

Memory is a taste in my mouth . . .

thick and warm
like cream and butter sauce
you generously poured
over cottage cheese dumplings
or those you filled with sour cherries,
ones you picked from your own trees
and swiftly pit with your thumbs by the pail-full,
stones you missed slipping passed
my lips like family secrets.
Warm pockets of summertime sprinkled with sugar—
the sweet taste
of another place.

You tended your garden plot here,
where other Polish and Russian neighbours lived,
cucumbers, carrots and sugar-snap peas,
edible kisses
for your English-speaking grandchildren,
little hybrids
hungering to belong to your lost Eden.
In your small kitchen, a picture of Jesus
the bread rising,
chicken soup simmering, noodles you kneaded
laid out on your table to dry.

Long, tangled ribbons of affection
are the family ties.

Or borscht thick with tomatoes and cabbage,
glimmering with globules of fat from the meat,
not just old bones for the broth
like when my mother was small.

And those golden nuggets you planted—eyes
from the old world.

How carefully you sowed the seeds
of your home-place, so small, precious
as if jewellery you smuggled out
when you fled, though you never owned any.
The only tangible belongings you managed
to salvage, the closest thing I had
to your unspoken memories,

these potatoes were your currency, you offered
them to me by the bowlful,
steaming, buttered and salted,
as though I needed such a rich bribe

to love an old woman.

Connie T. Braun

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<https://demeterpress.org/books/mothering-mennonite/>

My Name

(after John Mincezeski's prose poem)

In 1818, my name migrated from Prussia to Russia
in pursuit of farmland—planted watermelon, corn,
and potatoes, for a century, though hardly
enough to live on, until the promised land
was expropriated, my name marked,
enemy of the people, placed on a list, forced

to hide in birch forests from *black ravens* at night
filling their quotas for labour camps. War erupted,
front lines sliced through villages. As the snow fell,
my name fled for its life in an open boxcar
strewn with lice-infested straw; In 1948,
my name was written down

in a Bible handed out to refugees. It is there,
on the page of births and deaths;

a survivor
Before I was born, when the papers
for emigration were signed, the last letter,
an *n*, was dropped, like a stone into the ocean.
Did my name look less foreign on that converted
troopship?—a transport still smelling of fresh paint

sailing to Canada where my name settled
in an unheated garage, for a few dollars
a day worked in the hop-yard, enough
to start over. Of the missing consonant,
my father said only one was necessary,
as if one less heaviness to carry.

Connie T. Braun

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<https://carleton.ca/mds/cu-events/launching-refugee-a-themes-issue/>

Force Field: Anthology of 77 Women Poets of BC Ed. Susan Musgrave. Ganges: MotherTongue Press, 2013. 150+ Canada' History in Poetry Anthology. Ed. Judy Gaudet. Charlottetown: Acorn Press, 2018.

Against Disillusionment, or, Luciérnaga

Desperation and hope are a couple
expecting a child. Life begins

in trauma, and all of life is both the way of the refugee,
and a pilgrimage.

The migrants walk for thousands of miles
with their children. Who can say how far away

a refuge lies?

When there is a knock, we must open.

In the desert, the swelling rivers,
on the sea, the roiling waves.

A child who could not be resuscitated is placed in the ship's freezer.
And in the camps, the children in cages.

Neglected children care for younger children.

Babies, unswaddled,

children without blankets

lie down to sleep
on cold concrete,

no water to wash with, no soap,
no water to drink, guards point to the toilets.

Don't look away.

We have all asked ourselves what we would have done.
The past echoes.

We will do now what we would like to think we would have done.

Outbreaks of flu, scabies, lice.
The guards, the razor wire,

harsh lights throughout the night.

Without words in their language,
the children draw pictures for the visitors
who have come to see with their own eyes.

In Spanish *Luciarnaga* is firefly.

Their outcry moves through the air.
Across the city the evening bells ring out.

Jesus prayed *that all of them may be as one*
the night before he died.

Connie T. Braun

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