

**“WE CAME TO CANADA AND WE WERE GOING TO MAKE IT”:
ORAL HISTORY, AGENCY, AND POST-SECOND WORLD WAR
DUTCH IMMIGRANT CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS IN ALBERTA**

ELAINE TOTH
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ELAINE TOTH

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Dr. Amy Shaw Thesis Supervisor	Associate Professor	Ph.D.
Dr. Kristine Alexander Thesis Examination Committee Member	Associate Professor	Ph.D.
Dr. Lynn Kennedy Thesis Examination Committee Member	Associate Professor	Ph.D.
Dr. Heidi MacDonald Thesis Examination Committee Member	Professor	Ph.D.
Dr. Carly Adams Chair, Thesis Examination Committee	Associate Professor	Ph.D.

DEDICTED TO:

My sister,
whose reaction when I began talking about an MA was:
“Of course you should do it!”

ABSTRACT

This project reconceptualizes the immigrant child in a way that underscores their experience as distinct from that of an adult. There is little qualitative research on the histories of Dutch child immigrants and the findings in this thesis draw attention to and help fill this gap. By highlighting the life stories of school-aged Dutch children in southern Alberta and focusing on the complexities they faced during integration, there is opportunity to rethink what has been documented about their roles in the family migration process. This thesis shows how post-Second World War child immigrant memories are worthy of exploration as they serve to enrich our understanding of how children exercised agency and demonstrated independent thought while adjusting to unfamiliar cultural and social practices.

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Introduction

Recalling her life as a twelve-year-old, newly-landed, post-Second World War Dutch immigrant child to Alberta, eighty-year-old Rita reminisces about her first day of school. Recalling difficulties with the English language and with meeting her teacher for the first time, she softly says, “He was a fellow that wasn’t all that crazy about immigrants and not that helpful at all.”¹ Strategies to cope with xenophobic encounters such as the one described by Rita, are as intriguing as were the children themselves whose working-class families made the decision to leave the Netherlands after the war. While school-aged children made up a large proportion of Dutch migrant families, most immigration research emphasizes the economic, social and cultural effect on adult lives, but neglects to consider integration challenges specific to a child, such as Rita’s experience confronting an unsympathetic teacher.²

Drawing awareness to how children negotiated and made sense of their new surroundings, this thesis shifts the focus from an adult-only trajectory to one that considers children as participatory historical actors. Using semi-structured oral history interviews with adult willing to recall and record childhood immigrant memories, this qualitative study focuses on ten men and women who were born in the Netherlands between the years 1935 and 1942 and who, as children, immigrated to Alberta between the years 1949 and 1956.³ It explores the challenges they faced in the unfamiliar world of southern Alberta, how they worked within power structures to construct identity as Canadians, and how their experiences intersected with gender ideals, age restrictions, and religious practices within Dutch family dynamics. Faced with

¹ Rita Papworth (nee Vanee), interview by Elaine Toth, Delta, British Columbia, October 20, 2015.

² As scholarly interest in childhood studies receives greater attention, discussions on use of the term ‘child’ and ‘children’ also expands. Mindful of its socially and politically constructed nature, as well as its potential to change over time, this project uses the terms ‘child’ and ‘children’ to refer to anyone under the age of eighteen years.

³ See Appendix for detailed list of participants.

integration into a multi-ethnic, predominantly English-speaking settler society, participants recall their lives as post-war Dutch child immigrants and confirm their experiences as distinct from those of adults' during the social, cultural, and economic processes connected to family immigration.

Mariso O. Ensor and Elżbieta M. Goździak state, "Ethnographic research further suggests that child migrants often play an active role in assessing their own situation, making decisions about their life trajectories, and negotiating the challenges and opportunities posed by displacements."⁴ While their study is grounded in an ethnographical approach, this project agrees with this statement and argues its philosophy can be applied to historical research. By looking at children's experiences in the context of immigration history, the strategies used by child migrants to respond to challenges and make decisions, sheds light on the influence of power relations and their affect on agentic behaviour. Recording childhood memories has the potential to further overall understanding of what it meant to be a child migrant and how traditional customs, religion, economics and social issues affected integration into a new society.

Important to any family migration study are source documents and peer-reviewed literature that verify statistics on migrating families, as well as provide context to understand the political, economic and social reasons for leaving homelands. This project uses multi-disciplinary sources along with scholarly works specific to childhood studies to legitimize and contextualize certain aspects of the child immigrant experience. A central argument to this thesis is the value and necessity of the oral history interview. Recognizing they are essential to any scholarly research project, many historical documents do not reveal emotions related to one's

⁴ Mariso O. Ensor and Elżbieta M. Goździak, "Introduction," in *Children and Migration-At the Crossroads of Resiliency and Vulnerability*, editors Mariso O. Ensor and Elżbieta M. Goździak (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010): 3.

sense of belonging, to the intensity of familial connections and to identity formation over time. While one of the primary focuses in this project is the practice of oral history more broadly, there is no intent to diminish the use of written narratives, but rather to promote oral testimonies as necessary to immigration historiographies. This thesis also contends that oral history is especially important to childhood studies as it offers a valuable means of accessing children's agency in a way that reaches beyond conventional classifications of heroism or defiance. Its interactive method encourages exploration of the many layers of behavior and meaning often concealed within childhood memories and confirms that the role migrant children play in family processes during initial integration periods should not be overlooked.

Again, Dutch families of this time typically had several children, yet almost nothing is written specific to their lives. Barbara Lorenzkowski states, "in order to disentangle the many strands of childhood that were so tightly interwoven with larger threads of religion, class and gender," attention needs to be given to "maps of childhood in ever-widening concentric circles."⁵ This is relevant to the Dutch immigrant children highlighted in this project, in that their social and cultural experiences were also organized along ever-widening concentric circles, including the politics associated with gendered and age-constructed categories. Representing children as historical actors who faced challenges specific to being under the age of majority, this project not only adds original perspective to immigration research, but also helps identify the child's active and participatory role as post-war families adjusted to their new lives in Canada.

⁵ Barbara Lorenzkowski, "The Children's War," in *Occupied St. John's: A Social History of a City at War, 1939-1945*, editor Steven High (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), 116.

Participant Biographies

Engaging with the following ten adults who were immigrants ranging in age from nine to sixteen years of age upon their arrival in Alberta uncovered a multi-faceted discourse celebrating a spirit of tenacity and strength. Despite their shared identity as post-Second World War child immigrants, the distinctiveness of each person's individual background is worth detailing, as it will assist when reading interview excerpts throughout the project. In this vein, this section offers a brief biography of each of the ten participants, beginning with my paternal aunt Rita. The subjects of this study have some important common experiences. For example, all interviewees were members of agricultural families and all attest to bonds of family unity and loyalty towards their parents, however, the variations within each person's story make each experience unique.

Rita Papworth (nee Vanee)

Emigrating with her mother, father and five siblings (one of whom was my father) in 1952, Rita celebrated her twelfth birthday on the ship from the Netherlands to Halifax.⁶ Ultimately arriving in Edmonton via train, her paternal uncle arranged for family agricultural employment on a farm near Colchester, Alberta. Rita, the youngest in her family, did not participate in family farm labour and as a result, attended school full-time for approximately two years. Upon turning fourteen, she was legally able to end her formal education, and this coincided with her father becoming ill. She obtained full-time employment, sometimes living away from home, and contributed her earnings to her family. Rita's family was devoutly committed to the Dutch Christian Reformed church in the Netherlands and while she no longer

⁶ Papworth interview.

endorses its deterministic doctrine, an evangelical, a Christ-centered belief system continues to guide her life.

Sister and Brother - Wilhelmina Lichak (nee Bosman) and Henry Bosman

Arriving at the Lethbridge, Alberta train station in May of 1952, siblings Wilhelmina and Henry were part of a family of ten which included a father, mother, five boys and three girls.⁷ Upon immigration, Henry, the third youngest child, was ten years old and Wilhelmina, the third oldest, was sixteen. Both parents were politically active in the Netherlands and their father held a horticultural and science degree. Initially employed by a farmer in Turin, their family began work in the beet fields right away. The following season, their father obtained alternate employment, first at a Lethbridge flower shop, and then at the Lethbridge Research Station which resulted in the family leaving the farm and moving into a home in south Lethbridge.

Henry was one of two interviewees in this project who graduated from high school and later obtained an engineering degree from the University of Alberta. Wilhelmina attended the Lethbridge Collegiate High School and despite being short only a few credits, she did not officially graduate and lived at home until she was married. Neither placed a huge emphasis on formal church teachings, and while Henry recalls attending Sunday school and services at the Protestant Church in Lethbridge, Wilhelmina has memories of attending the Dutch Hope Reformed Church. Six years apart in age, but raised alongside one another, their divergent life stories are significant in their capacity to reflect on how gender and age affected opportunity.

⁷ Wilhelmina Lichak (nee Bosman) interview by Elaine Toth, September 12, 2017, Daysland, Alberta. Henry Bosman interview by Elaine Toth, January 11, 2017, Lethbridge, Alberta.

Bert Brouwer

Bert was thirteen years old when he arrived in Turin, Alberta with his mother, father and six siblings in July of 1949.⁸ His father was a government employee in the Netherlands who had originally applied for placement in Ontario, however, his family did not meet all requirements for sponsorship. Under private contract with a farmer, Alberta was their second choice and after their arrival, the family immediately began work in the sugar beet fields. Bert started school in September of 1949, however, he and his four brothers were intent on buying a farm. As a result, he only went to school for a short period of time and did not attend high school. Devoted to traditional church doctrine, his family attended the Christian Reformed church in Iron Spring. Religious teachings continue to play a central role in his life.

Jenny Aardema (nee Miedema)

Immigrating to Canada in June 1951, Jenny was thirteen, the second- oldest child, and along with her mother and father and siblings, part of a family of eight.⁹ Her father was a farm labourer in the Netherlands before the war and when an opportunity for housing and agricultural work with a German Mennonite farmer near Broxburn, Alberta arose, her father began filling out the application forms. She started school that September in Coaldale, however, her attendance was sporadic as the beet harvest season dictated when she would labour in the field. Complicating her family's financial situation, her father became seriously ill with double pneumonia. She stopped going to school at the age of fourteen and began full time work at various jobs, always contributing wages to her family. Church attendance at the Christian

⁸ Bert Brouwer, interviewed by Elaine Toth, September 14, 2017, Lethbridge, Alberta.

⁹ Jenny Aardema (nee Miedema) interview by Elaine Toth, January 18, 2017, Lethbridge, Alberta.

Reformed Church in Lethbridge was twice each Sunday and her religious devotion continues to influence her life.

Aris Slingerland

Aris was thirteen years old when he immigrated with his family in May 1956. Arriving in Diamond City, Alberta with his parents and ten siblings, his family was the largest in this project.¹⁰ Aris was the fourth oldest and along with his father and seven brothers and sisters, labor in the beet fields began immediately upon arrival. His father was an independent farmer in the Netherlands, and this seemed to guide his desire to do the same in Canada. Working together with his sons, he slowly began to acquire livestock and land, eventually buying a dairy farm. While Aris did not attend high school, he did pursue education as an adult and successfully worked in the accounting field later in his life. Strictly guided by Netherland's Dutch Christian Reformed teachings, their family regularly attended the Christian Reformed Church in Coalhurst, Alberta.

Abe Visser and Shirley Visser (nee De Roos)

The only married couple interviewed in this project, Abe and Shirley share the following commonalities: they were both born in Friesland, (the northern part of the Netherlands), their families were both adherents of the Christian Reformed Church, they were both sixteen years of age when they immigrated and neither one of them attended school in Canada. Shirley's family is the only one in this project who immigrated without a father. With their arrival organized by Dutch immigrant relatives already living in Alberta, her mother, herself and four older siblings

¹⁰ Aris Slingerland interview by Elaine Toth, January 25, 2016, Lethbridge, Alberta.

arrived in Iron Springs in the fall of 1952.¹¹ They all immediately began work in the sugar beet fields and continued farm labor for two years, until they moved as a family, to live and work in Calgary. Working full time into her early twenties, she continued to contribute her earnings to her mother until she married Abe.

Abe arrived with his mother, father and three siblings in April of 1951.¹² Abe was the oldest of the children and despite his educational background as a ticketed machinist, it was understood by most living in the Netherlands that it would be years before there would be sustainable work in Friesland. Upon arrival to southern Alberta, his family worked most of the year hoeing sugar beets, and in the winter, Abe obtained employment in the Burmis, Alberta lumber camp. His earnings were also always contributed to the family. Abe and Shirley met at church when she was seventeen years old and he was eighteen years old and dated for five years before getting married. Recently celebrating their sixty-first wedding anniversary, they believe “God to be in control of everything,” and church teachings continue to guide their lives.¹³

William Barthel

William was the youngest immigrant interviewed for this project. Turning nine years old a few months after arrival in Canada in the spring of 1950, he was accompanied by his mother, father and five siblings.¹⁴ Despite being young, both he and his younger sister participated in beet field work by pulling weeds. He recalls this as a “bit of a fun excursion.”¹⁵ William’s dedication to farm labor continued and when he graduated from high school in 1959, his goal

¹¹ Shirley Visser (nee De Roos) interview by Elaine Toth, Lethbridge, Alberta, October 20, 2016.

¹² Abe Visser interview by Elaine Toth, Lethbridge Alberta, October 20, 2016.

¹³ Shirley Visser interview.

¹⁴ William Barthel interview by Elaine Toth, Coalhurst, Alberta, February 23, 2017.

¹⁵ Barthel interview.

was to continue farming and work on motorized vehicles. Aside from keeping some pocket money for “smokes,” he handed his earnings over to his father until he married and left home. The Christian Reformed Church played a significant role in his life and family attendance in Lethbridge occurred twice every Sunday.

Anne Tanis (nee Aleman)

Anne was thirteen years old when she arrived in Picture Butte, Alberta in April of 1954.¹⁶ Along with herself, her mother and her father, there were seven siblings. She started school in September however, by March her father made the decision that she would not attend anymore. Steadfastly adhering to traditional Dutch cultural practices, he viewed her role as the oldest daughter to stay home and perform in a domestic capacity. When she was seventeen years of age, Anne moved away from home to work in a bakery in the Crowsnest Pass, however, she still gave a portion of her earnings to her father. Church attendance at the Christian Reformed Church in Coalhurst was a regular part of her life and while Anne does not adhere to Reformed doctrine any longer, she does attend the United Church in Picture Butte.

Background

Lasting from 1890 until 1914, and referred to as the ‘first wave,’ Dutch immigration to Canada began with an active campaign by the Canadian government to secure agricultural workers for the West.¹⁷ Freedom to practice religion and construct Christian Reformed churches in Southern Alberta saw Netherlanders willing to cut ties with their homeland to gain recognition

¹⁶ Anne Tanis interview by Elaine Toth, Picture Butte, Alberta, March 7, 2017.

¹⁷ Ganzevoort, 5.

as hard working members of Canadian society.¹⁸ The first World War cut off almost all European immigration to Canada, and it was not until 1920 that the ‘second wave’ of Dutch immigrants began, this time lasting until approximately 1929.¹⁹ Lured by promising work prospects, the Canadian government, again in need of a flow of agricultural and industrial workers conveyed Canada as a place to attain “free or cheap land, thousands of jobs and success.”²⁰

The psychological trauma suffered by Netherlanders during the five years of Nazi occupation in the Second World War was just one of the push factors guiding tens of thousands of Dutch nationals to immigrate to Canada during the years 1947 until approximately 1961. Known as the third and largest wave of Netherland families to arrive on Canadian shores, other causes included widespread unemployment, wartime destruction of most of the country’s arable farmland, and the government’s predictions for a lengthy post-war reconstruction period.²¹ Seeking economic stability, Dutch families from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds left behind property and other assets in the hopes of building financial security and better lives for themselves and their children. In addition to the potential for long-term, economic benefits, Canadian military leadership in Netherland’s liberation from Nazi Germany influenced many families to select Canada over Australia, New Zealand or the United States.²²

Other pull factors that had many choose Canada included a “heady optimism” that it was becoming a major world power.²³ This growing status contributed to the Canadian government

¹⁸ Ganzevoort, 25.

¹⁹ Frans J. Schryer, *The Netherlandic Presence in Ontario-Pillars, Class and Dutch Ethnicity* (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1998), 22.

²⁰ Ganzevoort, 37.

²¹ Schryer, 46.

²² Schryer, 47.

²³ Donald H. Avery, *Reluctant Host: Canada’s Response to Immigrant Workers, 1896-1944* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1995), 13.

creating an “expansionist immigration policy in the 1950s and 1960s.”²⁴ For the first time in decades, immigration restrictions were relaxed, and once again, meeting the Canadian government’s criteria as a “desirable group from Western Europe,” Netherlanders were given priority entry to Canada.²⁵ A growing British and European demand for Canadian exports contributed to a labor shortage in Canada’s “core economic sectors of agriculture, mining and lumbering” and a high percentage of Dutch farmers responded to this need. Because they did not initially vie for white-collar or manufacturing jobs, many families readily met conditions set out in the government’s strategies to expand Canada’s agricultural sector.²⁶ Considered unique because of its economic and ideological endorsement by both Canadian and Netherlandic governments, the “Netherlands-Canadian Settlement Scheme” allowed the Dutch diaspora to easily become part of Canada’s farming industry.²⁷ The Settlement Scheme brought 130,000 Netherlanders to Canada and of those, roughly 20,000, comprised primarily of lower to middle class landless farming families, settled in Alberta.²⁸ Funding family transportations costs, the Netherland government contributed to a fourteen-year influx of Dutch families who were willing to put down roots in British Columbia, Manitoba, Quebec and Ontario and Alberta.²⁹

Alberta was not just attractive to Dutch settlement because of its agricultural needs and potential for financial security. Religious and familial connections were important, with some immigrants sponsored by established Dutch Reformed Churches or by relatives who had emigrated prior to the war. Southern Alberta was particularly attractive for the large families

²⁴ Avery, 13.

²⁵ Harold Troper, “Canada’s Immigration Policy since 1945,” *International Journal* 48, no. 2 (Spring, 1993): 260.

²⁶ Troper, 259.

²⁷ Schryer, 44.

²⁸ Howard Palmer and Tamara Palmer, “The Religious Ethic and the Spirit of Immigration: The Dutch in Albertan,” in *Peoples of Alberta-Portrait of Cultural Diversity*, ed. Howard Palmer and Tamara Palmer (Saskatchewan: Western Producer Prairie Book, 1985), 157.

²⁹ Palmer and Palmer, 157.

which were common to adherents of the Dutch Reformed faith, as opportunities to hoe sugar beets included income-earning labour for children. The aphorism that states the true test of a person's character is the ability to withstand times of adversity is particularly applicable to Dutch children whose family structure was such that even younger members were assigned farm-related tasks. Often a contentious point for Alberta education administrators, labour contracts secured with farm owners obliged Dutch children to miss classes and, in some cases, deprived them from attending school for months at a time. Compulsory school acts across Canada eventually regulated the minimum age children must be before leaving school. First enacted in 1910, Alberta's Truancy and Compulsory School Attendance Act required students between the ages of seven and fourteen attend for the full term.³⁰ Conflicting with the need to perform farm-related duties during school months, these regulations often remained unheeded by parents. While teachers and administrators expressed concern about violating the legal requirement to attend school, there existed an unofficial understanding among authorities that children's agricultural labour was integral to ensure families remained viable, self-sufficient economic units.

In addition to the opportunity it offered for family labor and affordable housing, southern Alberta was an ideal destination point for Dutch Reformed families as churches ensured a space where common religious values could be practiced and upheld. First established and constructed by Dutch immigrants over one hundred years ago, southern Alberta's Reformed churches had long served as both a source of spiritual strength and a marker of group identity.³¹ Many Netherlanders who relied on their faith for strength during the Second World War continued to

³⁰ Statistics Canada, "Canadian Compulsory School Laws and their Impact on Educational Attainment and Future Earnings," *Analytical Studies Branch Research Paper Series* by Philip Oreopoulos (May 2005): 10, accessed 23 April 2018. <http://publications.gc.ca/Collection/Statcan/11F0019MIE/11F0019MIE2005251.pdf>

³¹ Palmer and Palmer, 146.

depend on it for guidance during transition to life in Canada. Devout members of the church remained resolute that their religious distinctiveness would persevere during adaptation to life as new Canadians.³² Eager to adapt in many ways – to learn English and to be seen as a hard-working, reliable and law-abiding people, most were unwilling to compromise the role religion played in their lives and in the lives of their children.³³ For some devout members, compromising religious practices generated more apprehension than separating from their homelands.

An important influence on family dynamics, Dutch Reformist tradition required parents ensure church doctrine remained central in family life.³⁴ This meant following key principles as set out in the teachings of Christian theologian and Netherlands Reformed church founder, Abraham Kuyper.³⁵ The Christian Reformed tradition centres on the tenet that faith is fundamental to one's mortal and eternal existence and salvation is attainable only through God's grace.³⁶ Following traditional Reformed orthodoxy involves denouncing any form of theological liberalism and places a "huge emphasis on the sovereignty of God and accepting that God is in control."³⁷ Believed to be spiritual governors, parents were to ensure, among other things, children's participation in catechism classes to keep the concept of God's grace through daily prayer.³⁸ Practicing their commitment to Christian Reformed doctrine, these Dutch parents taught God's law to their children.³⁹ In southern Alberta as elsewhere, Christian Reformed

³² Palmer and Palmer, 168.

³³ Palmer and Palmer, 162.

³⁴ Brian Kuyper, Pastor, Taber Christian Reformed Church, interview by Elaine Toth, Taber, Alberta, June 8, 2016.

³⁵ In addition to uniting Dutch Calvinists under the church name *De Gereformeerde Kerken*, Abraham Kuyper (unrelated to Pastor Brian Kuyper) was also Prime Minister of the Netherlands between 1901 and 1905.

³⁶ Kuyper interview.

³⁷ Kuyper interview.

³⁸ Kuyper interview.

³⁹ Papworth interview.

families supported one of Kuyper's most notable quotations, "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, mine!"⁴⁰ Family structure dictated that, even as immigrants, children would continue to respect parental authority and adhere to religious practices whilst adapting to new social and cultural constructs.

Embedded in an unwavering family and group ethos, literature on Dutch immigrant history characteristically highlights religious practices. Referencing the significance of religion in the lives of immigrant families, anthropologist Caroline Brettell states, "in the absence of residential concentration, it is the collective activities in institutions that provide the context for ethno-religious consciousness."⁴¹ In other words, families will often seek out existing churches and unite with strangers who share common religious affiliations. This was particularly true for post-Second World War Dutch migrants to southern Alberta whose immigrant status did not alter their commitment to following traditional religious practices.⁴² Sunday church services, well-attended and inclusive of children, provided a God-centered, conservative environment for worship and socialization. Whereas school and work surroundings might subject children to practices conflicting with Reform teachings (such as card playing, dancing and contemporary music), church activities were approved settings for interaction with others their own age and of the same religious background. Worshipping and socializing with established local congregations allowed newly arrived immigrant families to connect with those who shared their

⁴⁰ Kuyper interview.

⁴¹ Caroline B. Brettell, "Theorizing Migration in Anthropology-The Social Construction of Networks, Identities, Communities and Globalscapes," in *Migration Theory-Talking Across Disciplines*, editors Caroline B. Brettell and James F. Hollifield (New York: Routledge, 2008): 134.

⁴² Palmer and Palmer, 157.

religious beliefs. It also provided opportunities to empathize and strategize about shared experiences and challenges associated with uprooting and resettlement.

Discussing the manifestation and preservation of culture and tradition, Brettell also notes that “religious activities may be more prominent as markers of identity abroad than they are at home.”⁴³ This seemed true for the collective identity of Dutch immigrant families who often openly emphasized their adherence to the Christian Reformed religion to community members and employers. Motivated to build alliances with others who shared their beliefs and values, church members used their linguistic, religious and cultural ties to develop links with other members of their community in southern Alberta. In this respect, immigrant members of Dutch Reformed communities in post-Second World War southern Alberta belonged to what Benedict Anderson calls an “imagined community.”⁴⁴ Anderson’s theory can be used to think about how an immigrant creates space and place in their host society. He argues, “Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined.”⁴⁵ Regardless of the social and cultural differences between Dutch immigrants and other factions of the population, religion provided a way to ‘imagine’ space and place in Canadian society. Inspired by a shared religious and ethnic unity, Dutch men, women and children, many of whom were previously strangers to one another, reached beyond political boundaries to produce an image of communion and a sense of belonging.

⁴³ Brettell, *Migration Theory-Talking Across Disciplines*, 134.

⁴⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities-Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London: Verso, 2006), 6.

⁴⁵ Anderson, 6.

Purpose

Southern Alberta has a rich history of Netherlanders whose childhood experiences can be analyzed in meaningful ways to draw attention to what life was like during settlement periods. The decision to focus solely on a child's perspective originated after the first interview with Rita, who revealed that, while she was adjusting to life in her new world, she was also redefining herself in relation to family expectations and roles at school and work. From this perspective, a strategy emerged with children reframed as individuals who, in addition to contributing to family processes, actively took part in creating and managing their own space and place in Canadian society. While overarching cultural practices contributed to a certain amount of homogeneity amongst these children, their testimonies also reveal individual experiences that were much more nuanced than is often portrayed in historical research.

Chapter One focuses mainly on methodology and epistemology. It demonstrates that oral history testimonies are crucial and underused sources of information for historians of childhood and youth, immigration and migration and southern Alberta. Because this thesis argues for the exigency of recording firsthand accounts, it reveals the capacity for the oral history interview to disclose intimate details about children's lives as new members in their host society. In addition to outlining how and why participants were recruited for interviews, this chapter addresses some of the challenging and rewarding aspects of using oral history as a research method and identifies how its controversial features are both embraced and critiqued within academia. Proceeding with the awareness that it is often subjected to scrutiny, discussions of practical considerations and theory confronts oral history's complex nature while highlighting memory, performance and power relations. This chapter shows that, despite its complexities and criticisms, the interview

process is imperative in its capacity to bring personal stories to the forefront of immigrant histories.

Chapter Two introduces notions of identity, agency and emotion as they relate to childhood studies and childhood immigration. Described as a means to “appreciate children’s active contribution to the shaping of their social worlds and to society,” childhood agency research is a platform to reverse conceptions of children as exclusively passive recipients requiring care and protection.⁴⁶ Shedding light on the child immigrant as participatory (in terms of family dynamics) and agentic (in terms of the varied ways independent behaviour was negotiated), this chapter also includes key issues related to the role of social milieus and demands put on children to construct identity while adapting to new surroundings. By paying attention to a wide range of behaviours, there is opportunity to critically reflect on the child immigrant voice and its influence on family and household. Exploring the intersection of emotion and child immigration, this chapter also looks at the extent to which notions of happiness influenced actions and reactions to parental authority and other restrictions encountered during initial periods of adjustment. Adding an intriguing dimension to the history of childhood through the history of emotions, this approach “allows us to access children’s agency and children’s voices in a new way.”⁴⁷

Chapter Three adds more detailed analysis to testimonies that are rife with emotion and personal reflection. By further exploring how families were organized, gender and age distinctions are brought forward, allowing us to understand more fully what it meant to be a child

⁴⁶ Florian Esser, Meike S. Baader, Tanja Betz, Beatrice Hungerland, “An Introduction,” in *Reconceptualising Agency and Childhood-New Perspectives in Childhood Studies*, editors Florian Esser, et al. (New York: Routledge, 2016), 1.

⁴⁷ Stephanie Olsen, “Introduction,” *Childhood, Youth and Emotions in Modern History-National, Colonial and Global Perspectives*, edited by Stephanie Olsen (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 3.

immigrant. The inherent value in hearing and then preserving life stories such as the ones highlighted in this section, is in their ability to bring a new voice into a reality that occurred decades ago. Reciting stories, that for years may have been silenced, can be a conflicting process for the individual connecting to his or her past, especially if discussing family members who are no longer alive. While there may be an emotional cost, it is this humanistic approach that allows childhood histories to be brought in from the fringe and further “embrace the messiness of human experience and interaction.”⁴⁸

Literature Review

While there is literature available on the Dutch-Canadian post-war relationship, on Dutch immigrant families working in sugar beet fields, and on the significance and history of Dutch religious practices in Canada, studies specific to the experiences of post war Dutch immigrant children do not exist. More recent research is beginning to shed light on how immigrant families merged homeland traditions with host country practices, however, for the most part, children remain indistinguishable members of a family or group in the historiography, their perspectives conspicuously absent. Addressing the central question of how immigrant traditions contribute to, and shape Canadian history, contemporary articles such as “Migration is an Essential Part of Canada’s Historical Narrative” by Jack Jedwab, “Immigrants’ Stories of Setbacks and Resilience Keep Re-Writing and Enriching Our National Narrative” by Randy Boswell, and “Citizenship and Belonging to Canada: Religious and Generational Differentiation” by Lloyd L. Wong and Roland R. Simon, reflect on how a multicultural society works to reconcile the

⁴⁸ Anna Sheftel and Stacey Zembrzycki, “Introduction,” in *Oral History Off the Record-Toward an Ethnography of Practice*, editors Anna Sheftel and Stacey Zembrzycki (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 7.

cultural differences of its population.⁴⁹ These articles and others like them, call attention to cultural and societal contributions made by immigrant communities, and provide an operational framework to start looking at the vital roles children occupy in family processes. As individual family migrant stories are more fully recognized for their important contribution to Canadian history, there is better opportunity for children's voices to rise to the forefront in scholarly research.

Growing interest in the wide-ranging effects of migration on host country population dynamics is accompanied by a rising global concern for migrant children in economic, social, and political matters. The 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is a universal standard and has been a significant contributing factor towards widespread recognition of children "as human beings with a distinct set of rights instead of as passive objects of care and charity."⁵⁰ Immigrant children or, as frequently labelled in today's vernacular, uprooted children, are at the heart of many current news stories, video streams and social media sites. Unfortunately, while their experiences are increasingly viewed as noteworthy, most reports fail to include viewpoints from children themselves. A report from the United Nations News Center dated December 15, 2017 states, "Some 50 million children are on the move worldwide, and if countries follow best practices to ensure their safety and well-being, 2018 could be a landmark year for migrant children."⁵¹ Drawing attention to those who are forced into unsafe situations,

⁴⁹ Jack Jedwab, "Migration is an Essential Part of Canada's Historical Narrative," *Canadian Issues/Thèmes Canadiens*, (Spring 2017): 13-17. Randy Boswell, "Immigrants' Stories of Setbacks and Resilience Keep Rewriting and Enriching Our National Narrative," *Canadian Issues/Thèmes Canadiens*, (Spring 2017): 5-8. Lloyd L. Wong and Roland R. Simon, "Citizenship and Belonging to Canada: Religious and Generational Differentiation," *Canadian Issues/Thèmes*, (Spring 2009): 3-14.

⁵⁰ UNICEF–For Every Child, "Convention on the Rights of the Child", accessed April 30, 2018, <https://www.unicef.org/crc/>

⁵¹ "Protection, well-being of uprooted children must be central to new global migration compact–UNICEF," UN News, accessed March 3, 2018, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2017/12/639672-protection-well-being-uprooted-children-must-be-central-new-global-migration#.WlkJQ6inG70>.

these projected numbers include children who are part of families that voluntarily leave homelands with hopes to rebuild their lives.⁵² The motivation for researchers to explore and document children's migrant experiences is heightened as predictions for increased global movement is becoming a reality.⁵³ While recognition is growing for the number of children that will be on the move, many family migration studies continue to present children as "things transported by adults," unable to participate in migration processes.⁵⁴ This conjures an image of children as burdensome rather than as actors capable of engaging with their new world. Whether involuntarily uprooted or freely departing to begin anew, attention to childhood adversity is timely and warrants intervention using the child's voice as a starting point.

The young subjects of this study, like many migrants today, were involved in the labour market from a young age. As such, this thesis also draws on recent momentum in studies on child labour history. These often recognize school-aged children as contributors to the Canadian workforce, in particular to blue collar family survival. For example, historians Bettina Bradbury and John Bullen look at economics and other extenuating circumstances that affected the choices families made to have their children earn income.⁵⁵ Along the same line, a Statistics Canada Research Paper on the history of compulsory schooling in Canada acknowledges that the, "needs of the farm often dictated the frequency and timing of school attendance...and, politicians saw

⁵² Acknowledging the complexities attached to "voluntariness" in theories of migration, this thesis uses the term voluntary to refer to those who leave their home country in response to perceived economic opportunity, not because a government or authority forces them to leave. Ottonelli, Valeria, and Tiziana Torresi, "When is Migration Voluntary?" *International Migration Review* 47, no. 4 (Winter, 2013): 783-813.

⁵³ UN News, accessed March 3, 2018.

⁵⁴ Madeleine E. Dobson, "Unpacking Children in Migration Research," *Children's Geographies* 7, no. 3 (August 2009): 356.

⁵⁵ Bettina Bradbury, "Canadian Children Who Lived with One Parent in 1901," in *Household Counts: Canadian Households and Families in 1901*, edited by Peter Baskerville and Eric Sager (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006): 247-301. Bullen, John, "Hidden Workers: Child Labour and the Family Economy in Late-Nineteenth-Century Urban Ontario," *Labour/Le Travail* 18 (Fall 1986): 163-187.

public schooling as a means to cultivate a sense of citizenship and loyalty.”⁵⁶ Studies like these that recognize intricacies in the lives of working class families, and represent children as necessary and active participants in a family’s economic success, lay the groundwork for a new approach towards understanding the nature of child immigrant life.

Other significant factors to consider are how religion and cultural identity shape a migrant family’s decisions and experiences. Because this project focuses on how immigrant children’s lives were influenced by cultural and faith-based belief systems, it also draws on research about Dutch people as a collective. Sources that identify the traditional structure of Dutch families are important, as they address fundamental components of who Netherlanders’ are, sometimes referencing behaviour going back hundreds of years. Frequently referred to as “Dutchness,” group trajectories are more widely documented than the individual self.⁵⁷ The following three studies, aside from noting that Dutch immigrant families arrived with children, do not focus on a child’s life as separate from their parents. They do, however, stress the importance of family cohesion and familialism during adjustments to Canadian social, cultural, and economic structures and show how Dutch-Canadians persevered as a group to ensure commitment to traditional belief systems.

First, focusing on the periods beginning in the late nineteenth century and ending in the mid-twentieth century, Howard Palmer and Tamara Palmer track three waves of Dutch immigration to Canada, each one stressing an unwavering group ethos, that they argue, was manifested through family cohesion and adherence to religious doctrine. “Families” they write, “acquired a reputation for being hard-working, reliable and law abiding.”⁵⁸ Second, Frans

⁵⁶ Statistics Canada, 7.

⁵⁷ Schryer, 15. Frans Schryer uses the term “Dutchness” to refer to “hard work, perseverance, tidiness, strong family bonds and an ability to fit in,” 284.

⁵⁸ Palmer and Palmer, 162.

Schryer argues that, despite loss of homeland, cultural traditions were significant when adjusting to Canadian social constructs. His interviews with over six hundred Dutch-Canadians who immigrated to Ontario between 1947 and 1960, demonstrate that "...post-war Dutch immigrants and their descendants formed social networks within institutions most closely representing those in which they were involved in the old country."⁵⁹

Third, also referencing the separate waves of Dutch immigration to Canada, Herman Ganzevoort focuses on ethnicity and its influence on integration. Despite having interviewed thousands of Dutch settlers and mentioning the importance of referencing first-hand accounts, Ganzevoort misses the opportunity for individual voices to be heard by seldom citing oral testimonies in his written work. He writes, "Whether these occasions were formal interviews, complete with recorder and notebook, or simple chats over coffee, they all helped to build a strong sense and understanding of the human dimension of migration."⁶⁰ Referencing the large size of most Dutch families, his study is similar to others in that, while categorising children as valued members, leaves their specific roles and contributions sparse and seldom deliberated.

It is important to acknowledge that the lives of the ten interviewees' in this project were shaped, not just by family, ethnic background and religion, but by the devastation of the Second World War. Scholars who critically examine the effects of war on the child lay a foundation for the importance of tracing children's wartime and post-war experiences. Using a critical lens to chart how children faced their new realities both during and after periods of great trauma, the following three historians ask key questions: How did leaving one's country shape, influence and define identities? How did they adapt to new surroundings? How did children demonstrate

⁵⁹ Schryer, 317.

⁶⁰ Herman Ganzevoort, *A Bittersweet Land: The Dutch Experience in Canada, 1890-1980* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988): 3.

emotion? How did children negotiate space and place? Were children subjects of post-war nationalist agendas associated with universal rights of the child?

First, Tara Zahra shows how post-Second World War humanitarian movements were designed to safeguard displaced children from future persecution and violence while becoming central to nation-building projects and what she calls the “biological and political future of national communities.”⁶¹ Her use of archival documents and memoirs examines the psychological damage occurring from, among other things, family separation, and highlights the need for a child’s place in war-related historical literature. Next, looking at the social history in St. John’s, Newfoundland during the Second World War, Barbara Lorenzkowski accesses the child’s voice through oral history interviews and draws on memories of those who recall how their hometown was transformed into a military setting to accommodate soldiers and other army and navy personnel. Caught up in extraordinary circumstances, adults describe what it was like to grow up in a wartime city consumed with tension, overcrowding and chaos. Focusing on age and gender distinctions, which often had boys and girls appropriating social space and place differently, Lorenzkowski draws connections to the physical environment and states “Put simply, place mattered in the shaping of the social worlds of childhood.”⁶² Third, gaining access to children’s voices through letters written during the Second World War, Claire Halstead articulates their experiences of forced departure from Britain to reside with families unknown to them in Canada. She writes, “accessing the children’s voices remains critical, however, and here

⁶¹ Tara Zahra, *The Lost Children-Reconstructing Europe’s Families After World War II* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 20.

⁶² Lorenzkowski, 149.

scholars can turn to a cache of documents offering valuable insights into children's own perspectives."⁶³

In addition to referencing the above-noted historical works, inter-disciplinary sources were also important to this project in their capacity to provide context and aid in avoiding potential research pitfalls associated with a limited or narrow perspective on children and childhood studies. Anthropological and sociological sources that study the effects of migration are important to aspects of childhood identity, agency and concepts of space and place. The select few mentioned examine a contemporary context that is different from post-war Alberta, however they nonetheless offer useful theoretical and methodological insights. In "Transnational Childhoods-The Participation of Children in Processes of Family Migration," the focus is on "children's presence and participation in processes of migration."⁶⁴ Children are represented as influencing or participating in family decisions affecting migration which opens discussions on aspects of childhood agency. Using case studies from Mexico, Central America, Korea and Yemen, anthropologist-educators, Orellana, Thorne, Chee, and Lam argue that, while adults possessed final authority, children were central to the decision-making processes, and "fundamentally shaped the nature and course of families' migration experiences."⁶⁵

Conclusion

Using oral history interviews, this thesis enriches our understanding of child migration after the Second World War by capturing personal memories. By contextualizing each

⁶³ Claire L. Halstead, "Dear Mummy and Daddy: Reading Wartime Letters from British Children Evacuated to Canada During the Second World War," in *Children, Childhood and Youth in the British World*, editors Shirleene Robinson and Simon Sleight (United Kingdom: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), 94.

⁶⁴ Marjorie Faulstich Orellana, Barrie Thorne, Anne Chee, and Wan Shun Evan Lam, "Transnational Childhoods: The Participation of Children in Processes of Family Migration," *Social Problems* 48, no. 4 (November 2001): 587.

⁶⁵Orellana, et al., 587.

experience in terms of social, economic and religious backgrounds, consideration is given to a child's capacity to cope with settlement as they became part of their new communities.

Recognizing children as active participants, this thesis argues that young Dutch immigrants to post Second World War southern Alberta should be understood as independent beings, capable of exercising agency, negotiating space, and effecting resilient behaviour. Ultimately, through a small group of adults who were post-war Dutch immigrant children, this project contributes to a broader understanding of childhood immigrant histories by exploring strategies during adaptation to new surroundings. The recall of childhood memories is not meant to be definitive, rather it is an intimate reflection on the self, each story unique in its reconstruction.

Chapter 1 - Stories to Be Told – Immigrant Childhoods and the Practice of Oral History

Most often represented as a uniform, cohesive group, Dutch family immigrant histories focus largely on the adult experience. Because this thesis was motivated by the absence of children's own views about their immigrant experience, relying on archived sources and textual documents written *by* researchers *about* child migrants would undermine the very thing I argue is lacking in immigrant historiographies. Unique in its ability to capture intricate details linked to agency and emotion, the creation of an oral record, even from a small number of those who lived through the challenges of integration, addresses a gap in this part of immigrant research.

Interviews are contextualized within post-second World War immigrant historiographies, and, with an emphasis on family traditions, religious beliefs, identity and agentic behaviour, they reveal how children positioned themselves during adaptation to life in Canada. Following the example set by the work of E.P Thompson to tell "history from below," these detailed personal narratives are compelling in the ways they help to sharpen awareness on what it was like to be a Dutch child immigrant.⁶⁶ As memories were reworked, re-invented and re-told, analyses of these ten interviews strove to unveil a myriad of ways personal experiences live on in one's mind while adding individual voice to dominant historical discourses.

While there is a considerable expanse of literature on the mandatory ethical practices when using human subjects both during and after recruitment, procedures on how best to acquire participants for a qualitative oral history project such as this one, are not addressed in any type of comprehensive manner. This meant I had free rein on how I would enlist participants. Shortly after applying for and receiving approval from the University of Lethbridge's Office of Research Ethics and the Human Subject Research Committee, recruiting interviewees began with the

⁶⁶ E.P. Thompson, "History from Below," *The Times Literary Supplement*, (April 1966): 279-280.

placement of a poster in the Lethbridge Historical Society's on-line newsletter. Wording was as follows:

University of Lethbridge graduate student looking for Dutch women and men who were born between the years 1935 to 1955 and immigrated from the Netherlands to Alberta between the years 1947 to 1961; are willing to be interviewed about their childhood immigrant experience; are comfortable being interviewed in English.⁶⁷

I was optimistic this tactic would prompt at least a few phone calls or e-mails, however, it did not generate even one response. While developing alternate plans to reach out to the community for participants, unbeknownst to me, the Historical Society placed my poster on their Facebook page. Facebook's popularity as a wide-reaching marketing medium meant that news quickly spread and either by personal access or through 'messaging' by friends and family, there was an outpouring of telephone and e-mail enquiries. The extent to which southern Alberta was a destination point for Dutch families after the war meant there existed numerous adult participants who were once newly-landed child immigrants from decades past. Over thirty individuals responded on the first day and by the end of the week, the number rose to over fifty.

My conversations with those who replied by phone conveyed that it was the emphasis on their childhood immigrant experience a departure from research focused on family or adult history, that prompted their curiosity in the project. This hints that the lack of children's accounts in migration literature is not because of an unwillingness or inability to recall the past, but instead due to an absence of interest on behalf of researchers. Indeed, the number of people who responded on the first day are a reliable indication of how many are keen to record their life stories. While unexpectedly stumbling upon a wealth of valuable participants, in order to offer an

⁶⁷ Lethbridge Historical Society Newsletter, accessed July 10, 2019, <https://digitallibrary.uleth.ca/digital/collection/lhs/id/4249>

in-depth analysis, interviews were limited to ten, the first one already completed with my paternal aunt. I selected nine more who fit into the specifications as laid out in the poster. I found myself growing committed to giving a voice to these individuals whose experiences have remained unrecorded. By examining aspects of these years of their life related to religion, school attendance and traditional cultural practices, these ten interviews had the potential to revise and broaden understanding of children's space and place within the dynamics of family migration.

Because oral historians create their own primary sources by first selecting and then engaging with those who lived through the event in question, the practice is, to say the least, complicated. Asking participants to reach back in time to recall childhood migration experiences is often accompanied by subjective and emotional factors. Advocating for the value in recording past events as relayed by those who lived it requires accepting the biases and critiques that are inevitably part of the oral history interview process. I grew up listening to accounts from those who were once newly-landed post-war immigrants to Alberta, and a result, I am affected by preconceived notions on the topic of Dutch family immigration. I dismiss any pretence of neutrality and agree with Joy Parr's insistence that oral historians are "seeking not objectivity, but a highly disciplined subjectivity."⁶⁸ In a similar vein, anthropologist Victor Turner states, "one can have an objective relationship to one's own subjectivity and therefore can use self-scrutiny to gain greater understanding of the research one is engaged in."⁶⁹

I acknowledge that my role in setting up age-restrictive and/or school-attendance limitations and then selecting only those who fit those parameters, meant a certain narrative would be created. Also, while the script was not in any means intended to be deterministic, my

⁶⁸ Parr, Joy 338.

⁶⁹ Bennetta and Jules-Rosette, *African Apostles-Ritual and Conversion in the Church of John Maranke* (London: Cornell University Press, 1975), 8.

efforts to underscore agentic and resilient behaviours was influenced by firsthand knowledge of trials faced by my own family members. This prompted questions such as: “What was it like to attend school not knowing how to speak or read English?” “How did you negotiate the interruption of school attendance during beet season?” “Did religious restrictions affect interaction with peer groups?” Acknowledging I held influence over the substance of the interview by the questions I asked, I was conscientious to offer each interviewee every opportunity to recall events in their own way.

My Dutch heritage and relationship to members of the Dutch community in Southern Alberta also generated personal concerns about pressure, or feelings of coercion, to consent to an interview, which would likely involve divulging intimate family details. To mitigate this issue, I chose to offer participation to those who did not have a significant connection to me. Aside from the first interview with my aunt, the remaining nine interviewees were people with whom I had no substantive relationship. However, while unfamiliar with me personally, these people were at a minimum, familiar with my family name; three of them knew my father. We were linked, in other words, through a common cultural background and this raises the issue of personal situatedness, sometimes referred to as having ‘insider status.’

Some historians view the ‘insider status’ as detrimental, citing the researcher as partial and therefore, unable to produce objective or credible analysis. Establishing a trusted environment, while at the same time adhering to ethical practices as set out by the University of Lethbridge’s Office of Research Ethics, I have engaged with the subjective nature of the interview process rather than attempt to deny its existence. While my personal history linked me to this area of research and was certainly a tangible component during interviews, upon reflection, it was also the collaboration and like-mindedness between myself and participants that

allowed richer stories to be told. Building on a shared background, the interviewees in this project conveyed meaningful memories and my encounters with participants, while initially strangers, flowed easily from the start.

Lynn Abrams writes that the interview should be an “event of communication which demands that we find ways of comprehending not just what is said, but also how it is said, why it is said and what it means.”⁷⁰ Given that some questions in this project touched on sensitive issues, the development and sustainment of a pedagogy of deep-listening during the interview was crucial. Implicit in the listening imperative is the notion that the interviewer is “listening for meanings, not just facts” which, in turn, develops a rapport between researcher and narrator allowing follow-up questions to evolve.⁷¹ By encouraging participants to record their life history as their own unique memory, a relaxed interaction occurred and stories unfolded naturally. Central to this project’s interview analyses are the teachings of Abrams and other respected oral historians Luisa Passerini, Alexander Freund and Alessandro Portelli, all of whom argue for oral history as “a heuristic device,” and claim it a “unique and precious element” extraordinary in its connectivity to social history analysis.⁷² My attention to the value and norms of using oral history provided me the means to carefully analyze varied responses and while I recognize the validity in each person’s story to hold their own personal truth, I am aware that none are, by any means, a complete version of the post-war child immigration experience.

On the one hand, some scholars claim oral histories are fallible because testimonies cannot always be adequately cross-referenced to other kinds of primary sources such as

⁷⁰ Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 1.

⁷¹ Bronwen Low and Emmanuelle Sonntag, “Listening and Learning with Life Stories of Human Rights Violations,” in *The Canadian Oral History Reader*, editors Kristina R. Llewellyn et. al, (Quebec, McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2015): 272.

⁷² Alexander Freund, “Oral History as Process-Generated Data,” in *The Canadian Oral History Reader*, editors Kristina R. Llewellyn et. al, (Quebec, McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2015): 232.

government publications or manuscript material, and therefore, they render inconclusive results. This argument is countered by those such as myself who contend that, to a certain extent, all historical evidence (diaries, autobiographies, memoirs, and letters), is socially constructed and therefore subject to cross-examination. Rejecting the concept of an objective truth in any type of historical research, most oral historians effectively address credibility criticisms by cross-referencing primary sources and other historical works in their analysis whenever possible.⁷³ Valuing the oral interview for its subjective nature, this thesis adopts this practice and, along with William Cronon's 'historian's rules of evidence' philosophy, refers frequently to peer-reviewed works and other refereed sources.⁷⁴ This project's interview analysis has also benefitted from a theoretical framework that highlights memory, performance and power, as a means to disentangle the complexities of life stories being recorded.⁷⁵ Using a theoretical approach helped to organize children's capacity for personal choice and in turn, drew out instances of independent thought and action.

As previously mentioned, curiosity about a narrative specific to children prompted many participants to respond to the poster on Facebook. While the overarching theme of this project was linked to highlighting some similar aspects within the child immigrant experience (such as those connected to religion and traditional cultural practices), recognizing each person's story as containing personally emotive and distinct memories was also paramount. As well, asking participants to reveal thoughts and details on events occurring fifty to sixty years ago, required addressing some of the intricacies connected with memory recall. Recognizing the nature of

⁷³ Abrams, 81.

⁷⁴William Cronon, "The Life and Work of an Environmental Historian with William Cronon - Conversations with History," *University of California Television*. Filmed June 6, 2013-min 32:22, accessed March 17, 2018, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B1610FkoG7k>

⁷⁵ Abrams, 17.

memory to gradually change over time and therefore sometimes create discrepancies between accounts, it is the value of remembering *in the moment* that highlights oral history's unique ability to capture meaning of past events.

The ways in which personal life stories surface during an interview are unpredictable. The following example reveals how, during a conversation about chores and family routines, Wilhelmina suddenly recalled attending a church-sponsored, social event with Dutch youth. While her response initially centered on her parent's ongoing concern for hers and her sibling's well-being, it then shifted to an uncomfortable memory:

I just didn't fit in, I didn't fit in, because, anyways, this is being, I'm just telling you how I felt (pause) a lot of, (pause) I went to Young People's for while - I don't know, they had picked up the attitude that they were better already - and I'm not better than anybody, but I'm not less than anybody, and they were even more condescending.⁷⁶

A key issue to consider in this example is the nature of the interview setting and its capacity to generate a moment in time. Remembering that personal experiences are at the heart of this project, the focus is on how each participant conveyed their truth or their memory during the interview. For Wilhelmina, delving into childhood memories allowed a range of emotions to come forward. In her case, this encompassed pride when talking about her parents and pensiveness when recalling interactions with her peers. As the Canadian historian Neil Sutherland writes, "childhood is suffused by periods of sadness, embarrassment, shame, fear and intense hatred. Children have a different relationship than adults with their physical selves, with

⁷⁶ Wilhelmina Lichak (nee Bosman), interview by Elaine Toth, Daysland, Alberta, September 12, 2017.

animals, with aspects of the physical world.”⁷⁷ Recognizing its complexity, he adds that, “a memory is really a *reconstruction* of what is being recalled rather than a *reproduction* of it.”⁷⁸

Research shows that when adults recall elements of their childhood, there might be limitations or shortcomings, but it is rare for those interviewed to be deliberately deceitful and it is more likely an accurate recall will occur.⁷⁹ The process of reconstructing a moment in time is a combination of re-experiencing the original event and personal reflection arising in the present from the interview process.⁸⁰ Other research shows that an elderly person’s memory-recall ability is as reliable as that of a younger person, primarily because memories stem from what was most significant in one’s life. In other words, when traumatic, a memory is more firmly retained. The veracity of memory is not dependent on age, but rather the intensity or emotion connected to a specific event or experience. Valerie Yow writes, “in non-depressed people, in good health, in their seventies, eighties and even nineties, there is no difference between them and young adults in vividness of recall of details when the interviewer has given the narrator an open-ended question.”⁸¹

This proved to be true many times over in this project, as interviewees effortlessly described specific details when asked what they remembered about the war. The trauma of hunger, specifically, the Hunger Winter 1944/45, was mentioned numerous times. Despite being four years old, Aris’ memory about this time period and his family’s food shortages were clear:

We were poor, so if we ever got a cookie, it was kind of a big treat.
But anyways, this man came to ask for food, and I saw my mom give
him a stack of cookies about 3 inches, 4 inches high and he took

⁷⁷ Neil Sutherland, “When You Listen to the Winds of Childhood, How Much Can You Believe?” *Curriculum Enquiry* 22, no. 3 (Autumn, 1992): 243.

⁷⁸ Sutherland, 239.

⁷⁹ Sutherland, 237.

⁸⁰ Sutherland, 239.

⁸¹ Valerie Raleigh Yow, *Recording Oral History – A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences*, Plymouth: Altamira Press, 2005, 44.

one bite and he ate them all at once - I couldn't believe that.⁸²

Similarly, when asked to describe her family's cultural practices, in the midst of recalling her mother regularly making soup and rice pudding on Sundays, Anne shifted her focus and remembered a difficult time during the Hunger Winter:

I asked my mother if I could have a piece of bread because I was hungry and she said, "but that's for your brother mo". He was a year and a half younger than me.⁸³

These two examples further illustrate that, despite the gravity of this time in their lives, in the moment, the interview setting was a safe place and allowed a coherent memory and narrative to unfold. Because emotion was often at the core of testimony, participants remembered not only what they themselves endured, but did so in the context of other family members' experiences. Lynn Abrams states, "the memory system does not appear to be able to deal with the recall of emotion particularly well.... the events and experiences that caused the emotion are more likely to be remembered; one exception is traumatic experiences."⁸⁴ Stories in this project came through in different ways, and while emotional reactions were not always visible during the interview, dialogue containing both positive and negative thoughts clearly mapped out the complexities that were distinctive to their lives as immigrant children. Anne vacillated between pride and disappointment regarding her relationship with her father who, it seems, placed more responsibility on her than her siblings because of her role as eldest daughter in the family:

I always had to give my money to my father - I was the only one person contributing anything, because I was the oldest one - so I gave my money - my dad and I, we could have clashes between the two of us, but we always made up and through the end of my life - we always did- there were always clashes,

⁸² Aris Slingerland, interview by Elaine Toth, Lethbridge, Alberta, January 25, 2016.

⁸³ Anne Tanis, interview by Elaine Toth, Picture Butte, Alberta, March 7, 2017.

⁸⁴ Abrams, 87.

but that doesn't really matter, you know the clashes – I think I was like my dad – we talked lots – like always communicated.⁸⁵

Anne's narrative, while intent on not showing disrespect towards her father, highlighted the unfair treatment she remembered and adds to the complex nature of oral history testimony. Speaking further to the internal workings of childhood memory and the complexities of remembering decades later, Neil Sutherland comments on his interview with an eighty-two-year-old woman reflecting on her relationship with her grandmother when she was ten years old. He states, "Only as an adult did the woman have the vocabulary and, indeed, the conceptual and contextual structure that enabled her to put her childhood feelings into words," and further, "if the child had been pushed too hard, too persistently to describe her feelings at the time, that pushing would have made any later effort at accurate recreation even more difficult to accomplish."⁸⁶ Somewhat analogous to Sutherland's example, Shirley revealed the following wartime story in her interview with me: As one of five children, she was only four years old when her father unexpectedly died of illness. Referring to her mother's endurance in caring for her and her four siblings without a husband, she pensively stated, "that day when he passed away – ya, I still have memories of that."⁸⁷ Her eyes tearing up, she reflected on her mother's fortitude in keeping the farm operational and her family together:

We had people hiding in our place that didn't want to go with the Germans to work for them. We needed a lot of help so there were a lot of neighbors that we hid over there, but they were helping us in the meantime – you know with the fieldwork. Mom was never scared, she was always, everything will turn out okay. I think mom was very courageous and we never heard her complain.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Tanis interview.

⁸⁶ Sutherland, 252.

⁸⁷ Shirley Visser interview.

⁸⁸ Shirley Visser interview.

Expressing sorrow on the role her mother was forced into, Shirley's story was guided by her reflection as an adult, and while recalling factual details, she conveyed a depth of understanding that would likely have been unavailable to her as a four-year-old child. Shirley's insight as an adult, into her life as a four-year-old, highlights how personal memories can be put together to form an articulate historical narrative.

Stacey Zembrzycki states, "everyone experiences a time, a place, and a space differently, and that it is only in putting these memories together that we can attempt to reconstruct collectively what ceases to exist."⁸⁹ Often passed from one generation to the next, an awareness of collective memory is useful in analyzing the way individual memories might surface during an interview. Speaking to the relationship between collective narratives and individual memory, Graham Smith states, "remembering can therefore reinforce existing beliefs and further entrench the way we talk about the past," and the "presence of powerful discourses" can affect memories of both the routine, everyday activities and larger topics such as political events.⁹⁰ This applies to much of the history on Dutch immigrants which is frequently written about in a way that emphasises adversity overcome by hard work. A common narrative in Dutch migration literature is as follows: "The Dutch family was often given a small wooden-frame building without insulation or a converted chicken coop."⁹¹ The interviews in this project frequently supported elements of collective memories such as this. For example, when asked to describe his impressions upon arriving in Alberta in 1949, Bert recalled his family of nine being met by a

⁸⁹ Stacey Zembrzycki, "Sharing Authority with Baba" in *The Canadian Oral History Reader*, editors Kristina R. Llewellyn et. al, (Quebec, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015): 65.

⁹⁰ Graham Smith, "Beyond Individual/Collective Memory: Women's Transactive Memory of Food, Family and Conflict," *Oral History* 35, no. 2 (Autumn, 2007): 88.

⁹¹ Schryer, 59.

farmer at the Lethbridge train station at midnight. Escorted to their new home, he remembers being hungry and without access to food until the next day:

We moved into that little house – it was really neglected - there was nothing in the house – no water – there was absolutely nothing there, there was a mattress, not a mattress, but springs – the only thing the farmer supplied was a case of beer.⁹²

Almost all interviewees shared similar memories, describing their first homes as shacks or sheds, with inadequate furniture and no running water or electricity. While details like this are difficult to verify, there is likely some facet of truth to these sentiments as testimonies not only detailed descriptions of their surroundings, but also support what is recorded in most Dutch family immigration narratives. While testimonies like Bert's are sometimes constructed to fit popular cultural and social discourses, it does not mean that interviewees intentionally exploited master narratives to exaggerate their own life stories. Instead, these memories often serve to encourage conversation and inspire narrators to delve deeper into individual versions of the past. For instance, while common representations of inadequate living conditions were brought forward, Bert used this memory as a vehicle to describe the enormity of the challenges his family faced, as well as the strength they exhibited to overcome initial adversity.

This thesis argues for the value of oral history in part because of its strengths in revealing individual and emotional historical truths. Providing the means to push past facts and statistics, this is one of oral history's greatest strengths. As Portelli explains, "the discrepancy between fact and memory ultimately enhances the value of oral sources as historical documents."⁹³ What becomes most important is looking beyond a list of what is often deemed 'factual historical data'

⁹² Brouwer interview.

⁹³ Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History*, (New York: State University, 1991), 26.

and towards a construction of the meaning behind personal stories as a way to reconstruct how children felt, acted and negotiated their sense of self. While individual memory and collective (or official) memories are intertwined, they are not always constructed to correspond with one another. Portelli also refers to how the collective is often upheld as foundational in political and social histories, and states it should remain “a highly ideological and institutional construction, distinct from the memories on which it is based,” and further, “we must not forget, however, that the elaboration of memory and the act of remembering are always individual: persons, not groups, remember.”⁹⁴ While memory is used collectively as means to reconstruct past events, each individual organizes their memories in distinctly personal way, creating a unique truth and an inimitable narrative.

The interviewees in this study were asked not just to remember childhood moments, but also to narrate these moments during the interview. When memories are organized into narratives, incorporating the concept of performative theory helps to create a richer analysis. Performance analysis starts with the oral historian establishing who the narrator considers to be their audience. An interesting dimension to unfolds, as the narrator, who often is “conscious of the need to perform,” presents as an actor within the telling of a memory. The performative act begins as the self is revealed through verbal cues, gestures and facial expressions.⁹⁵ This theory held true in Rita’s interview. Her performance was unique because her role was not that of a stranger, but as my paternal aunt who took on the task of elaborating on our shared family history. How she chose to collaborate with me during the interview reflected performative theory as identified by Abrams who writes, “every speech act is a performance through which

⁹⁴ Alessandro Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia-Oral History and the Art of Dialogue*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997: 157.

⁹⁵ Abrams, 132.

identity is composed by the individual,” and further, “the narrator has no single identity in view to the oral historian – it can be constantly shifting – and by careful pursuit of its variations, important conclusions may be drawn.”⁹⁶

Drawn to Rita for familial reasons as the first interviewee in this project, it was soon evident that her performance would centre on her role as my elder and purveyor of our shared family history. Regardless of my series of prepared questions or my vision of how questions and answers would progress, my aunt piloted the interview. She skillfully and articulately shaped her dialogue in a way that highlighted diligence, work ethic and her religious beliefs. Recalling her life as a twelve-year-old Dutch immigrant to northern Alberta in 1953, Rita detailed complexities associated with being a child immigrant, all of which ultimately influenced and guided my approach in future interviews.⁹⁷ For instance, despite identifying some difficulties during her first few years in Canada, my aunt was determined to emphasize the value of the sum of her life, not a portion thereof. Her experience as a child immigrant did not define her, and while willing to divulge intimate memories, Rita was resolute that she would present herself in a controlled and thoughtful manner as a child who had faced and overcome numerous challenges. This facet proved to be a constant for all other nine participants who were determined their identity would not be measured solely on their experience as a child immigrant, but also as adult survivors.

Gender and identity were key aspects of Rita’s narrative. In her study of women and identity construction, Kristina Llewellyn points out, “Women do not have a coherent self that moves through history with a single identity. Rather, the self is an unstable identity created through accommodation and resistance to the social systems in which it is embedded, both past

⁹⁶ Abrams, 137.

⁹⁷ Papworth interview.

and present.”⁹⁸ Firm in her identity as a survivor, Rita reflected on her experiences as young girl, while using the opportunity to convey her deep-rooted status as a Christian woman. When asked how she processed her newly found role as an immigrant, she referred to values she had been taught by her parents: “What the bible has taught us,” she said in praise of her mother and father, “is how you live, you’re honest, you’re faithful, you’re true and don’t think of yourself only, you think of other people.”⁹⁹

The desire for Rita to perform as family mentor, was matched in significance by Henry’s request that his interview take place at the University of Lethbridge. Seventy-five years old and proudly wearing his Iron Ring signifying a University of Alberta engineering degree, an academic setting enabled his performance to reflect his contemporary identity as a scholar and a professional. Carving out a space for himself as an imaginative, curious and confident young lad, he narrated his time as a childhood immigrant to be an adventure and a learning experience. Providing a thorough knowledge of his family’s history, he presented as a man who took great pride in overcoming obstacles. When asked about what he recalled as most difficult during initial periods of adjustment to life in Alberta, Henry cast himself as fully capable of handling any and all tasks, including learning to speak both English and French with relative ease. Of his teacher’s treatment towards him, he proudly recalled “she used to get me to read to the class because my pronunciation was very good.”¹⁰⁰ Recognizing the performative aspects within each interview, while allowing free-flowing narratives like those of Rita’s and Henry’s to evolve and reflect personal objectives, requires a collaborative effort between participant and interviewer.

⁹⁸ Kristina R. Llewellyn, “Productive Tensions: Feminist Readings of Women Teachers’ Oral Histories,” in *The Canadian Oral History Reader*, editors Kristina R. Llewellyn et. al, (Quebec, McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2015): 153.

⁹⁹ Papworth interview.

¹⁰⁰ Bosman interview.

Introduced by Michael Frisch in 1990, the process of sharing authority challenges historians to collaborate with narrators and build a trusting relationship that works to the benefit of both individuals and, in turn, lessens unequal power relationships.¹⁰¹ The relational dynamics that construct a shared narrative mean the interviewer safeguards each interview as a cooperative process and, along with bringing an element of inquisitiveness to each interview, a willingness to relinquish control.¹⁰² Guided by the questions, but free to deviate from a fixed historical chronology, interviewees are then free to frame their memories in a non-linear, self-reflexive fashion. As the interview environment between myself and participants shifted from being solely inquisitorial to one that could be identified as a shared interaction, the value in adopting this process manifested in the following example. Taking my cue in a somewhat guarded start to an interview with seventy-six-year-old William, I chose to inform him of my immigrant father's stories about strong work ethic and its role in his family's ability to be self-sufficient. This gentle prompting led William to discuss at length his past and present work experience. Crafting his life story in a way that emphasized his belief in a connection between labor and strong moral character, he first spoke about his work in the sugar beet fields as a nine-year-old boy:

I didn't hoe the beets – they didn't have split seeds then so one seed would have say, four or five, so they split down to one bunch – we would crawl behind, that was our job, ya because we were closer to the ground, me and my sister – we were on our hands and knees and we did that.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Abrams, 27.

¹⁰² Joy Parr, "Don't Speak for Me: Practising Oral History amid the Legacies of Conflict," in *The Canadian Oral History Reader*, editors Kristina R. Llewellyn et. al., (Quebec: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015), 335-346. Joy Parr addresses the negative aspects of shared authority when a collaboration is assumed, and whereby the oral historian is seen to advocate on behalf of the narrator. The example given is in the case of interviews with female members of the Ku Klux Klan who were "active in the politics of intolerance, bigotry or hatred." Parr states that in our authority as oral historians, we are but witnesses and, "In this authority, we cannot and must not claim to share." 337.

¹⁰³ Barthel interview.

This was followed by referral to his present-day philosophy on how, in his opinion, each person has an obligation to always contribute to society. He discussed his volunteer work at a local thrift store:

The other day, we were discussing it with somebody, and he said, “you still help out at the thrift store?” and I said “Ya, y health is good, and I am strong enough that I can lift most things, but you know, most of the time in my life, I’ve always enjoyed hard work – it doesn’t matter – but every job can get boring right, so you have to make it interesting – sometimes it’s a rotten job, but somebody’s got to do it. I was telling one of my kids that in my entire working life, I think I was only unemployed for a total of seven days.”¹⁰⁴

A shared interaction centering on family labour and personal fortitude emerged during this part of our interview. William’s feedback was in part, precipitated by the fact that I, the daughter of a Dutch immigrant, was personally invested in the lived experiences of post-war families from the Netherlands. Referred to as an intersubjective relationship, or as the “interpersonal dynamics of the interview situation and the process by which the participants cooperate to create a share narrative,” this is another aspect unique to the oral history interview.¹⁰⁵ When both parties draw upon personal pasts, intersubjective dynamics such as this can steer the participant in a certain direction and further enrich the dialogue. In this case, William wanted to convey his choice as a senior citizen, to continue to work as he had since he was a child. This feature was emphasized as central to his life story.

There are always separate agendas during the actual interview. Oral historians play the role of a professional academic, and while striving for unrehearsed, expressive reflections of the past, their questions are constructed with a specific research goal in mind. Narrators, on the other hand, often have not had a previous opportunity to provide their life story and accessing personal

¹⁰⁴ Barthel interview.

¹⁰⁵ Abrams, 54.

memories creates moments of vulnerability. Oral historians differ on how best to prepare participants for the interview, with some asserting the benefits of furnishing an interviewee with questions prior to the interview thus allowing for a narrative with intricate details. Others contend this creates the opportunity for rehearsed or ‘performed’ answers and does not allow for spontaneous discussion or a natural stimulation of memories. To reach a compromise between the two viewpoints, I chose to share authority by providing participants with a general outline of topics and, along with a few examples of questions for discussion, asked for their input on what I was proposing. Openly expressing my motives for asking certain questions went a long way towards establishing a trusted environment.

Along with interview moments that are rich in detail, there can be times of silence and omission, and these may require the interviewer to reformulate or abandon a line of enquiry. Speaking to the occasional pause or “gaze into the distance,” Neil Sutherland writes, “the wise interviewer greets this silence with silence and not a question.”¹⁰⁶ What goes unsaid can sometimes be connected to power dynamics between narrator and interviewer and it is the oral historian’s task to empower the narrator to continue their story in their own way. However, despite working towards establishing a trusted environment, the process of recalling traumatic events can sometimes be too difficult in the moment. This occurred when I asked Rita to talk about her time as a twelve-year-old at school in Northern Alberta. Aside from identifying difficulties she encountered with one male teacher, her manner of describing her school experience implied that it was tolerable. It changed when I questioned her about relationships with her peers. She stared ahead, grew silent for a moment, again alluding to a non-confrontational environment, then quickly moved onto an unrelated topic.

¹⁰⁶ Sutherland, 250.

Reading the signals in the moment, and not wanting to risk an unrecoverable disconnect, I chose to end this line of inquiry. Our visit extended into the evening and it was during a casual conversation after dinner, long after the recorder was put away, that Rita began talking about being bullied by a group of classmates during lunch hour. She started with, “I was beat up at school.” This was an incident that she was willing to talk about, however, not one she wanted to lend her voice to on a recording. After I returned home, I corresponded with her and asked if she would allow me to write about her experience. She granted me permission.

Mindful of cultural barriers associated with language differences, Rita was also acutely aware that physical factors, such as clothing, were markers of social class. Traditional Dutch Christian Reformed Church practices prohibited girls from wearing, ‘slacks,’ and while she did not openly fault her parents for an unwillingness to compromise, she did mention that it would have been easier on her had she been allowed to wear clothing more similar to the other girls in her class. While a significant memory in her life, her experience as a victim of schoolyard bullying did not fit into the resilient, composed self she wanted to present in the interview. Rita’s ‘off the record’ conversation, while likely painful to recount, revealed a solemn part of her life as a new immigrant.

Silences like Rita’s are a reminder of the complex nature of asking participants to relive emotional memories. While a deeply meaningful part of our time together, the motivation behind her self-censorship remained a private issue, however I can confidently assume that her silence during the interview held profound personal meaning. By later choosing to talk about unpleasant school memories, she exposed part of her child immigrant experience that conveyed how her position in the social world was affected by marked differences. Rita’s experience

illustrates the extent to which child immigrant memories hold untold stories, each one having the potential add to existing discourses on family migration.

The evidence presented in this chapter shows despite being criticized as lacking in reliability, personal life stories are credible historical source documents. Addressing this criticism and other issues faced when practicing oral history, this chapter highlights the recording of childhood memories as necessary to reach beyond what has been written about child immigrant experiences in family migrant literature. Ultimately enhancing the value of personal narratives as part of historical research, the interview process has the capacity to capture memories and bring out details unattainable by most other forms of research methodology.

Chapter 2 – Children as Historical Actors – Centering the Child in Immigration Research

Historical actors are defined by anthropologist Zrinka Blažević as those who “engage in the dynamic and transformative processes which shape their understanding of reality and constitute their experience of the life-world.”¹⁰⁷ Seldom perceived as such, immigrant children are often presented as universally powerless and vulnerable, despite actions and behaviours that prove otherwise. This mindset has been influenced, in part, by a history of child and youth studies that consider childhood to be an “unchanging biological stage of life” rather than “a social and cultural construct that has changed radically over time.”¹⁰⁸ While significant changes in academic thought now more widely recognize that children “must be seen as involved in the construction of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live,” specific attention to the child’s voice in child migration studies seems slower to gain momentum.¹⁰⁹ Supporting a more comprehensive analysis of child migrants, Mariso O. Ensor states, “Increasing concern with agency and context, both in rights-based advocacy and in the social sciences, has led to new approaches to childhood studies and a broadening of interest in children’s lives.”¹¹⁰

Most recently, partly in response to global news stories, documentaries, and social media websites highlighting the political, social, and cultural rights of children, interdisciplinary studies have begun to acknowledge children’s own concepts of their worlds, and as a result, more researchers are beginning to think about children as historical actors. While current scholarship is

¹⁰⁷ Zrinka Blažević, “Historical Actor/Agency from A Praxeological Perspective,” *Croatian Journal of Ethnography and Folklore Research* 48, no. 1(2011): 55.

¹⁰⁸ Steven Mintz, *Huck’s Raft, A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), viii.

¹⁰⁹ Jacqueline Knörr and Angela Nunes, “Introduction,” in *Childhood and Migration-From Experience to Agency*, ed. Jacqueline Knörr (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2005), 11.

¹¹⁰ Mariso O. Ensor, “Understanding Migrant Children: Conceptualizations, Approaches and Issues,” in *Children and Migration-At the Crossroads of Resiliency and Vulnerability*, editors Mariso O. Ensor and Elżbieta M. Goździak (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010): 30.

slowly bringing migrant children further to the forefront, there is still minimal evidence of their personal voices being highlighted in child migrant histories. While listed in official documents and statistical studies according to age and gender, most migration research considers children indistinct or simply as boys and girls who accompanied mothers and fathers to new countries. Justly stated by Jacqueline Knörr and Angela Nunes, “Little is known about children’s particular understanding of (migrant) life, their concepts of their place of origin and their host society, their ways of building identity for themselves.”¹¹¹ This chapter aims to highlight that, despite widely-held assumptions concerning a child’s powerlessness in the immigration process, when their perspective is included, an awareness of their place in the world comes forth from angles not previously considered.

To better comprehend some of the complexities that accompanies centering the child in migration research, it is thought-provoking to discuss the origin of childhood studies in general. While interest in research on children and childhood is traceable to a number of historical junctures, many scholars find the origins of present-day studies to be in Enlightenment thought and an interest in “human nature.”¹¹² Believing humans to be born as blank slates, or *tabula rasa*, Enlightenment thinker John Locke considered children to arrive in the world “without any innate knowledge,” ready to be imprinted or molded into the environment.¹¹³ Countering this notion, contemporary theoretical ethicist John Wall contends Locke’s renowned theory to have had a long-lasting, negative effect on how children are represented in the world. He states that if

¹¹¹ Knörr, 14

¹¹² Anna Mae Dunne, “Introduction,” in *The Children’s Table-Childhood Studies and the Humanities*, editor, Anna Mae Duane, Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2013): 3.

¹¹³ Andrew Bailey, “Introduction to: An Essay Concerning Human Understanding-John Locke,” *First Philosophy-Fundamental Problems and Readings in Philosophy-Volume II-Knowledge and Reality*, editor Andrew Bailey (Toronto, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2004): 60.

children are viewed as incomplete beings or as “property of their parents until they are rational enough to hold rights to self-preservation without harming themselves,” the existence of an interdependent relationship between adult and child goes unseen.¹¹⁴ Further rejecting the concept of Locke’s adult-child binary, Wall counters with a concept he calls ‘childism’, which views children’s perception of human values and/or sense of morality, as instinctive, with each experience being a natural phase in the construction of identity.¹¹⁵ Taking into account variances in geographic and cultural backgrounds, he also contends that by envisioning and representing children as “legitimate subjects of human rights,” a more accurate depiction of the transition from childhood to adulthood is made possible.¹¹⁶

Wall’s philosophy on the adult-child binary and on ‘childism’ is a compelling way to think about how migrant children are often understood and represented. Recognizing the existence of an interdependent relationship between adult and child is particularly important in the migrant families in this project, as working together was essential to earning enough income for survival. This situation differed from what was practiced in most Canadian families during this time period. For example, contrary to most mid-twentieth-century Canadian children whose families prioritized a grade school education, Dutch immigrant families were obligated to focus on financial self-sufficiency and this was, in part, dependent on a child’s ability to perform agricultural labour and contribute to family income. Also, because a patriarchal setting dominated and was a primary building block in most Dutch families, children accepted that their

¹¹⁴ John Wall, “Childism-The Challenge of Childhood to Ethics and the Humanities,” in *The Children’s Table- Childhood Studies and the Humanities*, editor, Anna Mae Duane, Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2013): 79.

¹¹⁵ Wall, 68. John Wall defines childism as, “the effort not only to pay children greater attention but to respond more self-critically to children’s particular experiences by transforming fundamental structures of understanding and practice for all.”

¹¹⁶ Wall, 69.

fathers were in positions of power to make decisions on their behalf, occasionally even after reaching age of majority. Because safeguarding economic security was predicated on seasonal farm work, most post-war Dutch immigrant children did not complete high school.¹¹⁷ Accepting paternalistic control, (which in many families was founded in religious teachings), those interviewed all took pride in attesting to their ability to play an influential role in their family's overall health and well-being.

Using the Dutch child immigrant experience to examine the capacity to act and think independently heeds the often-sensitive relationship that can occur in the context of strong parental authority. Post-war Dutch Christian Reformed children are a compelling group to consider because, while observance of Netherlandic customs continued in the home, exposure to and occasional participation in, conflicting cultural and social practices occurred when at school. This included things such as exposure to contemporary music, watching television, and participating in sporting activities. How children coped with these everyday activities reveals their agency during adaptation to new surroundings.

Some customs and religious beliefs prompted exclusion from peer groups at school. For example, families who practiced the more rigid dogmatic teachings of the Gereformeerde Kerken denomination did not permit television in the homes, going to the theater, listening to non-hymnal music, or participation in most extra-curricular school events, especially those occurring on a Sunday.¹¹⁸ Notably though, while tied to conservative church law, most families did not intend to have their religious practices infringe on engagement with other aspects of Canadian society, especially those that might cultivate opportunities for economic success. For instance, parents were keen to have their children learn to read, write and speak English, and despite what

¹¹⁷ Schryer, 37.

¹¹⁸ **Gereformeerde Kerken* is sometimes used interchangeably with the term Dutch Reformed Church.

was widely believed by earlier Reformed immigrants throughout North America, post-Second World War Netherlanders soon realized that “remaining a Dutchman proved unnecessary for the preservation of one’s religious identity.”¹¹⁹

While perspectives on migration processes differ from one generation to the next, an emphasis on fitting in, maintaining religious identity and securing a close-knit family has been consistent in the minds of most Dutch immigrants. Frans Schryer notes that because of a significant effort to ‘fit in’, the two previous waves of Dutch immigrants to Canada made the transition easier for post World War Two families.¹²⁰ Despite continuity in these respects, research on Canadian-Dutch ethnic identity shows change since the Second World War and this is partially due to the influence of younger generations.¹²¹ While preserving cultural elements when in the presence of family members, some second and third generation Dutch made the choice to hide their ethnicity in certain social situations, particularly while in school.¹²² Avoiding remonstrance from peers, children who were younger immigrants learned to speak English without a Dutch accent (influenced primarily by lengthier attendance in school), sometimes even prompting self-identification as ‘real Canadians.’¹²³ Developing a new form of Dutch-Canadian identity, Schryer also points out that they were in an unique position because “unlike immigrant groups with a different skin color, most Dutch-Canadians are not subject to racial prejudice.”¹²⁴

¹¹⁹ Vogelaar, 71, 73.

¹²⁰ Schryer, 288.

¹²¹ Schryer, 289.

¹²² Schryer, 289.

¹²³ Schryer, 288.

¹²⁴ Schryer, 288.

These factors occasionally give rise to the argument that the Dutch experience could not have been enduringly harsh, particularly for younger children whose families eventually secured economic success, and in some cases, experienced upward social mobility.¹²⁵ Because it is my intention to argue that the Dutch immigrant child's adjustment to life in Canada was not more difficult than an adult's, but rather distinctive in its own right, it is useful to consider how cultural practices, religion and parental authority influenced children's agency. The ways authority shaped how children behaved, both in the home and away from home it, will be further explored in Chapter Three.¹²⁶

The significance of cultural practices is an important backdrop when considering identity formation. Mid-twentieth-century anthropologist Margaret Mead drew widespread attention with her study of cultural conditioning and its effect on identity formation.¹²⁷ Arguing for the "tremendous role played in an individual's life by the social environment in which each is born and reared," she countered popular notions of the time surrounding theories of biological determinism.¹²⁸ Her work has been influential in its conviction of the powerful effect of cultural influences in developing the self. Once believed predisposed according to innate qualities, identity formation is now widely regarded as influenced by language, discourse, environment, and relation to others.¹²⁹ Perceiving identity as a "cultural construction, leading to the linguistic expression of the self that is the product of narration," interviewees in this project were encouraged to reflect on the self as influenced and modified through interaction with unfamiliar cultural practices and social relationships.¹³⁰

¹²⁵ Schryer, 289.

¹²⁶ Age and gender influence within the family setting are addressed in more detail in Chapter Three of this thesis.

¹²⁷ Margaret Mead, *Coming of Age in Samoa-A Psychological Study of Primitive Youth for Western Civilization* (United States of America: William Morrow & Company, 1928), 4-5.

¹²⁸ Mead, 5.

¹²⁹ Abrams, 36.

¹³⁰ Abrams, 36.

When asked to describe one of their first memories upon arrival, participants often reflected on their identity as a child immigrant in the context of personal family details. For example, Rita's characterization of herself as provider is revealed as she described her family's situation:

I didn't finish school – I was fourteen by that time – then my dad became ill...my parents didn't tell me much, but we had to move away from the farm, and I ended up going to work at the age of fourteen. There was no choice. Not any.¹³¹

Presenting herself as essential to her family's subsistence, she touched on an intricate part of her identity as a wage-earner while outlining how traditional ties to parental authority shaped her young life. Adding to the economic factors that frequently required compromise between family life, school and work, social pressures also posed unique challenges. Discussing issues of cultural belonging in unfamiliar surroundings, Nadina Christopoulou and Sonja De Leeuw write, "cultural identity is negotiated and redefined in the new place, even when the ties to the ethnic or religious background are strictly maintained."¹³² Further analyzing the unstable nature of the self during periods of disruption and displacement, they also state, "the process of identity building is a continuous process that involves a permanent redefinition of oneself in relation to others."¹³³ For these Dutch child immigrants, a desire to become an 'ideal' Canadian citizen was initially an intricate undertaking as tradition and church doctrine frequently preserved Netherlandic customs in everyday life. While traditional behaviours were more easily heeded inside the home, during

¹³¹ Papworth interview.

¹³² Nadina Christopoulou and Sonja de Leeuw, "Children Making Media. Constructions of Home and Belonging," in *Childhood and Migration-From Experience to Agency*, ed. Jacqueline Knörr (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2005), 129.

¹³³ Christopoulou and de Leeuw, 134.

interactions at school, with peers, or with colleagues at work, exposure to alternate lifestyles and cultural practices often required negotiating between the old and the new.

This is highlighted in Wilhelmina's experience as a sixteen-year-old at a Lethbridge high school. Wanting her life story recorded in a way that emphasized her identity as a survivor, she remained adamant she not be represented as a victim. Like most immigrant children during this time period, Wilhelmina was initially placed in a classroom with students two years younger than herself. Succinctly summing up her school experience, she stated:

All those girls had their own friends already – I was different – an outsider – and they were younger - I never did get acquainted – never developed any friendship, no, no I never did.¹³⁴

Despite having to yield to teachers and administrators, who, she conceded, held power in an official capacity, her interview revealed how she began to develop a new sense of identity.

Asserting herself at school, she intertwined her life in the Netherlands with her Canadian school experiences. She stated:

What I noticed, and again, it might have been just my surroundings where I grew up, when I came here, I noticed a difference between boys and girls, meaning the girls were inferior to the boys. And, not where I come from...not when I went to school, not in my surroundings. There was no reason why I should be the dumbest in the class, just because I didn't speak English.....at Christmastime I had to write departmentals and I got honors in English! I'm proud of that.¹³⁵

There are interesting parallels to draw between immigrant experiences like Wilhelmina's and immigration studies focusing on children's identity and belonging in time periods other than post-Second World War. Through ethnographic fieldwork with immigrant children from the former West-Berlin, Sabine Mannitz found that, despite being migrant minorities and having to

¹³⁴ Lichak interview.

¹³⁵ Lichak interview.

cope with the competing cultures they lived amongst, children created personal space and identity. Defining it as “a form of self-empowered agency,” she states, “children overcame various forms of polarization” by creating a “transnational space for either imagining or escaping collectivity.”¹³⁶ This seemed true for Wilhelmina as she created a space for herself that focused on her skills as a student and in this way triggered a certain degree of agentic behaviour. She discussed how quickly she learned to read, write and speak English and this led to her request that she be moved up a grade:

It was very fast because after three weeks, one of the subjects was you had to imagine you were gone to England and you had to write a letter home – that was the assignment – so I go home, I take out an airmail paper, I write a letter, put it in an envelope, hand it in and three weeks later I came back to school and the teacher read it out loud to the class and I made no spelling mistake!

When I got my report card in January, I went to see Mr. Miller and I said “I’d like to go to grade nine,” and just like that there was no problem there.¹³⁷

Other studies involving contemporary school-aged immigrant children also speak to securing a sense of belonging. In her research focused on the lives of school-aged immigrant youth living with precarious legal status in Toronto, Julie Young says, “School-based friendships had mixed effects: at times they helped the youth feel like they belonged, but at other times, they brought out the ways in which they felt like ‘outsiders’.”¹³⁸ Young’s findings, based on contemporary immigrant experiences, are compelling to consider because, despite a different time period, childhood testimonies parallel the Dutch immigrant children interviewed in this

¹³⁶ Sabine Mannitz, “Coming of Age as ‘The Third Generation’ - Children of Immigrants in Berlin,” *Childhood and Migration-From Experience to Agency*, Bielefeld, Transcript: Verlag, 2005, 44.

¹³⁷ Lichak interview.

¹³⁸ Julie Young, “This Is My Life: Youth Negotiating Legality and Belonging in Toronto,” in *Producing and Negotiating Non-Citizenship-Precarious Legal Status in Canada*, ed. Luin Goldring and Patricia Landolt (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013):116.

study. The kinds of challenges that resonated from relationships with teachers, peers and securing a sense of belonging seem to span over decades. In her study on child migrants, Evelyn Arizpe found that when asked to reflect on initial periods of adjustment, children used the opportunity to “reclaim a particular identity as emigrants.”¹³⁹ Underscoring their capacity to empathize with fellow migrants, she found there was a tendency amongst children to stress experiential knowledge as consideration of the changes taking place in their lives. Wilhelmina’s memory of a conversation with a Japanese student in her class highlight this theory:

I think it might have been in grade eleven – Kas Kado was her name and she asked me “did you experience any discrimination?” and I said I did not – and I asked her “did you?” “yes – do you know that Eaton’s does not hire Japanese people?” Next time I went to Eaton’s, I went through the whole place – not one Japanese person.

She brought it up to me – yes, she asked me because we were the only foreigners in the school.¹⁴⁰

While expressing empathy for her school friend, Wilhelmina chose to avoid labelling her ‘outside status’ as connected to discrimination. She adamantly stated:

I did not know the word – I just thought that teachers either liked you or they totally disliked you – I thought it was just ignorance – they did not know how to handle me.¹⁴¹

Wilhelmina’s body language indicated she wanted to move on from this part of the interview. It was more important that she present as capable to meet the demands of the new world rather than focusing on others and their negative impressions. All interviewees re-stated the importance of their family’s moral character and worthiness of becoming Canadian citizens.

¹³⁹ Evelyn Arizpe, et al., *Visual Journeys Through Wordless Narratives-An International Inquiry with Immigrant Children and The Arrival* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc., 2015): 103.

¹⁴⁰ Lichak interview.

¹⁴¹ Lichak interview.

Interviewees were intent on exposing both the hardships and successes that were foundational to their family's ability to sustain financial independence and thus avoid the need for government intervention or, as termed by some, 'handouts.' It is important to point out that while outsiders might view Dutch Reform religious practices as restrictive, those interviewed expressed affection towards church doctrine in its capacity to nurture and preserve their culture, even when negotiating identity between private and public spaces. Referring to the need to balance church attendance with work responsibilities, Abe discussed an encounter with an employer:

We worked six days a week – it was nothing on Sunday – We had a farmer that came in there one time late on a Saturday afternoon – I had worked for ten hours already and he said, "I've got a job lined up for you tomorrow," I said, "Ken I don't work Sundays anytime of the day – anytime of the night, if you want something fixed, I'll fix it, but not on Sundays."¹⁴²

Interviewees generally steered the conversation away from instances that placed religious practices in a negative light. There is the possibility that sharing feelings attached to their religion with an outsider such as myself, particularly in a recorded interview, would be considered disrespectful or even sacrilegious. More interested in self-identifying as tenacious, the desire to direct the conversation towards independent behaviour and cultivating a sense of belonging in Canada is best exemplified in Shirley's comments:

We came to Canada and we wanted to work, because we were going to make it, right? We weren't going to hold out our hands to the government, we were going to make it.¹⁴³

It is in profound moments like this that childhood memories are revealed as useful tools for analyzing agentic behaviour. This next section discusses theories on agency as well as how

¹⁴² Abe Visser interview.

¹⁴³ Shirley Visser interview.

children perceive of and express independent thought and action. Aware of the intricacies attached to postulating children as historical actors, the intention here is not to limit the definition of agency to instances of defiance or non-compliance, but instead to employ a holistic approach that sees each person in the wider context of relationships with family, religion and society. Again, children faced adaptation in different, but equally challenging ways, and presenting them as active in the migration experience is not meant to create a polarity between adult and child, but rather, to highlight how initial periods of adjustment may have differed.

Studying children and historical agency raises caveats that are worth mentioning. Shown most clearly in its subjects' emphasis on tenacity and strength, this thesis perceives children's agency as broader and more expansive than solely in instances of rebellion. Moving beyond childhood research that confines it to either acts of great courage or extreme defiance, this project recognizes that in order to explore the child immigrant experience adequately, a wider range of actions merit inclusion. Dutch children actively participated in shaping their experience in ways that were not always valorous, but rather in everyday activities requiring independent thought and action. Equally important to expanding the definition of agency is an awareness that its search can erroneously "slip from being a conceptual tool or starting point to a concluding argument."¹⁴⁴ Cautioning against using agency as an "endpoint for our analyses," Lynn M. Thomas argues we should re-examine it as a "historical concept."¹⁴⁵ This means not treating it as a conclusion based on a premise, but instead using it as a template to explore behaviour by attending to "multiple, intersecting and shifting forces and concerns."¹⁴⁶ Mary Jo Maynes asks us to "reconsider how we understand historical agency and the ability of even relatively powerless

¹⁴⁴ Lynn M. Thomas, "Historicising Agency," *Gender and History* 28, no. 2 (August 2016): 324.

¹⁴⁵ Thomas, 335.

¹⁴⁶ Thomas, 330.

people to function as historical actors.”¹⁴⁷ This is key as narratives focusing solely on acts of rebellion or spirited acts of heroism make it difficult to identify other dimensions of agency that might frequently occur, including those involving compliance and amiability.

While agreeing that immigrant children are not a homogenous social group and should not be treated as such, researchers nonetheless debate on how to best situate childhood agency within migration scholarship. For example, Madeleine Dobson focuses on the importance of a narrow scope, contending that first and foremost, a micro-level approach is necessary to establish a child’s active engagement in their migration experience.¹⁴⁸ Opposing this methodology, and arguing for a broader scale of children’s geographies, Nicola Ansell is critical of studies that treat childhood agency in a non-theoretical manner, as she notes they do not allow for analysis of a wide range of social processes and therefore isolate childhood studies from other disciplines.¹⁴⁹ Also critiquing the popularity of what he calls an ‘agency movement,’ David Lancy finds fault with studies that “impose a single, privileged ethnography of childhood upon the diverse societies of the world.”¹⁵⁰ Arguing for the importance of applying cultural and social analysis to expand on our understanding of a child’s experience of the world, he cautions against research that promotes or advocates for agency rather than “treating children’s agency as a phenomenon worthy of attention and study.”¹⁵¹

Factoring the above-noted ‘interpretive problems or traps’ into analysis, this project also heeds the advice of Mona Gleason who suggests that a nuanced approach be used when

¹⁴⁷Mary Jo Maynes, “Age as a Category of Historical Analysis: History, Agency and Narratives of Childhood,” *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 1, no. 1 (Winter, 2008): 116.

¹⁴⁸ Madeleine E. Dobson, “Unpacking Children in Migration Research,” *Children’s Geographies* 7, no.3 (August 2009): 355-360.

¹⁴⁹ Nicola Ansell, “Childhood and the Politics of Scale: Descaling Children’s Geographies?” *Progress in Human Geography* 33, no. 2 (2009): 190-209.

¹⁵⁰ David Lancy, “Unmasking Children’s Agency,” *Sociology, Social Work and Anthropology Paper 277* (2012): 1.

¹⁵¹ Lancy, 14.

searching for childhood agency, more specifically, one that does not simply juxtapose adult authority with children's actions, but instead, more carefully examines assumptions of power.¹⁵² Discouraging analyses that promotes binaries such as good/bad, or compliant/resistant, she argues that searching for the agency ideal is too simplistic in its ways of "juxtaposing adult actions and perspectives against those of children and youth."¹⁵³ The framework suggested by Gleason is a key starting point to fully grasp the varied responses immigrant children employed to convey personal power. This project's analysis looked beyond stereotypical unruly or radical behaviour and explored a variety of ways children exercised agency during adjustment to everyday life in new surroundings.

An example of this was revealed in Aris' interview. Highly motivated to find employment after sugar beet season ended in the fall, at thirteen years of age, Aris accepted the notion that he might have to live and work away from home. He proudly recalled securing employment in the winter which allowed him to continue contributing wages to his family:

I spent one winter in the rendering plant where they processed all the dead animals – one winter I helped out at the feed mill so it gave me training in lots of different things.¹⁵⁴

A desire to contribute to and identify as part of a self-supporting immigrant household was in part influenced by parental authority, however upon deeper analysis, it was also expressed as an autonomous act of family loyalty and a means to exercise independence. Eager to articulate their intentions, those interviewed indicated an awareness of the social and economic stresses their parents faced and this knowledge, along with enduring the effect of painful, lingering wartime memories combined to create a sophisticated, worldly point of view.

¹⁵² Mona Gleason, "Avoiding the Agency Trap-Caveats for Historians of Children, Youth, Education," *Journal of the History of Education Society* 45, no. 4 (2016): 447.

¹⁵³ Gleason, 448.

¹⁵⁴ Slingerland interview.

Family loyalty was a constant in all interviews. Often manifested in ways that generated minimal angst for parents but effected a harsher reality for the child, there was a tendency among children to behave in ways that ensured familial bonds were kept secure, even when facing the pressures and demands of new surroundings. Jenny, who worked away from home as a nanny and housekeeper, was responsible for her own transportation to and from home and work and this varied between walking, taking the bus and hitchhiking.¹⁵⁵ Jenny describes two harrowing instances, one when she was by herself and the other when she was with her sister. She explains that hitchhiking was a common occurrence:

You know when it's raining, you take any ride you can and two guys stopped with a half-ton truck and they picked me up and then they had a big bottle of wine, there were going to feed me wine and I said, "no, no, no, no," so instead of me telling them which road to stop, I just told them far away from home....and then of course I had a long way to walk.

And then one time, my sister and I, we were on our way home for the weekend....and this man, he picked us up, so my sister and I, we sat in the back seat and then I was leaning over to the front to show him which road to stop-he had his fly open and he was going to do something to us – we quickly jumped out of the car and went under the barbed wire.¹⁵⁶

When asked if she told her parents, she could not recall, and instead indicated that because her father did not have a vehicle, finding transportation on her own was necessary and that situation could not be helped:

What do you do? This was from Lethbridge to Coaldale – Somebody would give us a ride to town, but ya, then we had to come home too and my dad did have a car yet and these things happened.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ Aardema interview.

¹⁵⁶ Aardema interview.

¹⁵⁷ Aardema interview.

While describing it as a traumatic time in her life, it seemed that as a young girl, Jenny felt compelled to internalize what happened and not place an extra burden on her parents with personal fears or anxieties. Jenny's pragmatic way of recalling this story highlighted her capacity to act independently and leave intact her power to not only protect herself, but also to shield her family from the possibility of a future encounter at her home. This example reveals the importance of doing research *with* children, rather than *about* them. Allowing perceptions of the child migrant as agentic brings forward a novel awareness of their active engagement in everyday life. Suggestive of a protective nature towards parents and siblings, testimonies like Jenny's project how emotions and feelings were actively managed in order that family happiness and family unity remained secure.

Referring to children's active involvement in the "shaping and re-shaping of social existence," David Oswell states, "the family and household from the late nineteenth century, if not earlier, have been seen as incubators of children's agency."¹⁵⁸ Supporting "children as speaking subjects," he writes, "family and household are now seen to be generators of emotional economy."¹⁵⁹ This was true for Dutch immigrant families as the home was central to a child's emotional health, even though the degree of openness and freedom within it was sometimes limited by parental authority. Along with establishing a strong work ethic, all interviewees in this project revealed they were taught that well-being and happiness was connected to honoring decisions made by mothers and fathers. While participating in and contributing to family farming operations translated into self-confidence, for some, (most often males), this meant

¹⁵⁸ David Oswell, *The Agency of Children-From Family to Global Human Rights*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 6, 89.

¹⁵⁹ Oswell, 89.

eventually gaining a voice in financial decisions. Bert's testimony highlights how relationships with his brothers translated into family financial security and unity:

We bought a farm – we finally decided this is the time to buy a farm – so we all moved onto the farm – it's a quarter section of land, so my brother and I, we worked the land.¹⁶⁰

In a recent project focused on refugee and migrant children from eastern European countries, Christopoulou and De Leeuw found that preserving family unity was a crucial issue for children, and this was reflected in their conceptualization of the home as both a site of material comforts and a source of emotional safety.¹⁶¹ Connecting the warmth of domesticity to one's sense of physical and psychological security, their findings parallel the position of post-war Dutch immigrant children who, while negotiating between two very different worlds, also prioritized family unity. For example, while at school or at work, children were sometimes exposed to ideas on modernization of the family including philosophies on the "construction of children with speaking rights."¹⁶² Dutch observations of strict obedience were often inconsistent with these ideas, however, despite these restrictions, there were constant expressions of warmth when referring to home life. Expressing confidence in his parents' ability to look after him, William's sentiment was representative of all ten interviewees:

Well, as a kid of course – the family is not very affluent, and they're having trouble putting meat on the table – you don't notice that – as a kid, you know, we had complete faith in our mom and dad – they'll supply you with what you need."¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰ Brouwer interview.

¹⁶¹ Christopoulou and de Leeuw, 115, 128.

¹⁶² Oswell, 104.

¹⁶³ Barthel interview.

Despite ensuring traditional continuity was maintained, there were occasional instances when parents accommodated Canadian societal norms and in doing so, helped children manage feelings, and bridge space and place in their new surroundings. For Rita, this meant permission to attend a movie with her friends. As an almost sixteen-year-old, she recalls asking her mother if she could go:

There was a girl that lived in the same house as we lived and she was going to see a movie. I've never been to a movie. And I told my mom about this and she said, "you go." It was something about magicians. That was the biggest treat. I've never been to a movie. But that was still one thing they stressed – movies and tv and all that sort of stuff was just not good.¹⁶⁴

Part of the negotiation between family tradition and the norms of their new environment involved children actively taking on emotional labour, especially as a way of protecting other family members. Setting up a wider framework to discuss how childhood agency might intersect with emotion work and emotional labour, this next section explores the importance of a sustained engagement with managing feelings. Arlie Russel Hochschild uses the term emotional labor to refer to the management of feelings stating it requires, "one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others."¹⁶⁵ Taking on this work appears especially important among those who endured post-war healing, and the array of challenges that go with moving to a new land. Addressing the pressure to negotiate and/or manage feelings when faced with everyday activities is an innovative way to further explore a migrant child's life. As is the case in most families, emotion work or emotional labor places the child in a position to align their happiness with parental ideals. Thinking about how

¹⁶⁴ Rita Papworth interview.

¹⁶⁵ Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Managed Heart-Commercialization of Human Feeling, Updated with a New Preface*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 7n.

children may have been instructed on how to feel while adjusting to their new surroundings opens new ways to understand how power imbalances affected integration. For those interviewed in this project, while well-respected, parental authority seemed to be a trigger for resilient behaviour both individually and as part of the family.

Exploring the intersection of agency and emotion is a complex undertaking particularly when asking adults to reflect on childhood feelings. Kristine Alexander suggests that to more fully understand agency and the intricacies connected to power imbalances in social relations, we should employ a “more sustained engagement with the concept of emotion work.”¹⁶⁶ She states, “Asking about the emotion work expected of young people has the potential to enrich and to alter our understanding of children’s lives and cultures in the present and in the past.”¹⁶⁷ Her argument is relevant to those interviewed, as almost all broached emotion while recalling sacrifices made by one or both parents to protect and secure their family’s safety, not only during the war, but also before and after migration. Recalling her feelings after leaving home as an adult, Shirley stressed a sense of duty to care for and acknowledge what had mother had endured, “I always thought about mom first, even growing up, then I thought, ya but I can’t go because then mom will be by herself.”¹⁶⁸

In her study of happiness, including its role in preserving family unity, Sara Ahmed writes, “the family becomes a happy object through the work that must be done to keep it together.”¹⁶⁹ She argues the family is “after all where the child is cultivated,” and, “if parenting is about orienting the children in the right way, then children must place their hopes for

¹⁶⁶ Kristine Alexander, “Agency and Emotion Work,” *Jeunesse: Young People, Texts, Culture* 7.2 (2015): 123.

¹⁶⁷ Alexander, 123.

¹⁶⁸ Shirley Visser interview.

¹⁶⁹ Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 46.

happiness in the same things.”¹⁷⁰ While the family generally served as a safety net and retreat from emotional management required during time spent at school, at times, it inflicted obligations of a different sort in the home.¹⁷¹ Children undertook the task of meeting the approval of mothers and fathers, making their personal happiness contingent upon the happiness of those holding authority. Because a sense of wellbeing was directed by parents, security came from sharing membership in a family that was self-resilient and worked together towards common goals, which in the case of these Dutch immigrant families, was founded on faith and focused on attaining financial security.

Vallgård, Alexander and Olsen point out that, “emotional formations, while distinguished by certain overall hierarchies of feeling, also tend to be characterized by a high degree of diversity across space, class, ethnicity, age and gender.”¹⁷² Analyzing emotional formation (a concept that encompasses both a pattern and a process in ‘collective standards for emotion’) requires recognizing relationships of power, in many cases, by way of parental authority.¹⁷³ Those interviewed seemed aware of their responsibility to manage their emotions and, further, how their feelings and actions might connect to family happiness. Actively exerting agency to ensure personal emotional security, interviewees recall that as children they honored parental sacrifice not only in looking after them during the war, but also in wanting a better future for them and migrating to a new land.

A child’s ability to cope with emotions varied in intensity and in some cases, had a long-term effect on their lives. Shirley’s sensitivity towards her mother shows how emotion work, or

¹⁷⁰ Ahmed, 48.

¹⁷¹ Hochschild, 69.

¹⁷² Karen Vallgård, Kristine Alexander, Stephanie Olsen, “Emotion and the Global Politics of Childhoods,” in *Childhood, Youth and Emotions in Modern History-National, Colonial and Global Perspectives*, ed. Stephanie Olsen (England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 20.

¹⁷³ Vallgård, Alexander, Olsen, 20.

the management of feelings, can sometimes be affected by authorities outside the family. This is shown in her discussion of her family's wartime involvement with the Dutch Underground Resistance and the threats she received from an officer regarding her mother's potential capture and subsequent removal if she was to tell anyone there were people were hiding on their farm. Having experienced the death of her father a few years earlier, Shirley took her role seriously and kept her fears about her family's participation in the resistance a secret. She recounted the message given to her by the officer as follows, "now if you talk about this, that we're here, if you tell anybody, they'll take your mom."¹⁷⁴ Wrestling with tears as she told this story, she connected the warning she received as a frightened young girl to a lifelong goal that her mother remain protected. When asked to describe the most difficult part of her immigration experience, Shirley replied that concern for her mom's wellbeing remained foremost in her thoughts and even once she was an adult, the threat of something happening to her mother endured in her private moments. Referring to the times she had to leave home for employment, she stated, "Being away from home, starting to work, that was really hard on me."¹⁷⁵

The management of feelings by young Dutch immigrants in postwar Southern Alberta was not limited to home and family settings. While the value associated with emotion work inside the home often culminated in psychological security, managing feelings when at work often dictated continued employment. Referring to the management of feelings on the job as 'emotional labour,' Hochschild states as "a publicly observable facial and bodily display, emotional labour is sold for a wage and therefore has exchange value."¹⁷⁶ Some interviewees

¹⁷⁴ Visser, Shirley interview.

¹⁷⁵ Visser, Shirley interview.

¹⁷⁶ Hochschild, 7.

expressed concerns and anxieties connected to employment and described the emotional labour undertaken to ensure their capacity to contribute to family income.

Shortly after leaving school at age fourteen, Jenny recalls her job as a full-time, live-in housekeeper. Earning thirty-five dollars per month, she describes how, despite fears and anxieties, she agreed to employment that took her away from her family. She says the following:

Oh, it was tough. I was homesick, you wouldn't believe it, I was so homesick. I would stand in front of the window and I could see the elevator and I knew I was close to where mom and dad lived...and I would cry. Finally, on one weekend, my dad came to pick me up and I said, 'Dad, I'm so homesick, I don't want to go here anymore.' So, then I never went back.¹⁷⁷

There was an obligation to 'feel' happy about having the opportunity to earn family income and this initially informed Jenny's agreement to leave home for work. However, residing away from her parents and the emotional labour required to adequately fulfill her duties turned out to take an excessive toll on her sense of well-being. She eventually spoke to her father and he allowed her to end the employment.

In their study of child and youth emotions in "various global and transnational settings," Karen Vallgård, Kristine Alexander and Stephanie Olsen point out that "many children share the experience of having to traverse various emotional frontiers and that, compared to adults, they are especially charged with such a role."¹⁷⁸ By pointing to the spectrum of emotions immigrant children managed while traversing between public and private space, between tradition and modernization, and, between parental and employer authority, a more complete child immigrant story is presented. Throughout this project, the challenges associated with accessing emotional moments from the past was difficult at times, however, during transcription

¹⁷⁷ Aardema interview.

¹⁷⁸ Vallgård, Alexander, Olsen, 22, 23.

and analysis of each life story, moments of laughter, tears and silence provided a window into children's agentic behaviour. When emotional experiences are included in historical research, common threads surface and by allowing personal narratives to inform one another, children's emotional management can be connected to agency, age and gender dynamics.

Barbara Rosenwein asks, "what should the historian look for?" when studying a community's emotions and the ways in which people "understand, express, and indeed 'feel' their emotions."¹⁷⁹ She writes, "There is much truth in the notion that emotions are a domain of effort."¹⁸⁰ Contemplating both emotional labour and emotion work, the experiences of this 'community' of Dutch children, who were essential to their families' cohesion and economic success, are reflected in Rosenwein's statement. Testimonies revealed that while sometimes compelled to feign feelings to avoid infringing upon family happiness, children's emotions were internally expansive. Influenced by a combination of war-related trauma and the necessity for extraordinary levels of resilience during this postwar rebuilding time, oral history testimonies suggest that those interviewed understood internalizing fear, anxiety, and worry as essential to familial survival.

As evidenced by the interview excerpts in this chapter, letting the child speak for themselves discloses valuable data to add to family migration histories. Prioritizing children's voices and shared experiences does not mean they should be represented as a uniform, homogenous group. Their testimonies, dependent on a variety of contingencies, bears witness to the multi-faceted character of each child. Recognizing both variations and commonalities in how they faced challenges, how they constructed identity, built relationships and formed a sense of

¹⁷⁹ Barbara Rosenwein, *Generations of Feeling-A History of Emotions, 600-1700*, (United Kingdom, Cambridge University Press, 4.

¹⁸⁰ Rosenwein, 315.

belonging in the new society is evidence of their presence as active, participatory members and a constant factor in shaping immigrant family life.

Chapter 3 - The Power of Voice – Chronicling the Journey

The power of narrating one's own life story resonated through each interview as adults voiced their childhood struggles and triumphs during integration into Canadian society. While the ten individuals in this project are but a small sampling of the thousands who left the Netherlands after the war, their testimonies add an important perspective to existing historical narratives on the lives of Dutch immigrant families. Re-stating the influence of traditional customs and religious practices, this chapter further explores interview testimonies to delve into the impact of age, birth order and gender in children's lives. Shaping identity both in the family setting and in the outside world, this chapter also shows how children, often caught between competing social and cultural norms, learned to mediate between conflicting spaces.

I began my interviews by asking participants about their lives in the Netherlands during and immediately after the war. When asked to expand on the reasons for their family's emigration, they all expressed an awareness of the socio-economic and socio-political factors precipitating decisions to leave the homeland. While national economic turmoil was cited as a shared factor, also reflected in each interview were divergent details causing families to choose southern Alberta. Diverse backgrounds gave rise to diverse life stories. However, certain facets of Dutch tradition, particularly those connecting religion and patriarchy to age and gender ideals, were revealed to be common influences in shaping children's lives. Giving voice to these dominant ideals helps piece together a more complete history of the child immigrant experience.

According to Joan W. Scott, the potential to deepen our understanding of past events greatly advances when gender theory is incorporated into research. Using gender as an analytical category and dealing "with the individual subject as well as social organization," she states, "Instead of a search for single origins, we have to conceive of processes so interconnected that

they cannot be disentangled. We must ask more often how things happened in order to find out why they happened.”¹⁸¹ In the case of Dutch immigrant children, these ‘interconnected processes’ were grounded in religious doctrine, patriarchal authority and long-standing traditional customs, all contributing to the core of family organization. Family organization centered on culturally constructed assumptions on the masculine and feminine, further defining children’s roles in the family. Reflecting dominant patriarchal views, interviewees reconstructed how age, gender and birth order sometimes presented challenges in their young lives. Despite facing difficulties associated with non-egalitarian family dynamics, testimonies show compliant behaviour towards parents and respect for traditional family structure. While alternating between assertiveness when interacting with teachers, classmates and employers, and deference when relating to parents, (and occasionally older siblings), careful interview analysis reveals how agentic behaviour evolved around these restrictions.

To better understand some of the philosophies guiding everyday life in Dutch families, this next section refers to current research on age and gender perspectives in the worlds of family and work. Pointing to the effect of systems of social control on transnational family integration and segregation, Rhacel Salazar Parreñas discusses “gender border crossings.”¹⁸² Referring to deep-rooted cultural ideologies that often curtail men and women from crossing gendered borders in the public sphere, she states, “gender distinguishes the flexibility with which, and the extent to which, men and women can cross set boundaries of parenting.”¹⁸³ Following what it meant to embody a nuclear family ideal, traditional Dutch parenting roles continued, as women,

¹⁸¹ Joan W. Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” *American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (December 1986):1067.

¹⁸² Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, *Children of Global Migration-Transnational Families and Gendered Woes* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 34.

¹⁸³ Parreñas, 34.

responsible for shaping the private sphere, performed domestic functions, including primary childcare, while males performed in the public sphere as proverbial breadwinners.

Focusing on the Great Depression era and highlighting what she calls “inseparable ties” linking wage earners to male adulthood and masculinity, Heidi MacDonald states, “Being the sole breadwinner offered these husbands and fathers more authority and thus a closer approximation of the masculine ideal of the interwar era.”¹⁸⁴ It appears this masculine ideal extended to post-Second World War Dutch families, as men were also ‘inseparably tied’ to a strong work ethic representing both masculinity and authority. Testifying to a gendered way of life, interviewees described their fathers, and sometimes older brothers, as obligated to take control of and provide family economic security during hard times.

While the female identity as nurturer in the home continued, roles frequently cut across gender lines as women temporarily moved into male-dominated spheres of agricultural labor to secure family wages (primarily seasonal and connected to hoeing sugar beets). Aside from one interviewee referring to his experience on a sewing machine, gendered tasks for males did not cross into the domestic sphere. A father’s masculine identity as provider was informed both by custom and church teachings and despite provisional changes (with girls and women taking on agricultural labour), ideological beliefs set in a patriarchal system were maintained. This meant the father was instilled as male authority, the mother was central to hearth and home and conventional gendered divisions of labor were kept intact.¹⁸⁵ While gendered roles remained central to family organization, age and birth order were also significant and reflected in children’s social interactions and work-related obligations.

¹⁸⁴ Heidi MacDonald, “Being in Your Twenties in the Thirties: Liminality and Masculinity during the Great Depression,” in *Bringing Children and Youth into Canadian History-The Difference Kids Make*, editors Mona Gleason and Tamara Myers (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2017): 165.

¹⁸⁵ Schryer, 37.

Mona Gleason raises the importance of exploring age categories in relation to agency and power dynamics and states “attention to age as a category of historical analysis helps us move beyond superficial contributory approaches to historical agency towards a deeper appreciation of how children and youth shaped responded (sic) to change in the past.”¹⁸⁶ In other words, when age is recognized as a relevant marker in power relations and a key characteristic of social and cultural organization, children can emerge more clearly as historical actors, not subjects that are acted upon. Until recently, with the exception of Howard Chudacoff’s age-conscious research in 1989, widespread attention to race, class and gender categories meant that age did not always prevail as key areas of study despite their impact on family structure.¹⁸⁷ Chudacoff states: “age has been adopted as an organizing principle that reflects people’s need for ordering and understanding modern life.”¹⁸⁸

For those interviewed in this project, age-related categories imposed additional order, and, combined with gender ideals, sometimes contributed to power relationships amongst siblings. For example, elder daughters often acted as surrogate parents to younger siblings and, to the point of sacrificing personal goals, assumed long term domestic roles in the home. Elder sons were more likely to branch out and seek economic independence, sometimes by furthering education and other times by acquiring farmland, either by inheritance from the father or by combining sources and purchasing with a male sibling. In only two cases in this project, both male and female children attended school past the required legal age of fourteen, with one male obtaining a post-secondary education. Expressing faith in their family structure as necessary to a

¹⁸⁶ Mona Gleason, “Avoiding the Agency Trap-Caveats for Historians of Children, Youth, and Education,” *History of Education* 45, no. 4 (2016): 454. Gleason, 454.

¹⁸⁷ Leslie Paris, “Through the Looking Glass: Age, Stages and Historical Analysis,” *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 1, no. 1 (Winter 2008): 111.

¹⁸⁸ Howard Chudacoff, *How Old Are You? - Age Consciousness in American Culture*, (United Kingdom, Princeton University Press, 1989), 5.

larger process connected to economic success and the makings of a unified home, those interviewed conveyed a sense of acceptance of gendered childhood roles in the family setting. Maintaining parental respect and loyalty to family and religious teachings outweighed resentment over personal goals.

Steven Mintz states, “In some respects age resembles gender, yet, in other respects it is fundamentally different.”¹⁸⁹ His contention is that while both are rooted in scientific research, and both are subject to change over time depending on historical era and cultural and social organizations, age is less static than gender.¹⁹⁰ Mintz’ comparison between age and gender, made more than ten years ago, would likely be debated by current research on the fluidity of gender categories, however for the time period referred to in this project, these social constructs apply to the Dutch families in this project. In some ways, interviewees attested to the family setting and its traditions as imperative to personal continuity and stability. By embracing these ideals, it seems exposure to the stresses and strains of integration were at times, made easier to manage.

For example, Jenny details her family’s Sunday routine as follows: church attendance and, as patriarch of the family, prayer rituals led by her father. While seemingly strict from an outsider’s perspective, Jenny conveyed this part of her life in a way that highlighted family unity and togetherness:

We were allowed to bike to church on Sundays, but we were not Allowed to bike ride for fun - we were not allowed to knit on Sundays and we were not allowed to play any sports. Mom would pray out loud, when dad was not home, but as soon as my dad would come into the room, it was quiet, and we had to pray soft – My dad prayed out loud. We didn’t have a car, so my uncle would pick us up for church and we

¹⁸⁹ Steven Mintz, “Reflections on Age as a Category of Historical Analysis,” *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 1, no. 1 (Winter 2008): 93.

¹⁹⁰ Mintz, 93.

had already packed a sandwich, because we had lunch there at the church, and then in the afternoon was a second sermon, or second service, and then my uncle would bring us home.¹⁹¹

When away from family and attending school, encounters with peers and teachers meant school-aged children initially had a more expansive cultural experience than parents and younger siblings who were more or less confined to life on the farm. This included exposure to Canadian customs related to language, clothing, diet, and leisure time. While avoiding discussions with parents on difficult personal encounters with others, children grew responsible for bringing the ‘new world’ into the family’s private space, thus serving as social and cultural mediators for those whose daily activities precluded external contacts. The family unit continued to serve as a pillar of traditional strength and guidance and when describing these times of negotiations between different cultural realities, those interviewed emphasised tenacity and occasionally displayed emotion.

Divulging details on her ability to handle diversity, Wilhelmina discussed coping techniques which reflected both points of vulnerability and resilience as she overcame obstacles while facing gendered limitations. It was clear from the onset of our time together that she would focus on presenting herself as a survivor both in the past and in the present. Referring to the struggles her family of ten endured during the war, she began by talking about herself as an eight-year-old. A sense of deep reflection was palpable as she referred to the Hunger Winter (also known as the Dutch Famine of 1944-45). Detailed and concise, she re-constructed the event to highlight both the severity of the ordeal and, conversely, her refusal to accept defeat.

It was very, very bad, but I was too young to know that it was not normal – my parents did not ever say, it’s bad or, that it used to be like this.... I do know that we were totally malnourished because we had boils, we had sores, we had lice, we had all these terrible

¹⁹¹ Aardema interview.

things, you'd scratch, you'd bleed, lice would go under there and it would get worse, you'd cut yourself, it wouldn't heal – we were totally malnourished – the last year, there was nothing left, there was nothing left. I didn't suffer – I have no scars.¹⁹²

Cognizant of why her parents made the decision to migrate, Wilhelmina was intent on imparting what she knew about Winston Churchill's electoral win in England in 1951 and the negative effect it had on her father's status as a horticulturalist. Her father depended on exporting goods to the United Kingdom, and, Wilhelmina explains, was outspoken about his political views:

Churchill had won the election and closed the border and my dad had some really choice words – he said, “if my life depends on what that so and so Churchill decides then I'm out of here!”¹⁹³

Arriving in Canada in May of 1952, Wilhelmina recalled the nationwide polio epidemic and its effect on delaying the first day of school until September twenty-first.¹⁹⁴ The late start meant her attendance in high school lasted only three weeks before she was pulled from classes to harvest sugar beets. She stated:

Well we had no choice to go...what dad said, and there was no resistance, I knew it had to be done. I knew it had to be done... we had hoed the sugar beets and got paid a little bit, but they held back a lot, so you didn't get your final payment until you did the sugar beets, until you finished, until it was all done.¹⁹⁵

Speaking with animated gestures while recalling the first few weeks of school, she refers to the unfairness of being sixteen years old and placed in grade eight with students two to three years her junior. Crediting her determination to study and rise above what she considered

¹⁹² Lichak interview.

¹⁹³ Lichak interview.

¹⁹⁴ “In 1952, and again in 1953, however, the virus raged, especially on the prairies.” Doug Owrarn, *Born at the Right Time: A History of the Baby-Boom Generation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 86.

¹⁹⁵ Lichak interview.

negative judgement by schoolmates and teachers, she proudly recalls being quickly transferred into classes with students her own age after proving her aptitude for learning. She stated:

Nothing bothered me, now this sounds, I'm going to say it, I was a very bright student, I was always at the top and it never occurred to me that I wouldn't be a top student there...and I do not remember being traumatized.¹⁹⁶

Intermittent absences from school (related to family contract labor in the production of sugar beets) left her, at age nineteen, with “only a few credits short to graduate.”¹⁹⁷ Despite her age, Wilhelmina recalled her desire to continue until she earned the one hundred credits necessary to successfully complete grade twelve. Constantly a challenge for Dutch immigrant families, economic pressure dictated life plans and Wilhelmina's ability to add earnings to the family income was prioritized over her personal goal to graduate high school. She was quick to recognize that financial matters, along with comments from family and friends such as, “why is she still going to school? Send her to work in the factory,” played a role in her parent's decision to suspend her formal education. Recounting this story, she voiced empathy towards her mom and dad and their denial of her request that she continue to attend school. She stated, “they must have been under a great deal of pressure.”¹⁹⁸ This generated a moment of silence and discernable discomfort, however, Wilhelmina quickly turned to discuss a confrontation at school with a teacher. Notions of pride surfaced as she wove details about receiving a low grade on an assignment to knit baby booties. Stipulating that she did not go to her mother or father when disciplined for having the wrong colored yarn, she described how she instead challenged her home economics teacher to raise her grade. She proudly recalled the incident as follows:

Money, there was no money at all, I could knit, I did a very good job –

¹⁹⁶ Lichak interview.

¹⁹⁷ Lichak interview.

¹⁹⁸ Lichak interview.

ten marks you got for that – I got seven – up I go to speak to the teacher and ask, ‘what’s wrong with my booties?’ Answer, “well you used navy yarn instead of pastel- I said ‘well navy was in the house and even if I asked my mother to buy yarn, she would have said no.’¹⁹⁹

Keeping this dispute from her family, this incident remained in Wilhelmina’s private world. Part of her adaptation process and developing a sense of belonging was to achieve high grades and become a respected student. For her own sense of well-being and independence, this meant facing negative encounters without outside help. Her decision to conceal this incident is one example of emotion work, of her choice to avoid raising an issue that might cause her parents angst and negatively affect the happiness in her home.

While accepting that gendered ideologies influenced responsibilities in the home, Wilhelmina rejected the idea that gendered roles would dictate her school performance. She candidly assessed her physical appearance as detrimental to her self-image, stating it caused her to rely on her academic ability:

I wasn’t confident about my looks, you know, red hair, freckles, glasses – it was not what carried me through. But I was confident that I was smart because I did not concede to the boys, or play up to the boys – that was not the game I played. I wasn’t even aware there was such a game. It might have just been my surroundings where I grew up, but when I came here, I noticed a difference between boys and girls meaning the girls were inferior to the boys – and, not where I came from, not when I went to school, not in my surroundings.²⁰⁰

She went onto explain that, in the Netherlands, girls were not viewed as academically or socially inferior in school and because of this, she found it difficult to witness certain behaviours by female classmates. Wilhelmina constructed her identity in a way that reflected a confident, sixteen-year-old, in possession of a resolute attitude. Conflicts or disagreements that might have

¹⁹⁹ Lichak interview.

²⁰⁰ Lichak interview.

suggested failure or any kind of hesitation on her part were dismissed and substituted with an account that highlighted her personal achievements. When asked how she managed to maintain a positive mindset, she was quick to credit her confidence to the protection and care her parents provided by ensuring she live in a secure home environment. Despite facing an unwelcome reception at school, Wilhelmina stressed ‘inexperience’ as an explanation for her teachers’ behaviour towards her and with statements such as “they were totally inadequate, totally unprepared and unwilling,” she de-personalized the treatment she received.²⁰¹

Wilhelmina’s memories of initial periods of adjustment to life in Canada reveal a great deal about managing feelings, as some emotions were at the forefront of her behaviour, while others were forgotten or repressed. Her testimony reveals that whether expressed, managed or internalized, feelings were often kept private from parents. Arlie Russell Hochschild says, “Almost everyone does the emotion work that produces what we might, broadly speaking, call deference. But women are expected to do more of it.”²⁰² As was the case in most Dutch families, the feminine ideal expected women to protect family cohesion and, for Wilhelmina, this meant not bringing negative school issues into the home. Her own sense of power was tied both to protecting the psychological needs of her family and taking advantage of opportunities at school to exercise independence. Used as coping strategies, both consenting and resistant behaviour proved valuable as ways to promote a framework for personal agency.

Current research shows these types of coping strategies are repeated in contemporary child migrant stories. Karin Heissler explores the plight of Bangladeshi migrant child laborers. She finds that children’s individual power and agency are seldom recognized for the active and dynamic role they play in their own lives and in the lives of family members. When faced with

²⁰¹ Lichak interview.

²⁰² Hochschild, 168.

negative judgement, she notes children circumvent gossip by citing jealousy in others as a means of self-protection. She states: “The power and agency of migrant working children is revealed by questioning and re-interpreting the norms; responding by accusing others of jealousy.”²⁰³ Accusations of jealousy, as Heissler points to in her research, or ignorance, as shown by Wilhelmina when speaking about teachers, reveal that when encountering obstacles, children have the capacity to re-define the situation on their own terms, justifying it in a way that allows resolution, even if sometimes only temporary.

While not explicitly articulated, the intersection of gender, birth order, and family customs is made clearer when Wilhelmina’s life story is analyzed alongside that of her younger brother. Henry was ten years old and six years younger than Wilhelmina upon immigration to Canada in 1952. While their testimonies mirrored one another’s in discussions of family unity, patriarchy, working in the beet fields, living conditions, and religious adherence, the opportunity for social interaction with peers at school turned out to be vastly different. Where Wilhelmina regarded herself as an outsider at school, Henry achieved social inclusion by playing soccer and baseball. Enhancing opportunities to gain acceptance from his peers, Henry pointed to his prowess in soccer:

I had a good time, I know that, a very good time... I had my friends. The soccer was fine, because I was always picked first, but the baseball that was kind of devastating for me, ya, it, not that it really bugged me...but you know I didn’t dwell on it... and I got a little better, I was never great.²⁰⁴

²⁰³ Karin Heissler, “Migrating with Honor: Sites of Agency and Power in Child Labor Migration in Bangladesh,” in *Children and Migration-At the Crossroads of Resiliency and Vulnerability*, editors Marisa O. Ensor and Elzbieta M. Goździak (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010): 224.

²⁰⁴ Bosman interview.

Royden Loewen and Gerald Friesen look at a range of struggles faced by twentieth-century immigrant children in schools in Canadian prairies provinces. Highlighting the role sports played in their social lives, they say school teams “constituted a potent factor in creating good-will among children of the many racial groups and differing religious beliefs...a boy got his place on the school team because of this ability to play the game and to co-operate with others.” Relationships with “institutions of the host society,” in this case, through male dominated sporting activities, contributed to a sense of belonging in Henry’s childhood immigrant experience.²⁰⁵

In case of school experiences, it appears gendered dynamics functioned according to masculine and feminine roles in the most basic of ways. It grows more definitive when it is revealed how these dynamics affected Wilhelmina’s and Henry’s access to education and labour-related duties in the home. Organized along gendered and age structures, Henry’s household chores were limited to taking the garbage out and occasionally making his bed, while Wilhelmina’s physical tasks were more extensive, including housekeeping duties and meal preparation. Henry detailed a weekly ritual:

We were living in Turin, and as they called it in a beet shack- an outside bathroom and then there’s bathing at least weekly and that was in the middle of the kitchen – big tub – I knew it happened – I wasn’t too interested – and usually my older sister Ann, bathed me and the younger kids. And it was quite common, that the older girls usually had chores that the oldest boys wouldn’t have to do – that is the way it was.²⁰⁶

Longstanding gendered dynamics like those described by Henry were deeply ingrained and meant women were most likely to be married and become mothers and full-time

²⁰⁵ Loewen and Friesen, 54.

²⁰⁶ Bosman interview.

homemakers.²⁰⁷ Part of a complex system influenced by religious doctrine and cultural practices; most postwar Dutch immigrant families reproduced this aspect of life in Canada. Mothers formed and maintained households, often sacrificing personal needs to make ends meet.

In her recent research on family migration processes, Caroline Brettell finds that “immigrant children in turn-of-the-twentieth-century families viewed their mothers as powerful.”²⁰⁸ At times in charge of cultivating family emotional security, immigrant children often defined their mother’s role in relation to their own resilience. Reflected in many histories on Western European family labour relations, Dutch women or, housewives, (as often labelled), have long been represented as crucial to fulfilling an idealized Netherlandic domestic lifestyle.²⁰⁹ Prevailing ideas about Dutch family life center on, “the wife’s dedication to the physical environment of her family.... and the ‘production’ of hygiene and good nutrition.”²¹⁰ The domestic atmosphere in the home was a long-standing and prevalent part of family life in the Netherlands, and those interviewed concurred with this notion by connecting their mother and domesticity to a nurturing environment.

Commenting on his mother’s skills in making good family meals, Henry stated: “Well, you know, it was common that my mother could make a meal out of nothing.”²¹¹ A visibly passionate moment arose when he discussed his deep respect for his mother’s advocacy work related to the education of young girls in the Netherlands. This discussion began with Henry’s reference to social issues and his mother and father’s involvement in local Dutch politics. He said the following:

²⁰⁷ Schryer, 32.

²⁰⁸ Caroline B. Brettell, *Gender and Migration*, (Cambridge, Polity Press, 2016), 127.

²⁰⁹ Boter, Corrine, “Ideal versus reality: The Domesticity Ideal and Household Labor Relations in Dutch Industrializing Regions, circa 1890,” *The History of the Family* 22, no. 1 (2017): 83.

²¹⁰ Boter, 89.

²¹¹ Bosman interview.

After the war...my mother was, before she got married, she was in the domestic service to the Phillips family... the originators of the Philishave...She was asked to join this committee to advise the Board of Education of, I don't know what level it was, but it was certainly to do with the town and this group was training young girls for the domestic service for the better families and my mother objected. She said fine, but you know, the education needs to be broader.²¹²

It seemed important to Henry that he convey his mother's inclination to reconsider traditional female roles even though, while within the confines of their home, the labour of women and girls was central to his home life. As he spoke further about his education and eventual career as an engineer, his narrative unveiled how gender dynamics affected his life versus what his sister experienced. He began by emphasising his father's scholarly credentials as a certified horticulturalist, along with his older brother's graduation in the Netherlands as an engineer before the family emigrated. After completing high school at Lethbridge Collegiate Institute in Lethbridge, Henry discussed his determination to go to university which he in fact did, successfully obtaining an engineering degree from the University of Alberta. Contrasting the attention Henry gave to the males in the family when speaking about roles in the family, Wilhelmina's answer to the same types of questions were centered on her mother as an outstanding homemaker and her older sister's formal training in the Netherlands and talent as a seamstress. It seems formal education was not devoid of value, however, in this family, the women discussed were relegated to a domestic category as opposed to an academic one.

Gendered ideals were more prominent in some Dutch families and this was readily discernible in Anne's interview. Separating the masculine from the feminine, her family followed church doctrine according to Dutch Reformed beliefs and this meant male members led

²¹² Bosman interview.

as heads of the household.²¹³ With post-war memories still vivid in her mind, Anne begins talking about why her family of ten emigrated in 1954. Referring to a time period a few years after the war and before migration, she reflects on her father's logic: "He had a farm, he had seven acres and well, there were six boys, so you know seven acres, we needed to go somewhere else."²¹⁴ The sexual division of labour was such, that for males in the family it was important to attain economic security and part of the transition into male adulthood meant acquiring land. Because deep-rooted cultural norms dictated women did not play a prominent role as wage earners, Anne expressed awareness that her own future would be in a domestic setting. Her tone conveyed acceptance of a natural order of life meaning that the boys in the family would hopefully prosper as land-owning farmers. Reminiscing about working in the sugar beet fields, and its effect on her infrequent attendance at school, she accepted that expectation was that her wages would be added to family income, and her role in family farm labour was an interim position until such time that she become a wife and mother. She stated:

I can remember the first summer, the people we worked for, she showed me how to make a cake, you know how you make things, like to help cook - those are all important for growing up when you were young, like knitting and crocheting and sewing.²¹⁵

While acknowledging that her family's gendered strictures limited a girl's educational and career prospects, when asked about what she would have chosen had she the opportunity to finish school, Anne recalled a conversation with her father when she was thirteen years old. She appealed to him to consider her vision:

I said to my dad, I want to go through school. My dad said I want you to quit school, so I asked McBride (the principal) and he said,

²¹³ Schryer, 204-205.

²¹⁴ Tanis interview.

²¹⁵ Tanis interview.

no. So, then my dad went and asked him. I wanted so badly to be a schoolteacher because it would bring in money for the family. My mom wasn't well at the time – so I think maybe that was the Reason why he would not let me finish school. My dad said no, because I was the oldest girl at home, and I was to help my mom.²¹⁶

At this moment in the interview, a youthful desire surfaced as Anne recalled her desire to not only further her education and fulfill her dream, but also to continue to contribute to family subsistence. Continuing on, she further attested to her father's adherence to gendered roles by pointing out the opportunities afforded her older brother:

My dad sent him to school...he had two years of school in Holland about welding so then over here he apprenticed for Liberty Boilers and then he did four years.²¹⁷

Somewhat analogous to Wilhelmina's acceptance of her parents' decision that she quit school is Anne's compliance of her father's ruling. Speaking empathetically about her mother's illness, she conceded this likely affected her father's decision. Filling her role as a compliant family member, she re-interpreted her situation to reflect a positive outcome:

If I can't do it by learning, I've got to do it workwise. I always had to give my money to my father – all except \$10 – that I could keep myself. The whole thing was in my mind already that I may as well be making money by working and I still have that strength today. To me, it's a God given thing and we have to remember that all our lives.²¹⁸

Emerging with her dignity intact, Anne seemed nostalgic when discussing her personal strength in facing this setback. She then deftly changed the topic to a happier memory related to church attendance and its facilitation of community and like-mindedness amongst fellow Dutch immigrants. This memory, rooted in her family's religious affiliation, allowed friendships and a

²¹⁶ Tanis interview.

²¹⁷ Tanis interview.

²¹⁸ Tanis interview.

sense of belonging to bloom outside of school. When asked earlier about new friendships, Anne's reply had been short and to the point: "just in church."²¹⁹ The majority of those interviewed were devout adherents to the orthodox sect of the Calvinist tradition and in lieu of gravitating towards peer groups at school, they instead sought connections with others on Sundays. In Anne's mind and in the minds of most children in this project, fellowship at church was anticipated and looked forward to. Recalling that it took some time for her family to buy a vehicle in Canada, Anne lightheartedly recalled standing outside with her siblings waiting for the Hoelekass family to pick them up on Sunday mornings:

We went all day to church – we got picked up by the Hoelekaas family because we didn't have a vehicle and we used to sing this song because we could see them coming around the bend where we lived. We'd sing, "Hey ho, the derry-o, the Hoelekass in the bocht! (English=bend) We'd go all day – there's a service in the morning and after the service was catechism and then there was a meal and then we had afternoon service – Sunday supper was soup and rice pudding."²²⁰

Memories like Anne's which center on both positive and negative aspects during early post-migration years are a powerful means to help identify the complexities of being a child migrant. In Anne's case, belonging or finding one's space and place was made more complicated by power relations limiting her freedom of choice. Speaking to the plight of migrants who strive to find their place and space in their new worlds, Joy Damousi writes, "newly arrived grieve their past's communities, lives and relationships but also integrate the new....the grieving process is important, but equally important is the hope and joy of the new,

²¹⁹ Tanis interview.

²²⁰ Tanis interview.

enthusiasm for life and hope for the future.”²²¹ Reminiscing about her home in Ouddorp, Netherlands, Anne said:

We did have a big place, which I have some pictures from yet... and because we lived on an island with, I don't know how many kilometers of beach front, my parents used to bring in people from cities for holidays.

In Holland, I was thinking about that the other day – I'll never forget – we were in a church in Holland.... all the women sat in the middle and the men they sat on the outside.... then the men could protect the women like they were huddled around the women...it was something from the Dutch you know.²²²

Describing an idyllic time in her life, this memory conjured an indelible moment of peace and security for Anne prior to leaving the Netherlands. Deviating from that moment of tranquility to the strains of adjustment, her next story reveals an experience related to contrasting sets of cultural practices. Having no choice but to abide by the restrictions preventing her education from continuing, at roughly sixteen years of age, Anne chose to risk parental admonishment by conspiring with her brother to go behind her father's back and attend a Johnny Cash concert in Lethbridge:

I don't know how old I was – maybe sixteen - they came to pick me up and mother was in the house, and I was in the house, and they told me they wanted to take me to go see Johnny Cash – then Casey (her brother) said to my dad, “I'm going to take Anne for a drive – is that okay?” So, we went – I'll never forget – and Jerry Lee Lewis – I Walk the Line – My father was furious – he didn't talk to me for two weeks.²²³

²²¹ Joy Damousi, *Memory and Migration in the Shadow of War-Australia's Greek Immigrants After World War II and the Greek Civil War* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2015), 73.

²²² Tanis interview.

²²³ Tanis interview.

Anne's relationship with her father dominated her interview. Having a profound effect on shaping her future, she maintained that along with religious teachings, his decisions instilled in her moral courage and the mental strength needed to adapt to life in Canada:

I know there were some things he planted in me as a child - what you learn as a child doesn't leave you – I thanked the Lord throughout my life you always give me an opportunity.²²⁴

Although restricted by her father's control, Anne constructed her identity in a way that turned lost opportunity into gratification. The preservation of family unity surpassed her personal goals and in a form of self-empowered agency, she created a space for herself that allowed personal fulfilment. While each one varied in its intricate detail, the complexity of the parent-child relationship is a narrative common in all interviews.

William's story, also emphasising the depth of family unity, focused on paternal leadership and a masculine ideal. Armed with war-related memories, he begins by reaching back to his life as an eight-year-old in Haarlem. Somberly recalling the Hunger Winter, and his mother's fear during the bombing of Alkmaar, he said, "If I close my eyes, I can distinctly see the smoke billowing in."²²⁵ Referring to his father discussing three possible destination points, he remembered why Canada was chosen over Australia or South Africa:

They chose Canada, I think, probably because after the war, the Canadians were very highly regarded in Holland – they were the heroes – I think what made a big difference too, there was a church here.²²⁶

Testifying to his family's favourable impression of Canadian soldiers (part of an army of liberators in 1945), along with the presence of Christian Reformed Churches, his father's

²²⁴ Tanis interview.

²²⁵ Bartel interview.

²²⁶ Bartel interview.

decision was made easier. Settling into their new lives, William recalled what his parents taught him:

We were now in Canada and now you become a Canadian. My mom and dad, they encouraged us to speak English in the house - not entirely - I mean we weren't forbidden from speaking Dutch, but otherwise, how would they learn English? Oh ya, they had trouble with certain words, and they had a fairly good accent.... their pronunciation of some of the words was a little different.²²⁷

As in Henry's testimony, William expressed his respect and faith in his mother's abilities to maintain family happiness in the home. Pointing out his family was not wealthy, he lightheartedly recalled his mother's comment as she served a scant meal: "well we have no meat today, put some pepper on your potatoes."²²⁸ For him, the difference between survival and deprivation depended on his mother's ingenuity. He recalled the following:

She made soup so thick, you could put your spoon in it, and it would stand upright, but if more people showed up? Hot water! It was a little thinner that's all!²²⁹

William narrative was also centered around his family's strong work ethic and despite having a sister who contributed her income to the family, labour-related experiences primarily referred his father, his brothers and himself. Because the construction of the Dutch masculine self-image focused on men as wage earners outside the home, separate spheres for male and female were a natural part of his upbringing. Raised in a "male breadwinner society," William identified with masculine duties held by himself, his father and his brothers.²³⁰ In their roles as agricultural workers, males were responsible for operating various types of machinery, tractors

²²⁷ Bartel interview.

²²⁸ Bartel interview.

²²⁹ Bartel interview.

²³⁰ Boter, 84

and other motorized equipment. William's enthusiasm in recalling this part of his life was easily discernable. Leading into a favorite memory and citing it as responsible for stirring a passion in him for powered vehicles, he begins by animatedly recalling his first ride in a car from the Lethbridge train station to their new home in Magrath. He then quickly detours to discuss his father and brothers obtaining driver's licenses:

The farmer where we were going to work – there was a gravel road to Magrath, and you know that little dip we have south of the airport, just before you get to the curves? Well at that time, the dip was quite a bit deeper – that seemed like it was the end of the world – that's where it started – I was absolutely nuts about powered vehicles. I would have done anything for the chance to run the tractor – oh you better believe it. The power bug hit us all very early. My brothers were old enough to drive.... they went and got a driver's license for a dollar, but of course, when you go to church, Dad drives – I mean there's such a thing as doing things properly.²³¹

William's testimony revealed that as new cultural customs intersected with traditional patterns of family organization, his family maintained social divisions related to age, birth order and gender. Old-world family customs continued to foster a sense of security in the new surroundings and nowhere was this more evident than when the discussion turned to religion. Taking on a more serious tone as he turned to prayer, William discussed stringent dinner table manners and his father's authority as patriarch of the family:

It was always at mealtime, you prayed before and after mealtime, there was a section of the bible that was read and then it was prayer again.²³²

Typical of most Dutch families who followed orthodox teachings, gender lines in the home were drawn during meal and prayer time. Fathers, as patriarchal leaders, dominated this

²³¹ Barthel interview.

²³² Barthel interview.

aspect of family life ensuring an atmosphere of respect was instilled. When asked about the importance of religious practices, William referred to his family's attendance which occurred twice on Sundays both in the Netherlands and in Canada:

Everybody brought their lunch and sat in the back, and of course, the high point of the lunch hour was that my mom and dad could speak to people in their own language and they didn't have to translate.... they could compare notes with what other people were finding out, or of course, for guys like my brothers, who were teens a little beyond, it was a time to scope out the girls. Our faith says that God is in control – God is trying to teach us a lesson and most people aren't listening.²³³

Faith in the Dutch Christian Reformed Church, both in the past and in the present remains embedded in his identity. Partly due to his parent's encouragement that they endeavour, whenever possible, to 'fit in', the obligation to keep the faith while adapting to a Canadian lifestyle was met with relative ease. Social contacts with already established Reformed Church members made it easier in terms of religious continuum and, in William's case, this network of like-minded Dutch Canadians made the integration process easier.

Alongside a desire to become a contributing member in Canadian society, was a church-guided obedience towards parental authority remained a priority. As attested by the others in this project, this meant contributing wages which were integral to family subsistence. William stated turned his earnings over to his parents except when he "got a little bit of pocket money, and of course, I smoked, so luckily smokes were cheap."²³⁴ He recalled a time when he independently pursued extra employment outside of sugar beet season, generating a three week absence from school. Aware that regular school attendance could not always be enforced on working class

²³³ Barthel interview.

²³⁴ Barthel interview.

families who depended on children's income, he emphatically stated was not going to pass up the opportunity to earn extra money:

I think I was in grade twelve...I got reamed out by the principal that I missed too much school...it was a horrible year for digging beets, and the fellow I worked for once in awhile, he was having a horrible time, so, I said ah, I'll just come home, so I took maybe three weeks off.²³⁵

Mentioning present-day volunteer work and emphasising his identity as a contributing member of society, William was proud not only of assimilating (in terms of learning to read, write and speak English) but also of his positive impact on the Canadian economy (most often through his ability to perform manual labor). Expressing a bond to Canada as a postwar survivor, William measured his and his family's well-being and his identity, not on socioeconomic status, but rather on personal work ethic and religious faith.

While work and faith remained primary components of what constituted success within these Dutch families, many family goals and dreams were permanently altered by the effects of war. Joy Damousi writes, "The hidden memories and the effects of wartime experience, both on migrants and their families, remain an area in need of further examination by historians, especially in relation to the impact of war on the waves of immigrants who settled in countries far removed from sites of conflict."²³⁶ The following testimony bears witness to this argument.

Aris' family of thirteen lived meagrely in the Netherlands for years after the war before migrating to Alberta in 1956. Post-war memories of his father's agricultural difficulties were revealed as he explained how coming to Canada offered an opportunity to repay debts left owing in the Netherlands. Aris' adjustment to Canadian cultural and societal customs occurred alongside his family's goal to restore to their reputation in the 'old country.' He took great pride

²³⁵ Barthel interview.

²³⁶ Damousi, 198.

in his family's ability to not only attain self-sufficiency while in Canada, but also to recompense individuals back home. Referring to it twice during the interview he said,

Once we got to Canada, we had to work hard to try and earn some money, so he could pay off his debts.

As I mentioned, we had to work hard to the first year so that my dad could send money to Holland to pay off the bills that he had left behind.²³⁷

Relating intricate details connected to hoeing sugar beets and working in a root cellar, Aris re-creates his labor-intensive work with an affinity that only someone who has performed the backbreaking task could describe:

We had to crawl on our knees because the beets were getting too big, and they were seeded in those years, so those had to be thinned down to one plant so that it could grow into a good beet. After we finally got done thinning the beets, then it was time to start the second hoeing, they called it, and you went through everything again to catch any weeds or try to cut them out.²³⁸

I worked in the root cellars - a lot of Japanese farmers grew potatoes and they stored them in underground cellars-and then in the wintertime we spent time sorting them, and weighing them and washing them and doing whatever needed to be done. It was very tedious.²³⁹

The work was strenuous however, Aris conveyed a sense of pride in his ability to complete the task at hand. Similar to what was revealed in other interviews, his family structure was fixed on gendered divisions of labour with males considered primary wage earners and decision makers. Honoring his father's authority, as a thirteen-year-old and the fourth-oldest male in the family, he understood a commitment to agricultural work would preserve and protect his family. Despite promoting masculine and feminine distinctions, it worth pointing out that as a new immigrant family, gendered roles pertaining to divisions of labour were occasionally

²³⁷ Slingerland interview.

²³⁸ Slingerland interview.

²³⁹ Slingerland interview.

suspended. When they first arrived in southern Alberta, Aris noted that every family member's ability to contribute was integral in ensuring economic needs would be fulfilled, and despite being designated to perform domestic duties, this included that his sisters work in the fields as well:

All the money that was earned, the farmer paid my dad and my Dad bought groceries or whatever we needed the rest, we tried to save a few dollars. I never had any of my own money until I was twenty-one. I can't say I had much trouble with that.

Sometimes we were not too happy with the long hours we had to work, but at the same time, I think we accepted that as needed. We were used to working hard at the chicken farm my dad had in the old country-we had lots of work.²⁴⁰

While Aris' testimony included memories of school taunting by classmates and struggles to speak and write English, he consistently returned to talking about labour, agricultural matters and his father's determination to own and operate a farm with the help of him and his male siblings. Engaging in a narrative that highlighted recompense for those who carried his family's debt in the old country, he was focused not only on documenting his family's integrity, but also on giving his father a credible voice. For Aris, testifying to his father's priority to repay debts represented more than just documenting the erasure of a liability. It was intertwined with confirming his identity as a member of a trustworthy and respected family. Present in his life both as a young boy and as an adult, the repercussions of his father's actions informed Aris' philosophy on building effective work relationships, attaining credibility and perhaps, most significantly, served as a means of pride and self-fulfillment. Concluding the interview, his voice trailing off at the end, Aris again paid homage to his father:

My dad came here when he was 39, on his 39th birthday, and he sold his farm to my brothers in 1975 and basically retired – you know it's

²⁴⁰ Slingerland interview.

unbelievable you know – starting with nothing andya.²⁴¹

Picking up on the thread of family unity, work ethic and spiritual faith, Bert's testimony also discusses the power of a patriarchal family structure, however, his story unravels somewhat differently from others in this project. At thirteen years of age upon arrival in Canada in 1949, he focused on his family's immigration experience an adventure and an opportunity which was "very exciting for us kids."²⁴² While an opening interview question about the war compelled Bert to share a profound event, the rest of his testimony did not mention difficulties or hard times and instead highlighted only positive memories of his life as a young immigrant

Detailing this wartime story with a familiarity indicating it to be a well-worn narrative, he recalls the last year of the war when his family hid Polish Jews in their home. At nine years of age, his parents feared that he might unintentionally disclose his family's work with the Dutch Resistance, and this resulted in he and his younger brother being sent away until the war was over:

We had a family of Jews in the house and they were Polish Jews, they didn't even speak Dutch, except for the younger fellow, there were six of them – they stayed with us over the last winter of the war and you know, we didn't have a big house – we lived in a duplex and because of the extra crowding, but not only that, us little kids, we talked a little too much and we talked about people and if anybody asked, we said 'oh they are relatives living with us,' not everybody believed that, so for safety reasons, they sent my brother and myself to live with relatives about 30 km away in a different province for the last 3 months of the war.²⁴³

Invoking this difficult time informed the rest of Bert's dialogue during our interview.

Although not articulating it as such, removal from his home as a nine-year-old boy loomed large

²⁴¹ Slingerland interview.

²⁴² Brouwer interview.

²⁴³ Brouwer interview.

in the moment of re-telling and seemed to amplify further references to his focus on family unity. Particularly intriguing was the way his answers were contextualized within his family as a collective, thus avoiding any description of his experiences as an individual. While briefly mentioning participation in church-organized sports, choir and his love for music and playing the guitar, questions aimed at gaining personal perspective were met with reference to his family's co-operation and solidarity. Throughout most of his testimony, this collective centered on the economic efforts of the males in the family, which included working for farmers, eventually buying a farm, and other details highlighting male work outside the home. Speaking about his father as a wage earner he said the following:

My dad was always working for the government, he was something like associated engineer, he wasn't an engineer, but he looked after big projects – he had 80-100 people to look after.

My dad worked in Spring Coulee; they were putting in a big siphon through the coulees for irrigation, and the thing was, my dad because he was used to working with a lot of people – taking charge kind of – the foreman noticed that, and he paid him 10 cents an hour extra.

In '56 we bought a farm – we finally decided this is the time to buy a farm – my brother still owns that farm – and so we all moved onto the farm – it was a quarter section of land.²⁴⁴

When asked to talk about what he might identify as challenging aspects of integration, his manner turned nostalgic, describing memories of adventures and friendships made with boys on neighboring farms were described:

There was a farmer, Art Goode and, his son, Merle they only had one boy – him and I used to chum together, and the Japanese farmer had a Japanese young fellow and we used to chum together – he learned a little Dutch – I learned a little Japanese, that was fun.

I can't say that I had any really difficult times, but I had a lot

²⁴⁴ Brouwer interview.

of good times, you know exploring with this Japanese fellow – and Merle, him and I - we used to do things together, I used to go over to his place.²⁴⁵

Bert provides a primarily positive slant on his experience as a post-World War Two child immigrant and in so doing, highlights the diversity in how children processed and constructed identity. For him, negotiating family separation at nine years of age inspired a mechanism of survival that intensified family connectedness. Along with emphasizing this perspective, most of his stories center on his father as a provider and successful wage earner, and thus lend credence to a masculine work ethic typically stressed in Dutch families. While enriching our understanding of the far-reaching impact of wartime events on children's lives, Bert's narrative, based on ties of kinship, articulates the importance of recognizing how memories are framed by the context in which the participant is speaking.

Also drawing attention to a strong work ethic and family cohesion, Abe's testimony raised important issues about the power of language. Arriving in Canada with a machinist diploma from a technical school in the Netherlands at age sixteen, Abe began hoeing sugar beets with this family in May of 1951. Attesting to his wage-earning responsibilities as the eldest son in his family of six, he recalled his parents' guidance centered on the following three words: "work, work, work." Presenting this philosophy as central to his life, Abe explained how he handed his paycheque over to his father for five years and to him, it was simply, "family income."²⁴⁶ At sixteen years of age and not legally required to attend school, his testimony revealed a situation distinctive from others in this project who had exposure to the English language in the classroom. Abe used the phrase 'word power' to describe the difficulties he faced

²⁴⁵ Brouwer interview.

²⁴⁶ Abe Visser interview.

when learning read and write English while being exposed to slang and curse terms at work. He stated:

Well, we had no word power at all, because I never went to school here and the English language, even with the farmer, it's a terrible language, it was unbelievable what they said – the language I learned – it was behind the barn – so that was too bad.²⁴⁷

A 2007 migration study led by occupational scientist Suzanne Huot explored the ways the power of language shaped immigrants' access to occupations. This study found that the “pressure to learn the host society's dominant language, in this case English, shaped their engagement in daily occupations throughout the integration process.”²⁴⁸ Crucial to both economic success and as a means to obviate social marginalization, this research shows that despite efforts to enhance proficiency, difficulties with English often limited an immigrant's ability to “access the resources and services provided in Canada.”²⁴⁹ Huot's study, while focused on present day immigrants, raises important points for consideration about the essential role language, or ‘word power’ played in the lives of post Second World War child immigrants. Attested to in Abe's story, learning English was a more challenging task, as he did not attend school upon arrival to Canada. In a nostalgic moment, tears formed as he recalled his winter employment in the Burmis, Alberta lumber camp, where he read his first book in English:

Stevenson, he was a bookkeeper and he had a bit of a library in his office and I picked up a book and he had a dictionary – the book was written by Douglas – The Robe – that's the first book I read in English – It took me two months. Every time I had to look it up (words) or sometimes the boy next to me – he knew it (a word) that's how I got through it. I just loved that book – The Robe – the robe of Jesus when he was hanging on the cross and it went from soldier to soldier.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁷ Abe Visser interview.

²⁴⁸ Suzanne Huot, “The Power of Language: Exploring the Relationship Between Linguistic Capital and Occupation for Immigrants to Canada,” *Journal of Occupational Science*, (October 2018): 11.

²⁴⁹ Huot, 6.

²⁵⁰ Abe Visser interview.

Jenny's memories also point to the power of language but, in the context of school, and with the aid of a supportive teacher:

We had to learn English – I didn't know a word of English – We knew we were called 'DPs' – Even reading in school – you read the way you saw it, you know, like pronounce – I had to read about Dick and Jane and it was about 'pretty' but I would read it as 'pratty' and they (fellow students) would laugh. The teacher got so mad and she says, "if you go to her country, and you were laughed at like that, how would you feel?" Mrs. Jackson, I'll never forget her.²⁵¹

The differences in these two English-language learning experiences also touches on how age categories affected these children's lives. Jenny, at age thirteen, was legally required to attend school, and while her time spent in class was intermittent and ended at age fourteen, it offered her formal lessons in reading and writing, along with positive memories of a teacher. Abe, sixteen years of age upon arrival to Alberta, exceeded the legal age required to attend school and immediately entered the workforce. This meant he was left to his own devices to learn how to read and write English. Abe's and Jenny's experiences speak to the emotions associated with learning a host society's dominant language. While both stories attest to how 'word power' shaped their immigrant experience, age categories, in this case linked to education laws, affected their learning process.

The testimonies in this project show that while Dutch families shared certain commonalities, no single child immigrant experience could be categorized as typical. While all interviewees expressed a resolute attitude towards securing unity and economic security, they each adapted to their new worlds in distinctive ways. Drawing a definitive line around the sanctity of the family, the outside world and unfamiliar environments did not deter children from

²⁵¹ Aardema interview.

demonstrating agentic behaviour. Understanding this helps move beyond conventional approaches of historical agency that focuses solely on rebellious or non-compliant conduct, and instead towards a richer appreciation of how children perceived and acted upon challenges during integration.

Conclusion

Though often nostalgic and occasionally fragmented, this thesis argues for the inclusion of adult-narrated childhood memories into post Second World War Dutch immigrant histories. This historical research project recognizes that an absolute version of the childhood immigrant experience is not attainable and therefore includes sociological, anthropological and philosophical approaches in its analysis. Contributing to historical studies in a way that adds complexity to existing scholarship on Dutch immigration to southern Alberta, the ten interviews in this project force deeper contemplation of children's active participation in family integration processes through details not revealed in most scholarly research. More than a means to gather facts, the narratives in this project add a sense of determination and emotional depth on both the after-effects of war on family economics and on leaving one's homeland. These oral history interviews with adults willing to recall childhood memories of immigration and integration into Canadian society are valuable in their capacity to add insight to childhood experiences. For these young immigrants, integration was not about losing identity, but rather about maintaining the self while adjusting to unfamiliar cultural and social practices. In the end, this project confirms that Dutch children's immigration experiences required negotiation between obedience in the home and independent behavior when at work or school.

Taking a qualitative approach means sacrificing the opportunity to represent Dutch migrant children on a larger scale. Far from intending to speak for all Dutch Canadian immigrant children, this project's analysis is very much forged in terms of the legacies of ten interviews and the ways each person remembered themselves and their families. Using the concept of agency as a lens to argue for a child's capacity for individual thought and action, certain clear assertions can be drawn from their experiences: As child immigrants, they had agency. As child immigrants, they influenced family immigration processes. As child

immigrants, they negotiated age and gendered restrictions. And, perhaps most significant, as child immigrants, they strove to meet the approval of their parents. Despite having to conform to the constraints of adult directives, these conclusions are embedded each oral history interview. Adapting to new cultural, social and emotional settings, those interviewed were historical actors who not only actively participated in their family's well-being, but also negotiated and made difficult decisions in response to personal circumstance.

So how did adults talk about experiences as immigrant children? There was a strong determinative approach taken when asked about family decisions, both before and after migration. They understood that their contribution to family income and manual labour in sugar beet fields and other work in the off-season was necessary to their survival. There was little space for self-absorption. Arriving in Canada with uncertain futures and no firm guarantee of acceptance, most were keenly aware of their initial disjuncture from mainstream Canada society. While alluding to initial feelings of isolation, most acknowledged that their religious affiliations and church activities filled a void and provided social connections. Despite facing challenges as outsiders, the persistence to overcome obstacles and succeed set the tone in their young lives.

A compelling, but underlying factor, war trauma was another factor with unprecedented impact on family and individual life paths. However, while wartime experiences were discussed during each interview, these children did not allow the trauma of the war itself to define their lives. A desire was shown by each interviewee to move on from that part of their past and focus on successes and survival, both as members of hard-working families and as determined individuals. The requirement to negotiate Canadian cultural norms with traditional 'old country' customs, particularly those related to age, gender and birth order divisions, seemed to hold more weight in children's conception of self than identifying as a post-war survivor. Because families

relied on age and birth order as part of their family structure, children understood their position in the family as relative to both parents and siblings. Respecting the positions of authority as taught both by religious teachings and by a patriarchal system of hierarchy, age as a framework for family unity ensured a firm sense of order to family life.

Traditional gendered conventions were also ingrained in family organization. Female and male roles were predetermined and crossing boundaries occurred only when economically necessary, and most often involved women and girls temporarily engaging in male-dominated farming duties. While not the only factor, gender oppression curtailed education and career opportunities for women who were expected to carry on as mothers and wives in a conventional nuclear household. Male-ascribed responsibilities centered on income-earning capabilities and usually involved the efforts of fathers securing an ongoing ‘breadwinner’ role for their sons. Despite the absence of an egalitarian belief system that most often did not favor women and girls, those interviewed upheld family ties and professed loyalty towards parents.

This study was limited to children living in the same household with parents and siblings and did not include details of their lives after reaching adulthood and living away from home. Left unanswered is whether they continued their family’s adherence to traditional customs, whether some or all factors were passed onto the next generation, specifically age and gender restrictions towards their children; and finally, how their immigration experience affected a long-term sense of belonging in Canadian society.

Marah Gubar states that, by conceiving of children as actors, we accord children “agency without denying that they are shaped by a classification that pre-exists their arrival in the

world.”²⁵² This is important to current discourses on childhood studies and it reflects a surge of attention to children as refugees, displaced migrants, and victims of global tragedies. Inherently complex, a child’s immigration experience is not something that can be scientifically studied. However, while broadening our awareness of the plight of children, we have much to learn from adults who were young immigrants in decades past. It is not just about recording stories to be published then forgotten – it is about how their stories can teach us more about the role post-war children played in Canadian society. All the interviews in this project serve as a link between the immigrant and Canada’s immigrant history of which they were a part. Beyond highlighting a historical presence, their stories bring forth a range of epistemological questions related to the child immigrant experience and points to the importance of addressing memories, agency and identity in post-World War Two child immigrants. When we turn our attention from waves of family immigrants over time, (which historically garners the most commemoration) and position the individual in an equally important role, we pave the way for preservation of the immigrant child in historical memory.

²⁵² Marah Gubar, “The Hermeneutics of Recuperation: What a Kinship-Model Approach to Children’s Agency Could Do for Children’s Literature and Childhood Studies,” *Jeunesse: Young People, Texts, Cultures* 8.1 (2016): 295.

Epilogue

Sharing an ethnic and cultural background, my position as the daughter of a Dutch immigrant generated an emotional connection to the participants in this project. Accompanying an instinctive rapport with those who were willing to dredge up childhood immigrant memories, came a commitment on my part to be an advocate for them, not only as survivors of war, but also as elderly individuals consenting to having their life stories recorded for my project. In my position as a novice oral historian I was determined to explore the childhood immigrant experience as distinct from what their parents experienced. Upon reading interview transcripts and listening back to recordings, I noticed I often encouraged participants to reflect on themselves as independent and autonomous beings. This exercise in self-reflection led to more questions surrounding the role my familiarity with the topic played during interviews and thus, provided the impetus for writing this epilogue. I could write at great length about my experience; however, for now, I will limit it to three main points.

First, after selecting interviewees and prior to conducting the formal interview, I met with participants for a casual conversation over coffee. This allowed me the opportunity to go over the consent forms and explain why this project was important to me and why I chose to pursue it. Expanding on my personal connection to the immigrant experience, I believe, helped develop trust and for the most part, interviewees told their stories with ease. Second, this project has taught me to more fully appreciate the importance of ‘deep-listening’ skills. The significance of listening for meaning in a way that prompts the interviewee to provide more detail is critical to the oral history interview process. During analysis, I noticed there were times when I was overly concerned with the list of questions in front of me and neglected to comprehend that the narrator was opening a door for me to ask a follow-up question. This realization has influenced a personal

desire to improve as an interviewer in subsequent oral history projects. Over the past three years, I have been fortunate to work with the Nikkei Memory Capture Project (led by Dr. Carly Adams of the University of Lethbridge and Dr. Darren Aoki of University of Plymouth in the United Kingdom). As a research assistant and interviewer, the importance of listening and allowing silences to occur during the interview have been brought forward even further. I have come to understand that a critical, self-reflective approach is important not only to grasping the complexities attached to the practice of oral history, but also in other ongoing challenges that are part of this ‘messy’ form of research methodology.

Third, when I came across this story it spoke to me personally: Presenting his oral history research on the lives of Kentucky coalminers to a group of “eminent historians, sociologists and philosophers,” Alessandro Portelli writes about a reaction he received during the question period. One of the comments was as follows: “nice, very interesting, but what difference does it make?”²⁵³ He writes that his first reaction to this line of questioning was anger, followed by self-reflection. Facing a somewhat similar incident during a mock thesis defence a few years ago, I was asked to argue the value of first, studying childhood as a category for analysis and second, of studying the history of migrant children using personal testimonies. I recall stumbling whilst trying to find the right words to answer. Reading Portelli’s reflective reaction, I’ve spent some time thinking about the significance of childhood studies and using oral history interview as method of historical research. Yes, there was a personal dimension to this project and at its core, I acknowledge there existed a certain amount of emotion work on my part in allowing children’s immigrant voices to be heard. I argue that exploring the histories of children is an important step in reconceptualizing and empowering them in our world today.

²⁵³ Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia-Oral History and the Art of Dialogue*, 51.

Of the reservations associated with the practice of oral history and its academic legitimacy, Canadian oral historians Sheftel and Zembrzycki state, “Our fears get to the heart of our struggles to define what oral history is and what we hope it can achieve. Let us keep being afraid and see what richness emerges.”²⁵⁴ In retrospect, I believe my insider status gave participants room to delve into parts of their immigrant experience that otherwise would have been silenced. I am further inspired to say that I consider it a privilege to have heard each one of the historic life stories that are part of this project and in addition to making a difference in my life personally, I hope having the opportunity to have their childhood stories told has made a difference to those interviewed.

My role as a graduate student exploring the experiences of Dutch immigrant children has taken many detours since its inception. Initially faced with self-doubt, fear, and questions, (for example, what happens if no one wants to speak to me about their experience or what if this research is rejected as unimportant), I have found solace in an article intuitively given to me by Dr. Lynn Kennedy during my undergrad years. Written by Audre Lorde and titled “The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action,” its powerful message opens as follows: “I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood.”²⁵⁵ Her message speaks loudly to me. What began as, and now continues to be, most important to me is upholding the individual’s historical past as a way to find meaning, understand, and move forward in the present.

²⁵⁴ Anna Sheftel and Stacey Zembrzycki, “Who’s Afraid of Oral History? Fifty Years of Debates and Anxiety about Ethics,” *The Oral History Review* 43, no. 2 (2016): 366.

²⁵⁵ Audre Lorde, “The Transformation of Silence and Language into Action,” in *Sinister Wisdom* 6 (1978) and *The Cancer Journals* (Spinsters, Ink, San Francisco, 1980): 40.

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Appendix 1

Family Data

Name <small>m= married name</small>	Birthplace: Municipality and Province	Year Immi grated	Family Members	Year of Birth	Birth Order (from oldest)	Age Upon Arrival	School Attendance in Alberta
Jenny Miedema m Aardema	Idsejahuizem, Friesland	1951	Mother, father, six children	1937	Second	Thirteen	Until age fourteen
William Barthel	Haarlem, North Holland	1950	Mother, father, six children	1941	Fourth	Eight	Completed grade 12
Henry Bosman	Alphen aan den Rijn, South Holland	1952	Mother, father, eight children	1942	Sixth	Ten	Completed grade 12 University of Alberta
Bert Brouwer	Nijkerk, Gelderland	1949	Mother, father, seven children	1935	Fourth	Thirteen	Until age fifteen
Wilhelmina Bosman	Alphen aan den Rijn, South Holland	1952	Mother, father, eight children	1936	Third	Sixteen	Until age
Rita Vanee m Papworth	Hoevelaken, Gelderland	1953	Mother, father, five children	1941	Youngest	Twelve	Until age fourteen
Aris Slingerland	Rotterdam, South Holland	1956	Mother, father, eleven children	1942	Fourth	Thirteen	Until age fourteen
Anne Aleman m Tanis	Ouddorp, South Holland	1954	Mother, father, eight children	1941	Fifth	Thirteen	Until age thirteen
Abe Visser	Koudum, Friesland	1951	Mother, father, four children	1935	Oldest	Sixteen	Did not attend
Shirley De Roos m Visser	Siegerswoude, Friesland	1952	Mother, Five children	1936	Youngest	Sixteen	Did not attend

Appendix 2

Oral History Interview Details

*Digital recordings and transcripts in interviewer's possession.

*All interviews conducted and transcribed by Elaine Toth.

*Interview with Pastor Brian Kuyper was not conducted as an oral history interview, but rather used a source for church history and other doctrinal information about Dutch Christian Reformed practices.

*All interviews conducted in the homes of participants, except that of Pastor Brian Kuyper whose interview was conducted in the Taber Christian Reformed Church and Henry Bosman whose interview was held at the University of Lethbridge.

Aardema, Jenny, interview conducted on January 18, 2017 – Lethbridge, Alberta.

Barthel, William, interview conducted on February 23, 2017 – Coalhurst, Alberta.

Bosman, Henry, interview conducted on January 11, 2017 – Lethbridge, Alberta.

Brouwer, Bert, interview conducted on September 14, 2017 – Lethbridge, Alberta.

Kuyper, Brian, Pastor, interview conducted on June 8, 2016 – Taber, Alberta.

Lichak, Wilhelmina, interview conducted on September 12, 2017 – Daysland, Alberta.

Papworth, Rita, interview conducted October 20, 2015, - Delta, British Columbia.

Slingerland, Aris, interview conducted January 25, 2016, - Lethbridge Alberta.

Tanis, Anne, interview conducted March 7, 2017 – Picture Butte, Alberta.

Visser, Abe, interview conducted October 20, 2016 – Lethbridge, Alberta.

Visser, Shirley, interview conducted October 20, 2016 – Lethbridge, Alberta.