Let me count the ways...". She adds her own spin when contemplating her understanding of her father's love (and even understanding her own love for her father). "How do I love you? As best I can", is apropos. Hanchuk likes to share, "Whatever your story, just do the best that you can. It may not be ideal, or even what you wished or needed, but if it is the best you can do, then it is a good place to begin." Our past might be written, but not our future. Afterall, as an old adage states, sometimes the best beginnings have been disguised as painful endings. 



Rena Hanchuk received her Bachelor of Arts Honors and a Master's in the Ukrainian language, and folklore. She then received her Bachelor of Education and became a teacher where, for over 30 years, she taught the Ukrainian language, social studies, and history. She also volunteers teaching the Ukrainian language to English speaking people, and teaching the English language to Ukrainian newcomers. All this, and she is the author of two books. Her first one being *The Word in Wax: a medical folk ritual among Ukrainians in Alberta*, and her second book, *Slinkapoo, I love you: A daughter's quest for love*. Both books are for sale at the ACUA Gallery and Artisan Boutique, and the Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village.

WE ARE OUR STORIES:

ON WRITING, EDITING, AND THE STUFF OF LIFE WITH MARIE LESOWAY



PHOTO PROVIDED

By Joyanne Rudiak

Marie Lesoway is no stranger to the written word. “I remember being a little kid and desperately wanting to read, and not knowing how to read. And then suddenly I could read and a whole new world opened up to me,” she explains, her voice resonating with excitement.

Learning to read sparked Marie’s lifelong passion for words and language. It is no surprise, therefore, that she launched a communications company, Pentacle Productions, and has spent the last three decades helping others craft words in a way that sparkles.

When asked how she got started as a writer and editor, Marie says, “I’ve always been a voracious reader. That gave me a feel for language and a love of words. I was always the go-to person for friends and colleagues who needed someone to look over their writing, and eventually I realized that people

actually got paid to do this kind of work. When I finished a contract project that established an energy and natural resources specialization in the U of A’s MBA program, I decided to dive head-first into writing and editing full time. For pay!”

In Marie’s mind, writing and editing are two sides of the same coin, and both are needed to help shape a story into something truly magnificent. Stories—especially life stories—are where Marie’s true passion lives. Marie caught the story bug in her early work as a researcher for the Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village, when she travelled around rural Alberta collecting the life stories of Ukrainian settlers. Patrons get to experience these stories in action when they visit the open-air museum.

When asked what it is she loves about stories, Marie is thoughtful: “We shape our world with stories. The stories we tell shape who we are, and we tell stories to understand who we are.” Stories are a vehicle through which we understand the world and ourselves,



Marie explains. They're also a medium through which we can learn about our past and connect with the people who came before us. As Marie succinctly puts it, "We are our stories."

The family stories that connect Marie to her Ukrainian roots are extremely important to her and have indirectly informed her process of writing and editing. "I grew up with babas," Marie explains, "and my babas' stories and sayings have shaped who I am and how I try to live. One baba would often tell me, 'Треба мати smiling face' and 'Треба на цім світі якесь добре діло робити.'" Loosely translated, that means "be pleasant and do some good in this world." Good advice for anyone.

While her work with Pentacle Productions focuses on corporate and government projects, Marie's love of people stories sparked the creation of Storyphile—the branch of her company that helps clients share their roots and remembrances with the people who love them. Her work for Storyphile is the most fun part of her job, Marie says, and she's had the privilege of helping to shape some incredible stories.

One such story is Rena Hanchuk's *Slinkapoo, I Love You: A Daughter's Quest for Love*, a memoir one can pick up at ACUA. It was somewhat intimidating to work so closely with someone who was not only a client, but a friend, Marie explains. But her longtime friendship with Hanchuk also gave her insights that helped draw out the story. Marie also had the pleasure of shaping *Work Hard, Have Fun and Keep Smiling*. In this memoir with a twist, she worked with author David Simpson—big brother of famed Oiler, Craig Simpson—to

shape his life story into a practical guidebook for parents, volunteers, and coaches involved with Canada's greatest game. "And I'm not even a hockey fan," Marie laughs. Another favourite project was *True North Down South: Tales of a Professional Canadian in America* by David Wayne Stewart, a funny and heartwarming story about identity and finding your way far from home.




PHOTO PROVIDED

No matter the story, Marie delights in preserving each writer's voice while also being the reader's advocate. It's a tricky balance, but one Marie confidently delivers. It's

clear that she finds great pride and joy in her work, having stayed in the game for nearly three decades.

Marie has witnessed a great deal of change in the literary industry over the years. Her first publications were typed out by secretaries and laid out by typesetters; now her writing and editing is all done online. The rise of AI and social media have also had an impact. This last development presents a particular challenge because young people don't necessarily identify as readers, at least not in the way Marie identifies as one.

When asked if there's anything in particular she'd like to see happen within her industry, Marie is firm: "It's critical for young people to be readers, because if you're a reader ... you learn to be a thinker. You can't be a good writer unless you're a good thinker, and you can't be a good thinker unless you're experiencing the world in the deeper ways that books let you do."

Books and stories are important. That's why you can always find Marie doing what she loves best; working with words and helping others share their stories. No. Helping others share themselves. 



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To learn more about Marie's writing, editing, and life story services, visit her websites at www.pentacleproductions.ca and www.storyphile.ca.

For more of her stories, check out her blog at www.storyphile.ca/blog.



Recipe for a Cookbook

By Isabella Sheptak

“There are as many *borshch* recipes as there are Ukrainians,” laughs Darlene Atamaniuk. That makes compiling a Ukrainian-Canadian cookbook a significant undertaking. When she began collecting recipes for *With Baba’s Blessing...Smachnoho*, Atamaniuk never imagined how large the project would become. At the start, it was not about cookbooks at all.

Natalka Yanitski put the wheels in motion for the book’s creation when she was the eparchial president of the Ukrainian Catholic Women’s League of Canada (UCWLC) in 1974. She had received a grant from the Alberta Minister of Culture to collect traditional recipes. The intent was to collect them for the Minister’s office, which was amassing them for its own project. Yanitski now had in her possession a wealth of authentic Ukrainian-Canadian pioneer recipes and wanted to give them a life beyond the Minister’s project. At first, the UCWLC worked to bring them to the broader community by organizing workshops. Cooking demonstrations were held and copies of the recipes were distributed to participants. However, Yanitski wanted to share the rich Ukrainian-Canadian culinary tradition with even more people, and thus the idea for a cookbook was born.

At the time, Atamaniuk was the cultural chair of the eparchial UCWLC. Yanitski brought her the idea for a cookbook, asking if she would be willing to bring it to life. This began an endeavor that spanned many years, challenges, and triumphs. It was Atamaniuk’s job, as the chair of the newly formed cookbook committee, to orchestrate the collection, sorting, and typing of the recipes. The committee was aware that many other Ukrainian-Canadian cookbooks already existed—sharing the culinary wealth of different holidays or communities, centering on different themes or places. *Their* cookbook would need its own slant.

From the very start, the core of their cookbook was ‘Baba’. Their vision was to work with the foundational recipes

gathered by Yanitski and expand to create a book that represented the recipes that Baba brought with her from Ukraine. Which culinary traditions traveled with her across the Atlantic? How did they evolve in Canada? What did breakfast, lunch, and supper look like at Baba's? How about Christmas and Easter? How did she entertain friends?


Atamaniuk's committee sought to answer all of these questions, following in the footsteps of Yanitski, whose goal from the beginning was to preserve those recipes that oftentimes reside only in the minds of the cooks. The recipes that Yanitski gathered turned out to be primarily for baking, and so the committee put out a call for everything else, from appetizers to Christmas Eve dishes. As recipes started rolling in from all across Alberta, the committee began the work of organizing and typing them. This was a rewarding experience that also came with its own set of challenges.

Many of the Babas, or the children and grandchildren of Babas, who submitted recipes were experienced cooks who knew the recipes and culinary traditions like the back of their wooden spoon. However, the cookbook was being written to pass on such recipes to younger generations—individuals who might be more distanced from both cooking and Ukrainian culture, but who wanted to learn about, and reconnect with. Atamaniuk found that many of the recipes submitted omitted information that the original cook would have found intuitive—practices or procedures that would have been ingrained in an experienced cook who had been taught the tricks of the Ukrainian culinary trade by mothers and Babas of their own. This information was less intuitive, however, to the new cook, and thus it was Atamaniuk's job to track down the owners of many recipes to clarify information so that the cookbook could be both authentic and easy to use.

The production of *With Baba's Blessing... Smachnoho* was a time-intensive labor of love: love for the Babas who brought the recipes from Ukraine, for their children who adapted them to the Canadian environment, and for their grandchildren, who will carry on the Ukrainian-Canadian culinary tradition. It took many years and people to bring the work to completion. Atamaniuk, who was with the project from beginning to end, said its creation involved many hurdles that the average person might not think about when holding the finished product in their hands. People got sick or passed away, the committee changed several times over, and Atamaniuk was working all day as a caregiver for her

husband, who had cancer, leaving only the late hours of the night to work on the book.

When Mary Ann Phillips became the eparchial president of UCWLC there was renewed interest in completing the cookbook and it was finally published in 2019. This was a moment of triumph for Atamaniuk, Yanitski, and all the countless others who had contributed to the creation of the book. Atamaniuk was relieved that after all of their hard work, the book launch was a smashing success. It felt good for their work to be recognized and appreciated, especially since so many of the trials that occur during the undertaking of such a project are invisible in the final product.

With Baba's Blessing... Smachnoho is one of many Ukrainian-Canadian cookbooks that have formed a cornerstone of culinary and community life. As with *With Baba's Blessing... Smachnoho*, these cookbooks often financially support an organization that does good work within the Ukrainian-Canadian community. They also ensure that recipes that otherwise might have been lost to history can continue to feed the spirit (and stomachs) of generations to come. Although many cooks today turn to the internet for recipe inspiration, these virtual versions lack much of the beauty and effort found in a printed cookbook. *Baba's Blessing* and its many hardcopy counterparts are the products of a living community working together to create a reflection of the culinary culture of their time and place. They require the efforts and coordination of many different people and the stories they have. These cookbooks are about continuing not only a tradition but a connection between people. Sure, you can go to Costco and get a bag of frozen perogies, or to Rogers place for a perogy poutine, but if you want the love and flavor of supper at Baba's, you should read *With Baba's Blessing... Smachnoho!* 



STUDENETZ

Elsie Achtemichuk

- 6 large pork hocks
- 4 pig knuckles (feet)
- Cold Water
- 2 onions
- 1 large carrot



- 1 bay leaf
- Bay Leaf
- 4 peppercorns of allspice (not pepper)
- 3 to 4 garlic cloves or to taste



Wash and clean hocks and knuckles carefully. Place them together in a large pot and cover with cold water. Bring this to a rapid boil for 10 to 15 minutes. Pour off water and wash again carefully. Add enough cold water to cover meat. Bring to a boil and then simmer for about 3-1/2 hours.

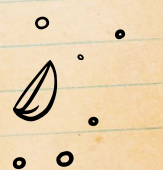
When meat is cooked (meat could be coming off the bone), remove bones and skin. Arrange chopped meat in a shallow pan.

Strain the broth and add 3 to 4 garlic cloves minced finely to the broth. Pour broth over arranged meat. Place in refrigerator to set.

When jellied, slice into bite-size pieces and serve.

Note: Use less garlic if you prefer.

Із свинини чоловік нігде не буде,
Але з чоловіка свинина ся може стати.



Darlene Atamaniuk

Crust:

- 1 c. vanilla wafer crumbs
- 3/4 c. finely ground hazelnuts
- 3 tbsp. sugar
- 3 tbsp. butter, softened

In a small bowl, combine crumbs, hazelnuts, sugar and butter. Blend with fork. Press mixture onto bottom and sides of a well buttered 9 inch springfoam pan. Chill in freezer for 30 minutes.

Filling:

- 1 lb. cream cheese, softened (2 large pkg.)
- 1 c. sugar
- 4 eggs, separated
- 1 c. sour cream
- 1 tsp. brandy extract
- 2 tbsp. flour, sifted
- 1/4 tsp. salt

In a large bowl, beat cream, sugar and egg yolks until very smooth. Add sour cream and brandy extract. Add flour and salt; mix well.

In a separate mixing bowl, beat the egg whites until stiff, then fold into cheese mixture until smooth. Pour into chilled pan and bake in a preheated 350 F oven for 1 hour. Turn off oven and let cake remain in closed oven until completely cooled.

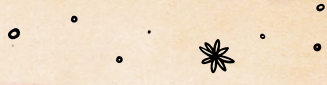
Topping:

- 2 c. fresh blueberries
- 2 tbsp. sugar
- 1/2 tsp. brandy extract
- 1 tsp. cornstarch
- 1 tsp. water
- 1/2 tsp. lemon juice

In a large saucepan, mix blueberries, cornstarch, sugar and water; bring to a boil. Stir over medium heat for 3 to 5 minutes, until thick and smooth. Add brandy extract and lemon juice, stirring well. Remove from heat. Spread blueberry mixture evenly over top of cake.



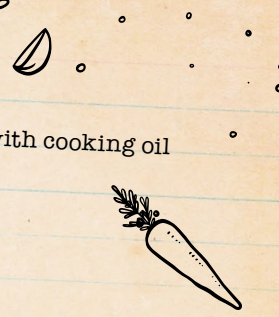
BLUEBERRY CHEESECAKE



**PATYCHKY
(MEAT ON A STICK)**

Cathy Rakchaev

- 4 lb. pork butt, cut into 1 inch cubes
- 2 tbsp. vegetable oil for marinade
- 6 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 onion, finely chopped
- Seasoned salt & pepper, to taste
- 6 inch wooden skewers (not the thin kind)
- Bowl of seasoned flour
- 1 egg, beaten
- Bowl of bread crumbs
- Deep-fryer/frypan filled with cooking oil
- 2 c. grated carrots
- 2 onions, sliced
- 1 c. water



Combine oil, garlic, chopped onion, seasoned salt and pepper with precut meat. Marinate overnight.

Soak sticks overnight. Thread 4 to 5 pieces of meat on each stick. Coat with seasoned flour, then dip into egg and roll in breadcrumbs. Deep-fry until coating is brown. Drain on paper towels.

Place grated carrots with sliced onions in roaster with a cup of water. Reserve some carrots and onions to cover over top of meat in roaster. Lay prepared meat on the bed of grated carrots and onions. Bake in 300 F over for 1 hour.

Note: This dish is freezable.



**BEET LEAF
HOLUBSTI**

In Memory of Lucy Kowal

Rice Filling:

- 2 c. rice
- 2.c or less boiling water
- 2tsp salt
- 1 medium onion, chopped fine

- 4 to 5 tbsp. butter of fat



Wash the rice until the water becomes clear. Add rice to the boiling water. Stir in salt. Bring to a brisk boil and let it cook for 1 minute. Cover, then turn off heat and allow it to stand until water is absorbed. The rice will only be partially cooked.

Cook the onion in the fat until it is a light golden colour. Mix the onion with the rice and season to taste. The filling for the holubtsi should be well seasoned because some of the seasoning will be absorbed by the beet leaves. Cool the filling.

Preparing the Beet Leaves: Wash the required number of beet leaves and shake off excess water. Scald the nature leaves with boiling water. Just enough to wilt them for easier handling. (Modern cooks can use the microwave. Put some beet leaves on a plate, cover with paper towel and put into microwave on HIGH for about 20 seconds. This will wilt the leaves and make them easier to handle.)

Making Holubsti:

- Rice Filling
- Beet leaves

- Salt
- Melted fat

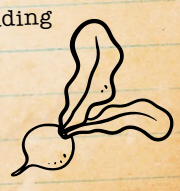
- Small amount lemon juice or vinegar.

Use rice filling above. Place about a spoonful of filling on beet leaf. Roll. Place beet leaf roll into greased casserole or small roaster.

Sprinkle each layer with some salt and melted fat. A small amount of lemon juice or vinegar sprinkled over the layers will improve the dish by adding firmness and tartness over the layers will improve the dish by adding firmness and tartness to the leaves. Cover and cook the holubsti in a moderate oven (350F) for about 1 to 1-1/2 hours or until the filling is done.

Note: Serve hot with sour cream, or with creamed onion sauce or any other favourite dressing.

Freezes well. Simply thaw and cook as outlined above.





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