



## Ghosts in a Photograph: A Chronicle

**Myrna Kostash**

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In her erudite family memoir *Ghosts in a Photograph*, Myrna Kostash searches for her Western Ukrainian grandparents' histories in Alberta, Canada.

Tracing her family back to Tulova in Galicia (now part of Ukraine) in the 1900s through photographs, relatives' autobiographies, quotations, and mementos, Kostash reconstructs a story of immigration, beginning with her paternal grandfather. But she questions, too, its familiar arc, in which "peasants fleeing oppression ... become the heroes of our own stories," even though European settlement meant overtaking Indigenous lands. Despite the frequent erasure of colonization's marks in stories that surround Ukrainian Canadian pioneers, and despite the unknown gaps in her "ancestral memory," Kostash shapes an intriguing patchwork tale in which she reconciles what she thought she knew about her family with fuller truths, examining their wider place in Canadian history.

In between the concerns of settlers (the most poignant pertaining to her grandmothers' domestic labors), Kostash reflects on the materiality of photographs, research, and the broader aspects of writing one's way into fragmented narratives. Her keen descriptions allow memories to linger. Even as they are acknowledged as mutable, and sometimes based on other people's recollections, her memories retain a semblance of truthfulness.

Throughout, Kostash weighs the responsibility of bearing two homelands within her: the inherited Ukrainian one and the one rooted in Canadian soil. The result is a sensitive, challenging inquiry that mixes travel with forays into literary records. As Kostash traces the patterns of her people moving from a homestead toward education and urbanization, her place within their story is elucidated.

In the memoir *Ghosts in a Photograph*, ancestors populate vintage albums, their voices echoing across time in recorded interviews. But more salient, their efforts join in a personal, generational story about making a home on the Canadian plains.

KAREN RIGBY (September / October 2022)

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