

*Analysis of the Children of Holodomor Survivors Speak oral history project, written by Sophia Isajiw*

## **First Analysis of the Children of Holodomor Survivors Speak oral history project**

for the Ukrainian Canadian Research and Documentation Centre (UCRDC)  
By Sophia Isajiw, Interviewer and Analyst

### ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Children of Holodomor Survivors Speak oral history project is a project of the Ukrainian Canadian Research and Documentation Centre, coordinated by Head Archivist Iroida Wynnnyckyj. The interviewer/researcher for the project was Sophia Isajiw; the technical consultant/videographer was Andrij Holowaty, and the web page developer was Valeriy Gorchynskyy. Please refer to the web page introduction for further information about the project: [ucrdc.org/cohs](http://ucrdc.org/cohs). The project was realized with the assistance of sociology advisor, Professor Wsevolod W. Isajiw, PhD. We are grateful to the Temerty Family Foundation for sponsoring the project.

### INTRODUCTION

Although there has been much research on the survivors of the 1932-1933 Holodomor, a genocide that claimed millions of lives through forced starvation, there has been very little research on the children of Holodomor survivors. The project intended to assess the consequences of the knowledge of the Holodomor on the second generation, the survivors' children. This is the first oral history study addressing the legacy of the Holodomor on the lives of the second generation of survivors in the Ukrainian Canadian diaspora. The Ukrainian Canadian Research and Documentation Centre hopes that it sparks many more such studies.

We did not set any predetermined hypotheses for this study. The method used followed the Oral History Method of open-ended questions, which allows for respondents to freely express themselves and draw on memory as needed. We were interested in what would come up naturally as the respondents recalled their knowledge. Each of these interviews was between 2-3 ½ hours long, recorded in video format. This analysis assesses 5 of the 51 questions that the respondents were asked (full questionnaire attached, see Appendix A). The questionnaire was developed in consultation with a sociologist and psychologist.

The 5 questions assessed in this analysis are:

- When did you first learn about the Holodomor? What were you told?
- What affect did it have on you and how do you know it affected you?
- How do you think your parent(s) survived?
- Since then, do you feel the Holodomor has affected your life in any way?
- Is there anything you've done with your knowledge of the Holodomor and your family history since that time?

### **Description of the sample of respondents:**

A total of 21 respondents were interviewed about 31 survivor parents (some of them had both parents in the Holodomor). Eleven of the 21 respondents were selected on the basis of UCRDC having previously conducted archival interviews with their Holodomor survivor parents. The remaining 10 respondents were the result of the "snowball method" of selection. Seventeen of the survivor parents described by respondents were their mothers and 14 were their fathers. The average age of the parents during the Holodomor was 11. The youngest parent was 2 at the time of the Holodomor and the oldest parent was 31. The interviewees' average age was 63. The youngest respondent interviewed was 46 and the oldest was 81 in 2015. By religion, 15 of the respondents and parents identify as Ukrainian Orthodox and 6 as Ukrainian Greek Orthodox. All respondents had some form of Ukrainian language school growing up (19 attended Ukrainian school, 2 were taught by their parents who taught Ukrainian school classes).

### **Respondents by profession:**

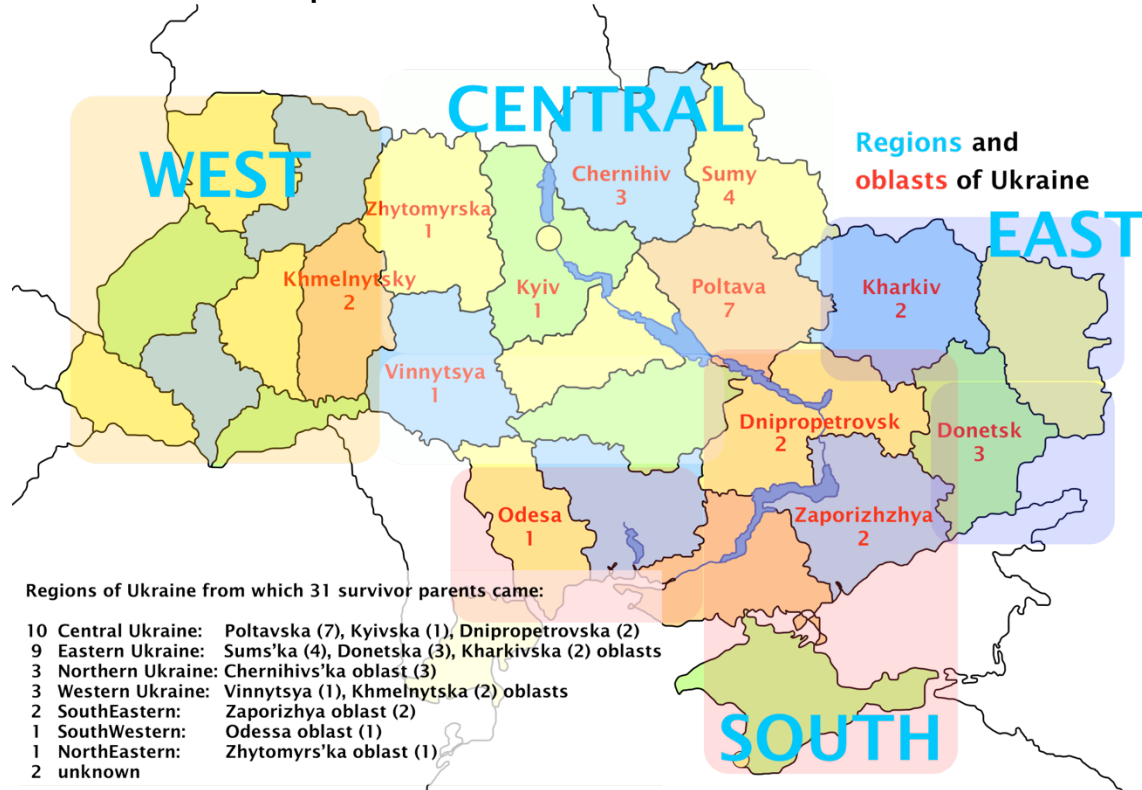
- Architect
- History Teacher and History Department Head
- Chemical and Industrial Engineer
- Structural Engineer
- Educator/ School Trustee
- Educator/Education Consultant
- Librarian/Reference Specialist/Musicologist/Composer
- Urban Planner
- Pharmacologist/Mom homeschooling 5 children
- Teacher
- Artist / Curator
- Artist / Designer
- Ministry of Health and Long-term Care
- Engineer/Business Development Manager
- Ukrainian Catholic Priest
- Criminal Lawyer
- Capital Markets Trader
- Litigation Lawyer
- Professor of Chemistry
- Occasional Teacher
- Actor / Comedienne

### **Parental origins in Ukraine of the 31 survivor parents:**

<b>10</b>	<b>Central Ukraine:</b>	Poltavska (7), Kyivska (1), Dnipropetrovska (2) oblasts
<b>9</b>	<b>Eastern Ukraine:</b>	Sums'ka (4), Donetska (3), Kharkivska (2) oblasts
<b>3</b>	<b>Northern Ukraine:</b>	Chernihivs'ka oblast (3)
<b>3</b>	<b>Western Ukraine:</b>	Vinnytsia (1), Khmelnytska (2) oblasts
<b>2</b>	<b>Southeastern:</b>	(coastal) Zaporizhia oblast (2)
<b>1</b>	<b>Southwestern:</b>	(coastal) Odessa oblast (1)
<b>1</b>	<b>Northeastern:</b>	Zhytomyrs'ka oblast (1)

2      **unknown**      (parents themselves did not know or child did not know)

### 31      **Total survivor parents**



*Map of survivor parent origins in Ukraine: the highest percentage came from Poltava in central Ukraine; the second highest from eastern Ukraine. Note that for 2 of the children/respondents their parents' origins were unknown to them.*

### **Two Main Types of Interviewee Respondents:**

Overall, the most significant finding is that the respondents grouped by knowledge into 2 main categories: *whether they had been told about the Holodomor as children growing up and it was talked about at home, or whether they had never been told, it was not talked about at home, and they found out about it in various ways later.*

### **Of those whose survivor parent DID NOT TALK ABOUT THE HOLODOMOR:**

For a few, their parent was quite broken from the whole experience (2 of the fathers and 1 of the mothers), but otherwise:

- The parents are described as very smart and intelligent but very taciturn, guarded, almost untrusting, suspicious, timid, of few words (“маломовні”) – this was all about protecting the

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family and it being a trauma that they lived with. In the words of one of the descendants: *"I understood she was not like other mums. She was very, as if broken, she needed a lot of healing."*

•The fathers tended to be more angry and irate over Ukraine than the other fathers. Significantly, this held true even though not all these fathers experienced the Bolsheviks and the Holod, because the survivor parent was the mother.

So, for these families with a parent living in fear, having to lie about where they came from, falsifying documents to get into Canada to avoid being sent back to be murdered by Stalin – these were honest hardworking people, and it ate them up inside to be liars and to lie to their child about aspects of their history – and when the children learned the truth later, it caused rebellious behavior in them and feelings that everything the parent had told them were lies.

The others were brought up hearing stories of their parents' life pre-collectivization, of quite prosperous lives that were idyllic, with land, livestock, bees, windmills, horses, pigs, fowl, carriages, sable coats, velvet dresses, hired workers, because the parents wanted them to feel connected to *that earlier* Ukraine that had existed pre-collectivization, and its goodness and happiness, and not have to suffer what they went through or to inflict their own wounds on their children.

As one child said: *"It was almost like they came to a fresh start in Canada, and they didn't want to weigh us down with stories from back there that might have been hard for us to hear."*

Several were very careful not to tell much about life in Ukraine because they had been declared dead back home or did not want to endanger relatives left in Ukraine, which was a big fear, or because the children thought they had survivor guilt. More often those who survived and made it out were the only members of the family that had fled or were left.

Significantly, for those parents who absolutely refused to ever talk about it, it was when their third-generation grandchildren started to ask questions or wanted to interview them for their Ukrainian school projects, that they would open up. Already in their 80s, their 2<sup>nd</sup> generation children now in their 50s finally learned some details because their children (the third-generation grandchildren) became the catalyst for it. But it had to be pried out of people who did not want to relive those emotions and memories. Also, because under Soviet occupation you didn't talk – because your neighbors or kids could rat you out to the state and you would wind up in a gulag – so, for survival purposes, you close up. **Across the board, these children made mention of this guarded behavior as becoming a part of their consciousness growing up that affected them.**

Very often they may have talked about the events leading up to the Holod – brutal розкуркулення [dispossession or dekulakization] in 1929-31 on family farms with communist commissars taking things away over several trips, then taking the father and the eldest sons, shipping them to Siberia or shooting them, then brutally kicking mothers and children out of their homes, pregnant in the middle of winter, taking away boots and even the husband's sheepskin

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coat, living through the Terror of the 30s, repatriation, being sent to Siberia, DP camps. Men would often talk more about these specific events and not a word about the Holodomor in general (or if they wrote a diary, the same thing) partly because this would be evidence against you if you wrote or talked about Holod. **And significantly, when they did talk about the Holod, it would be very specific graphic stuff, much more graphic than what the other group of survivors talked about.**

### **So, of those whose survivor parents DID TALK ABOUT THE HOLODOMOR:**

Firstly, no parent called it “the Holodomor,” that came later with politicization, they all called it holod, “when holod was in the village...”

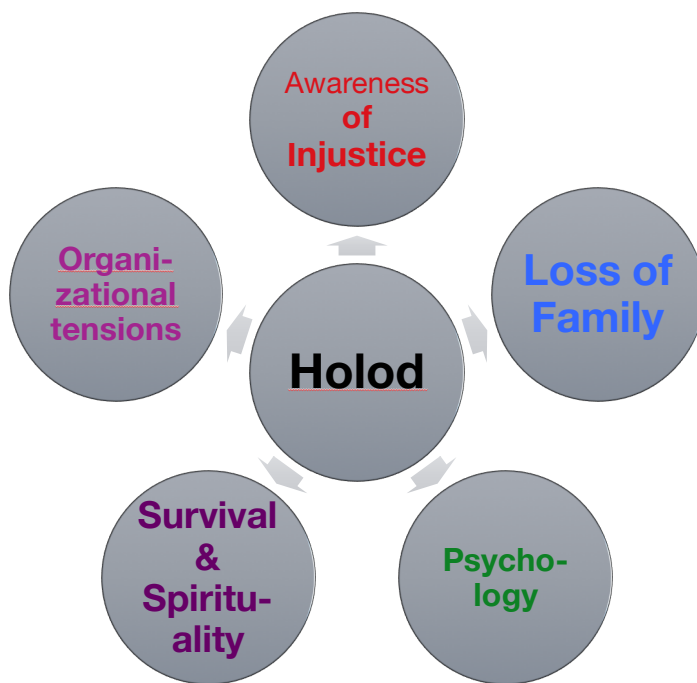
Secondly, it's not so much that all the children who knew about it sat and talked to their parents first, it's more they listened and heard, they absorbed the information through a full range of visual and verbal cues, through tones and tears, most often at the kitchen table at a celebration with other survivor friends of their parents. People would ask each other around the dinner table where were you in the 1930s and then the anecdotal stories of sharing similar experiences would come out (and the children nearby would listen, or even if they got kicked out of the room would defiantly sneak back under the table and sit quietly absorbed in listening). These early childhood events left an indelible impression on almost all of the children who soaked up information about it in this way. *“So, you listened, you picked things up.”* And they would have to put the pieces together themselves which led directly to those children choosing professions as historians, librarians and educators.

Significantly, none of the children ever dared sit the parent down and grill them about it. It was so obviously painful to the parent, it was evident how much they suffered, and as a child you wouldn't voluntarily inflict this on them. Also, several children mentioned they just didn't want to hear it again and again, over and over, themselves, in their youth.

Thirdly, as one child said: *“I think this profound permeating sense of sadness and loss was passed along. “Where my father grew up there is no place I came from left, the village is gone, people ask, ‘where are your relatives?’ – but I have no relatives, they all died. Mother would on rare occasions get a letter from Ukraine and cry. There was always sadness from anything connected to Ukraine.”* (In some cases, this led to an early rejection of Ukrainian things – although in adult life there was a quest for understanding usually after the death of one parent, and a reconciliation. Or the opposite reaction was to carry on traditions, language, learning and “taking on the mantle” with more passion and commitment to ensure a future for an independent Ukraine.

So, one begins to see how certain kinds of identities begin to formulate themselves in the next generation given whether the Holodomor was talked about at home growing up, or not.

## Holodomor: IDENTITY DENIED



**This denial of a national and ethnic IDENTITY in the Holodomor gave rise to the following markers of identity in the children of survivors**

### **1. An overarching awareness of INJUSTICE in their lives:**

They carry a strong sense of social justice and understanding of human rights, especially living in Canada. This influenced the careers they chose for themselves as educators, criminal lawyers, teachers (all of the educators teach about the Holodomor and Ukraine). About half of all children interviewed trace their professions to fighting for injustice or to being children of survivors. Several worked on the Deschênes Commission on War Criminals (1985); all are activists in one form or another.

*As one daughter stated: "Well, I wonder if I would have chosen criminal law and social justice and have an interest in human rights had my parents not had this experience, had my parents not persevered during this horrible time. So, I think it developed my sense of social justice, my interest in my career and I suppose even the types of friendships that I have chosen, the type of interests I pursue."*

## 2. LOSS OF FAMILY

### **All the children spoke most poignantly on what it means to grow up without relatives:**

About the **fragmentation** of not knowing one's own roots even one generation back, who their grandparents were, where exactly they come from; not being able to visit because whole villages no longer exist; especially about having no photographs of anyone and knowing these were big families once – the sadness of a parent not having a photo of their younger selves or of their parents; being asked about relatives growing up and not having any because their parents were orphaned in the Holodomor; not having any family traditions because of having no family.

The subtext of “**survivor guilt**” and **profound loss** meant an unhappy parent would get noticeably sad remembering traditions they lost out on in their youth which resulted in holidays that were sad and uncomfortable celebrations for the children. This created residual **anger and fear** in the children and **regrets** around not having uncles, aunts, or grandparents to go to when needed for outside counsel or for help coping – the loss of the sense of extended family support.

Not knowing one's own **genetics** for what might get passed on to a child you may have. As one son said: *“And part of the problem is with my mother's side of the family – I have no idea what my genetics are because she was adopted in the Holodomor. So, I don't know what diseases the maternal grandparents had or what they were susceptible to, so it's impossible for me to be able to give a medical history of my mother's side. I don't know what her parents had, or any of her aunts and uncles or her brothers and sisters. So, if you want to look at what the Holodomor did to us, that's fairly subtle, but it's real.”* [–A married child of a survivor, but never had his own children].

Another son talks about the realization that the children have been victimized also, saying: *“Because, if you can't connect to family, that means you're an orphan, right? So, you act like an orphan. You have to basically go back to find those roots. If you can find one or two, you're lucky.”*

As one daughter said: *“The other thing that this Holodomor did indirectly, is the fact that my parents had to emigrate to survive. They had to leave, my mother was taken, and my father fled, and then they chose not to go back to Ukraine under those conditions. We came here like orphans, with nobody. If you didn't have that Ukrainian ghetto, you couldn't have survived. And there's a feeling that maybe that's why we clung to each other. There's always the feeling, my feeling of loss of family. There's a sort of inner rage in me about how dare you have kept us away?”*

## 3. PSYCHOLOGY:

We need our psychologists in the community to carry out some serious research studies in general on this legacy. I will share only one example from the children about one way it affected their struggles with their identity and Canadian friendships and relations in particular, but other points deal with an acknowledgement by the children of their being victims of parents with [undiagnosed] PTSD, of carrying a sense of inferiority and a mindset of fatalism that makes

them extremely risk-averse, and experiencing communication issues, amongst other things.

**One son's reflections on how this identity fit growing up:**

*"I would be waking up and have sleepless nights and struggle with my friends: There would be times of saying what's going on, why is it my job? Why do I have to do this? You know, all my non-Ukrainian friends were going to tennis camps in the summer, they were sailing, they were golfing. And what am I supposed to be doing? I'm going with these scouts camping? And then while I'm playing cards with these guys I'm supposed to tell them about the Ukrainian cause and about the Holodomor, and about the evils of Stalin? Why? Why me? This cross is too big to bear. And there are other times when you're saying, 'Why aren't my friends listening to me? Why are they such goofballs? Why don't they believe me?' When you're not wrestling with that, you're wrestling with something else. Again, I've been lucky growing up in the period of Martin Luther King [Jr.] and his legacy was a huge inspiration, and one of the things that he said that I'll never forget is that: "In the end, it's not the words of our enemies that we'll remember, but the silence of our friends."*

And this ongoing inner conflict has continued for this child of survivors to the present day, with Ukraine in the news since Maidan in 2013, and in conversations with some friends he's known for decades.

**Other examples:**

- I think that the people that survived against absolutely every conceivable odd, developed a particular mindset of fatalism and risk-aversion that permeated every part of their lives. And I think that was in turn passed on to us as children of it. Because I think it has affected our community deeply, I think it has created a particular way of acting and I think there's a particular way of thinking and, you know, in order to understand us you have to understand this.*
- My father was a tortured guy. And on top of all of it, all of the people I know, my dad, mom, their friends, would have what we would call PTSD; every last one of them. And nobody recognized it. It was completely undiagnosed, and I think a lot of our community had it ... You know, my father I think treated his PTSD with Manhattans ... I think a lot of that was a coping mechanism for the most abject horrors that these people had been subjected to ... But it was a thing and I think that in some ways it affected our ability to excel and that kept us insular. That kept us within our community – you could spend your entire time dealing only with other Ukrainians. I don't think that helped us in terms of being a success, what we could be in Canada, from the talents that we had. For a variety of reasons, you have a lot of wounded people that dealt with things in a particular way, and you know, as a result we have no entrepreneurs of that generation.*
- Like, your parents are telling you this at the dinner table, which is, you know, it's odd. And you don't really know how to relate that into your daily existence of going to play football in the park or riding around the street on your Big Wheel. You know that your parents' experience is different from the experience of your friends, but you can't really talk to them about it either*

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*because if you tell people they kinda go: “you’re lyin’.” Um, it made us different. It made us insular. It made us stay inside our own heads, inside our own community. You couldn’t really tell people about it because they wouldn’t believe you – no one talked about anything, especially the kids. Because: “you’ll say something and we’ll all get deported,” you know, or “I’ll lose my pension.”*

• *My father couldn’t communicate with his mother, my father couldn’t communicate directly with his brother, my mother had no one to communicate with, and that’s all they had.*

#### **4. SURVIVAL & SPIRITUALITY**

In response to the question of how they thought their parents survived, respondents cited the following range of characteristics that group together under “survival and spirituality”:

##### **• Innate traits:**

- Parent survived because of tenacity, stubbornness, never feeling sorry for oneself.
- Dad survived because of his mother’s wisdom, her ability to do what was needed and not fall into despair, and to take things one day at a time.
- Survived because people helped each other, didn’t listen to the rules and snuck each other food.
- Grandfather was an herbalist – he knew what to bring back from the woods, grasses.
- Through the kindness of Germans and even German officers who helped them with medical help, hiding, information to do the opposite of what they were being told, to run into the woods to not show up on the platform because they would all be killed.
- The foresight of my grandfather to escape, and the good luck.
- Ukrainians are resourceful, and Ukrainians adapt.
- It was just a will to survive, nothing else can describe it.
- I think it’s due to my mother’s quiet yet determined stance in life that you had to do what you had to do in order to survive.
- Because they escaped (usually to avoid deportation).
- Because they are tough psychologically; I never heard them being depressed, anxious or overly-worried. They had an inner toughness, a centre around which they could build an identity – they had an identity.
- The ingenuity of a grandfather and his skill set.
- Innate ability to survive, she had her wits about her, she had street smarts, she had a skill set and she was a survivor, it’s all she knew how to do, it was ingrained.

##### **• Parent’s physical circumstances:**

- Lived in the city or were resourceful (they re-sewed garments to sell, had more land so therefore more money and possession so could last longer, hid food well all around the farm, didn’t play by the rules).
- Were students, so received food rations in city.
- Because they went through dekulakization, they survived because they had to move to cities where they were able to get enough food to get by (not everyone though).
- Relocation to the city (after dekulakization most frequently, or other reasons) and grandfather was able to get a job in the city and feed the whole family.

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- Physical strength, ability to hide food (potato peels & grain), ability to eat things you normally wouldn't have to (could stomach what little there was to eat).
- Because they lived just outside the village, had a creek, had a forest, mushrooms became a part of the diet at this time where previously they were not a staple in the diet.
- A very ornery cow that the Communists couldn't take away.
- Because they were indispensable fixing things (in the Communist distillery)
- Parents had a quiet, low-profile nature.

• **Luck:**

Both categories of children of survivors pointed out to me that it was a matter of luck, a great deal of random luck involved in this (but as one said, luck is what we call what we don't know) and then talked instead of spirituality and faith.

• **Spirituality/Faith/Religion: was PASSED ON to the children and became the main support for how they also cope**

- Deep faith, putting their trust in God made her able to cope with the situation in a rational logical way, which saved them.
- God's will, good fortune.
- Being adopted (by a doctor) when their whole family died, and they were orphans. Through the charity of an almost complete stranger.
- Their faith in God.

*• It was an acceptance: we lived through it, we survived. We are thankful we survived, and we are thankful for what we have. Our life is built on this gratitude expressed in getting together with other people in church, concerts, community.*

*• It probably had a hand in the development of my own kind of spirituality. It's hard to put into words, but maybe a carryover that's both a combo of sadness and optimism because I mean history has repeated itself, but if you're going to find any meaning in life you have to look towards the good and you can't ignore the bad – you have to sort of delve into it and see what you come away with, because you have to know about it and know that we're ALL capable of it.*

*• It is one thing to give a political answer, it is another to give a psychological answer, it is another matter to give an economic answer, but there's also, and I think a more profound answer, is a spiritual answer, because fundamentally, that is where some of these deep questions are answered. And so, it's fine to curse, it's fine to blame somebody; it's fine to complain about something. But we can also create; we can also be a transformer, transformer of evil into good. And I think to a large extent, that's what humans do. ... We always have to be vigilant; we always have to work, and I think this is one of the messages that is passed on to us from our parents who survived the Holodomor. Pass the message along. Stay at it. Heal that wound.*

## **5. ORGANIZATIONS:**

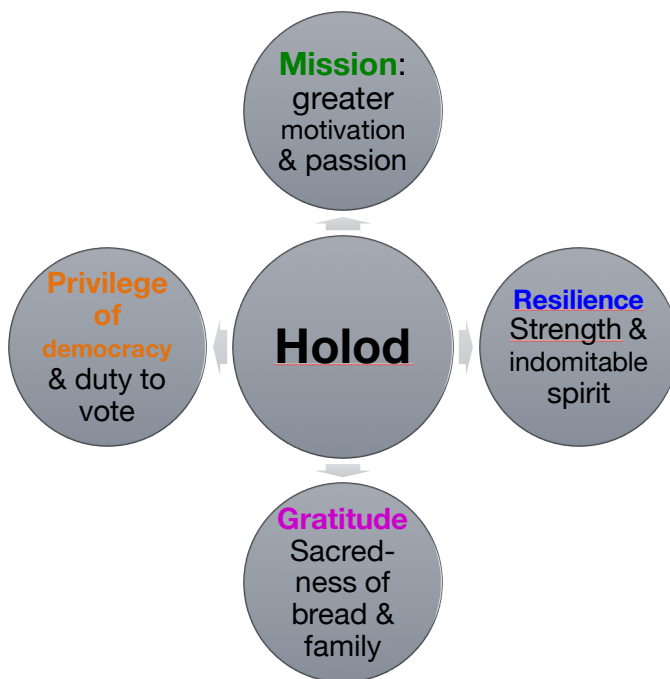
**Respondents cited the need for belonging to many organizations, especially in their youth, as part of creating a strong sense of identity but with some side effects also:**

- *“Our parents took all the civic stuff extremely seriously and it created a generation of people who wanted to be very Canadian but at the same time, they wanted to be very Ukrainian too, there was that dichotomy. It inculcated a sense of community spirit as well. We’ve gotta do this, gotta do that. Maybe that’s why I’m in a trillion organizations.”*
- *“It was a political community, the PLAST of that era, everything was ‘at some point we’re all going back so we better learn these skills ‘cause we’re going to be the new Divizia or UPA or whatever.’ And it was a real thing, I remember. Camouflage skills, digging trenches, marching, doing drill. I’m 8 years old, I’m digging slit trenches. Really actually helped in the army, because: “where the hell did you learn to do THAT?” “Uh, Boy Scouts, Sergeant-Major Macmillan!” “WHAT? What kind of boy scouts were you in?” They didn’t get it, you know? Like we were getting merit badges, but the merit badges were a little different. Bow and arrow. Like, when am I going to use a bow in combat?”*

**The *denial of identity* formed the above distinguishable identity markers amongst the children. But *surviving the tragedy* also created certain *positive markers of identity* in the children as well:**

## **HOLODOMOR: IDENTITY CREATED**

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## 1. SENSE OF MISSION: Greater Motivation and Passion:

- Across the board, from the parents, there is a passion for Ukraine that comes from a mission to be Ambassadors of Ukraine so as to ensure that Ukraine has friends in the rest of the world that will fight for it so it can rebuild itself (like Poland did between the wars with the support it had in Paris). The children significantly reminded that their parents didn't leave Ukraine and end up in Canada because they wanted to:

*"When I compare my parents to other parents of people of their generation that I knew in the Ukrainian community, they were obviously people who were **more motivated** than others when it came to history and the national cause. ... It's not that my parents were burning nationalists, but they really loved Ukraine, they loved their village, just the beauty and the richness, and that that beauty and richness wasn't allowed to flourish was always a source of pain for them, an injustice, you know?"*

This **mission** is one that **was passed down** to them from their survivor parents, as one interviewee said, *"I took my father's words seriously."*

**—This extended into keeping the traditions, customs, history, and language alive:**

*"We were brought up with a love and a kind of a patriotism, because my mother and father were very much that. My mother in particular was quite the patriot. And so, yeah, we were interested*

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*in working for the liberation of Ukraine. We were very idealistic at that time. So, yes, we did the Ukrainian school, and Ukrainian dance and whatever else.”*

**–This mission also motivated the children:** *“Basically it put me in a position where I said, ok, now you have to do something about it over time and commit to it and spend money and time on it, and that’s basically what I did. I can say I spent more money on the Ukrainian issue than on my personal life in my lifetime.” I put 3 million dollars into a joint venture in Kyiv. And more in another joint venture in Lviv.*

## **2. RESILIENCE: Strength and indomitable spirit**

Resilience is a key characteristic of all the survivors which is mentioned by their children, most especially *“the quiet strength and indomitable spirit of women.”* One of the markers of resilience is belief in oneself and something larger than oneself, certainly true of their spirituality and faith that supported them, and that it develops out of the challenge to maintain self-esteem. And as one daughter stated: *“That stock of resilience was inbred in us, I think. And also, for future generations.”*

A degree of resilience is indeed genetic; however, psychology experts still argue how much.

This is Ludmilla Temertey who created the world’s first Holodomor monument in Edmonton explaining it: *“The reason I wanted to take on this project of the Holodomor Monument, was to honor that indomitable spirit. Because these immigrants who came really with just a suitcase and very little money, in 5 years they had already built their own home through hard work. And because here is a woman [her mother] upon whom every tragedy was visited, if you can imagine, starting from the collectivization, being thrown out of your own home with nothing but your shirt on, the Holodomor which was horrific, and then the loss of her first child, the war, the camps in Germany, and so on, and here’s this woman who had experienced just about everything. And she was the most loving, forgiving, joyful, generous person.”*

- What contributed to the **resilience** was their legacy, honesty, hard work and a devotion to the country they left behind, always with the hope that it would be free.

As one daughter stated: *“And so that was really what they were trying to instill in us, is this hope. “You have to help that country” my mother told my eldest brother on her deathbed. And he set about doing it immediately and still does.”*

- *“My mother the survivor, in her parting words, she says at the end, “what your soul yearns for, grant it.” Don’t waste your life. So that’s the kind of spirit, you know?*

## **3. GRATITUDE: The Sacredness of Food and Family**

The children carry deep gratitude, first of all, that their parent survived because they otherwise wouldn’t be present talking with the interviewer.

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• *I think it has perhaps given me the means to be more grateful for the things that I do have and to realize the transiency of the good things of life. I think that we tend to think in terms of progress, that the world is progressing toward some sort of better state. But I think, looking back on the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, that's not the case, and I think it perhaps helps me see things in a real way and not to idealize our society but work towards keeping the good things in our society alive and recognizing evil, or things that are flawed in our society today, and to know that very easily things can change, the way they did for my family in the 1930s.*

• *What I felt from the very beginning was a deep, deep sense of gratitude, to my mother and father, and that was for their courage; and for having spared us too. I mean when I think, imagine: we'd be there today, you know? It was the courage and resourcefulness – how they survived that exodus – very few people survived that exodus out of Ukraine. And they did. And there were many stories my father told us – he was arrested and interrogated, and all kinds of horrible things happened on the way. So, yeah, there was just this gratitude. I was, eternally, and am, grateful. Not a night goes by without my thanking them.*

**Gratitude for the family which was possible to have now in Canada, for Canada, for food and an awareness of the sacredness of food and of family.**

• *My mother never allowed us to leave the table with food on our plates. Never. You had to eat everything. See it hearkened back to the days when they had nothing to eat. The other thing is the strong bond to family. Because only family they could trust. So back then, the strength was in keeping touch with the family and being a family, being together. I think that's one of the things that we love about our family. We've got a very good relationship with everyone, with our kids and grandkids and everyone.*

#### **FOOD WAS SACRED:**

–Pretty much universally the children of Holodomor survivors grew up with it inculcated into them that all food is sacred, it never gets just thrown out, it goes to the birds or some other being, but most especially bread is sacred. If a piece fell on the floor, God forbid, or even a crumb, you picked it up crossed yourself and kissed it. Like a ritual you enacted for forgiveness for dropping it. You never threw out food and sometimes would hear about the Holodomor in these moments too.

–With many mothers who were survivors, even if they were poor or not well off, the table had to be groaning with food. Why? Because cooking the food, seeing the food, feeding guests with it, this was a great joy, they felt rich.

#### **4. VOTING: the privileges of democracy**

• *The other thing that was instilled by, I think, my parents is the absolute, well, the privilege that we have to vote, and you know, and the understanding that democracy is a complicated, kind of unhappy, construct but I don't think we've come up with anything better. So, I've never missed a vote and never would, to me that's, it's a very important privilege to have and I've tried to instill that in my kids. If they didn't go and vote, other than the times they were off in school or different*

*provinces or whatever, I would be very upset. Yeah, flawed though it may be and complicated, you've got to exercise that.*

**Imbued with Canadian values** the children of survivors' knowledge of the Holodomor brought them closer to the Ukrainian community, but they also acknowledged that the Ukrainian community is not a homogenous whole. They feel closer to that wave of immigration that came with their parents rather than the most recent wave who came for economic reasons. They also felt that it's not about a hatred for Russians in any way but that there should be a healing, a truth and reconciliation process carried out still, a recognition of diversities. And that there needs to be acknowledgement that Ukrainian Canadians have worked their way into government and that there is a legal and government process by which we can get our issues heard and our goals met as a community here, with the government helping us to succeed in our goals and with the current recognition of our community as a political force.

## **Holodomor: community issues as defined by the children of survivors**

- **Recognition of PTSD:**  
Because they recognize their parents never had any treatment or support.
- **Divisive agent element within community organizations:**
  - The children were referring to the KGB, and others who infiltrated diaspora organizations about whom they heard frequently growing up, and partly about divisions of focus on issues within the community itself.
  - That there were KGB and Soviet agents, spies that came over with the Eastern Ukrainians especially who worked within certain community organizations especially against certain initiatives, including free speech on Holodomor. This bears some future scrutiny, which it has not received in a formal or scholarly way although people have always talked about it, especially in the Toronto community. (Sydorenko's father's painting was not accepted for exhibition on the anniversary of the Holodomor until he told the committee that they would be able to remove it only over his dead body). Numerous other instances and sometimes names are given in their interviews.
- **The stated need for a truth and reconciliation process:**
  - Coming to an understanding of this trauma and reconciling it in our minds is very important in the development of contemporary knowledge about Ukrainian history.
  - *And he says to me, 'the Holodomor was brought on by Stalin.' And I said, no - it wasn't brought on by Stalin - it was brought on by Russia. And he says, 'no, it was Stalin.' And I said, no, it was Russia, I said. There's a problem that Ukrainians and Russians have, in respect of the Holodomor. The problem eventually will have to be resolved. It's a problem that is raised by Yale theologian, Miroslav Volf. He talks about reconciliation. And he makes an interesting statement, he says: 'In order to finally deal with evil you*

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*have to name it.' The people who carried out that Holodomor, they have to be named, because once you name the perpetrator, it's not for vengeance. It enables reconciliation to occur, and eventually these peoples can live normal lives. And that enables it to happen.*

- My cousin in Ukraine, she says, our family and extensions of these families, extensions of those families who were actually involved in some of those deeds, we have names of these people. Up till '39 it was other people who were coming in and doing these nasty deeds who were from somewhere else, they were strangers. But in '39, a lot of the local polls showed up and all of their names are listed that they were actually going into the xytrip and forcing people to either take your house apart and move it to the village and join the collective or tear the roof off and that's the end of it. And those were local people. What happened to them? When the war broke out, a lot of them scattered, went into the army, took off. Because I asked my mom when she ended up in the kolhosp in '39, you had to work with these people. You knew who they are, you knew what they did. She says, what am I going to do?*
- But I think a lot of Ukrainians still have a lot of this buried, there's still a long way to go. We need some more of those truth and reconciliation kinds of, I think you know, those are mind jarring because they force people to uncover uncomfortable truths about themselves that allow them to move on, and I don't think Ukraine is anywhere near any of that. It's not necessarily to lay blame on anyone in particular, because that's still part of the problem, right?*
- You know, history shouldn't be repeating itself. And the only way to stop that is to make sure that the history is known. If you're equipped with what you have then you will try to do something about it. I believe that the Holodomor has to be well studied, but I think the Ukrainian nation, it has to go through its system. They have to learn, they have to grieve, they have to do it, they have to come to terms with it, and understand whether they were participators in that or they weren't, who knows? Some of those people in Ukraine were obviously ... they couldn't have done all of this without some participation of somebody. That's something they have to do, think about their ancestors too. I mean, that's part of what the Jews had to do too. So basically, once you get that out of your hair, I think the only way you're going to move forward in society is to then come to terms with it and let it go. It's your past history, and then you can develop as a nation, and be healthy; because this constant feeling that nobody understands is what holds us back.*
- Talks about Mandela and South African apartheid and ethnic cleansing and genocide of other countries who have had to come to grips with this and Ukrainians never have. There they had their truth and reconciliation where communities came together and acknowledged, confessed to each other [their deeds]. They had their confession; they had their cleansing. And Ukraine never has had that. And Ukrainians never will, we are too backward to ever realize the necessity of that. We will never have a cleansing we will remain divided. Melnykivtsi, Banderivtsi, who gives a damn about your stupid...listen the modern world politics is not Melnykivtsi and Banderivtsi, open your damn eyes and come*

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*to grips with modern political reality and economic reality. And clean up your act. They're wrapped up in this garbage, Pravoslavni, the divisions that everybody knows about. Would they agree to some kind of reconciliation?" When they got rid of the communists in Czechoslovakia the newspapers published the name of everybody that was a member of the Communist Party in Czechoslovakia so that everybody knew who was ratting them out and who was doing what to destroy their country.*

- *Follow the money and find the papers on the whole torgsin system. The torgsins are unique in the sense that a few hundred tons of valuables left the country, where did they go? When they do things like that they obviously must have kept very, very precise records, because if you send people to do this you have to know who they are, what they collected, and they must have somewhere, that whole torgsin system, this is an added bit of information for everyone to understand that. Destroying people through collectivization was enough. Starving them was enough. But to make sure they didn't get past this last Holodomor, while they're still alive and breathing, let's get the last of their gold? The last of their silver; they'll give us anything now, they're starving – let's take everything. This was a severe crime, of tremendous magnitude. But who were these people?*
- **Risk-taking inhibitions in individual and organization life** breed insularity in the individual and in the community.

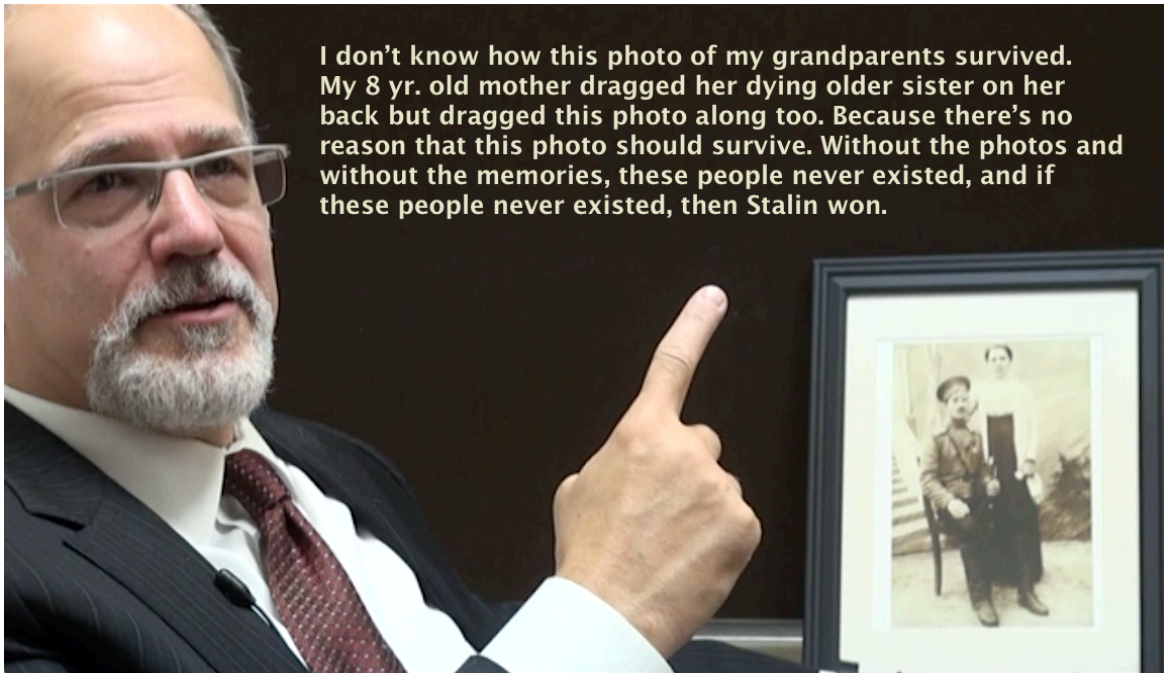
#### **Most understood and often stated in the interviews: the issue of COLLUSION**

- *If the guy in charge of the village who allowed this to happen, colluded in the famine, ok'd all the orders, who was often a communist party member, was Ukrainian, then it makes Ukrainians and the Holodomor as banal and evil as all these other banally evil people in similar horrific tragedies all over the world. The enemy isn't necessarily 'over there' or 'other' – it could be us. Why did he do it mom? "Because he wanted to take care of his family." Put in a circumstance, anybody could do horrific, horrific things. That's not to absolve Stalin and the Bolsheviks as being the main motivators. But, without that guy in that village, who's trying to protect his family, at the cost of my mother's family, it wouldn't have happened, it would have been a very different story.*

- *In Ukraine there were no onlookers, everybody was part of it. They were either the ones being tortured, or they were those few inflicting the tortures, but there were no onlookers...everybody suffered the same fate. Everybody had to fend for themselves, at every minute, every second they had to fight for their life.*

- *The Holodomor was a war of extermination against us, which could have united us into thinking about us as a nationality to unite around. It was done in terms of "kulaky/kulaks" being "class enemies" against the regular proletarian. But the "kulaky" were all ethnically Ukrainian and we were ethnically cleansed from certain areas and people were brought in to replace us – which in some ways explains the Donbas to us today. ... **But this was done to us, and only us, it was a war on us as a culture, to beat the nationalism out of us, to beat the culture out of us, to turn us into the new Soviet Man in an unadulterated socialist baloney of***

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***'you-can't-really-tell-who-you-are-you're-the-new-socialist-man,' so that we had no national consciousness. What it should do, and if it's taught more, it could still do, because the Fourth Wave [of immigration] were never taught any of this at school and have no knowledge of this, is it should spark a nationalist consciousness in ourselves because there's no systematic way of remembering it to us. I think we have to recognize that this has to be our rallying cry because Donetsk and Donbas are entirely and completely connected through time from 1932-33 to Maidan in 2013-14.***

## **Conclusion:**

The finding that there is a significant difference between the two major types of second-generation children of survivors in terms of how the parents handled conveying knowledge of the Holodomor should be further investigated for all the issues raised by the second-generation survivors in their interviews, and many others.

Furthermore, the children of survivors themselves indicated areas that they felt desperately required further study or action including the recognition for PTSD, a discussion of the presence of divisive elements in the form of agents within earlier community organizations, a stated need for a truth and reconciliation process that would also include the recognition of collusion amongst Ukrainians in this tragedy.

Finally, it is clear from the interviews that it would be highly valuable to look at the legacy of this history from a purely psychological aspect through standard tests in a psychology study of its effects on the second generation.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **Interview Questions used for the Children of Holodomor Survivors Speak oral history project**

*One of the main objectives of the project is to assess if the knowledge of survivor parents, having endured and survived the Holodomor, had any influence on the descendant. The influence could be in the psychological realm – on the respondent's attitudes toward life, work or feelings of obligation. Or it could be social, such as what the respondent's feelings of connection to the Ukrainian community might be.*

*Another objective is to record the respondent's own life story. This includes a description of his or her family, schools the respondent attended, work history and the like.*

#### **Questions:**

1. What is your full name? First name, surname, (maiden name).
2. What is your date of birth?
3. What is your place of birth?
4. Tell us something about yourself.
5. How many brothers/sisters do you have? What are their ages, or years of birth?
6. Tell us something about each one of your siblings.
7. Where did you attend elementary school, high school, and college?
8. If you attended college or university, what subject did you major in?
9. Tell us a bit about your job history.
10. What was the first job you had, and what is the job you are working at now?
11. Did you have difficulty finding your present job?
12. Who or what was most helpful in your job search?
13. Did you attend Ukrainian School? Saturday school?
14. What language(s) did you grow up with? (First language, others)
15. Did you or do you belong to any Ukrainian organizations?
16. To any Canadian organizations? (hospital, theatre, reading group, church, work-related, sports)

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17. Do you consider yourself religious/spiritual? Do you belong to a particular religion? Which?
18. What is your mother's full name? First name, surname, maiden name.
19. Tell us about your mother, when and where she was born, what she does, her hobbies, interests, etc.?
20. What is your father's full name? First name, surname.
21. Tell us something more about your father, when and where he was born, what he does, his hobbies, interests, etc.?
22. What do you know about your grandparents – paternal and maternal? Where were they born?
23. Do you have relatives in Ukraine, and do you maintain contact with them?
24. Do you know of any family traditions, jokes, stories, etc.?
25. Which of your parents is a Holodomor survivor?
26. How old was the survivor at the time of the Holodomor?
27. How often did you talk with your parent about their experiences in Ukraine?
28. Do you remember when and how you first learned of the Holodomor? What was the situation, how old were you, how did that happen?
29. If someone told you about it what made him or her tell you at that time?
30. What did your parent tell you about the Holodomor? Give details.
31. How did you feel?
32. How and why do you think your parents survived?
33. What effect did this information have on you? And how do you know that it affected you?
34. Did you talk about it with anyone (friend family priest)
35. Since then, do you feel that the Holodomor has affected your life in any way?
36. Describe in what ways in particular it has affected or continues to affect your life?  
(Nightmares? Sadness? Silence? Make you stronger? Write a book? Make art about?)

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37. Is there anything in particular that you've done with your knowledge of the Holodomor and your family history?
38. Do you have any affinity toward Ukraine as your place of origin?
39. As you have been raising or raised your children, Do you maintain Ukrainian national traditions in your family? Do you encourage your children to learn Ukrainian? Do you speak Ukrainian at home? Do your children study the history of Ukraine, or have you studied it together? Family trips to Ukraine?
40. Do you consider yourself to be Ukrainian? Ukrainian Canadian? Canadian Ukrainian? or Canadian?
41. What do you think the Ukrainian community should do about the Holodomor now? (Or the larger Canadian community depending on how they define themselves).
42. How close do you feel to the Ukrainian Canadian community?
43. What do you like and find helpful about the Ukrainian Canadian community?
44. What would you like to see different about the Ukrainian Canadian community?
45. Do you feel that your knowledge about Holodomor brings you closer to the Ukrainian community?
46. And how do you feel about Canadian authorities and the government?
47. Do you trust them?
48. Would you say that you are passionate or dispassionate about politics and social movements?
49. Do you believe that the collective, or community can change social or political realities?
50. Is there anything else we haven't mentioned that you feel is important to touch on or talk about?
51. We asked everyone to bring in something that connects them to their early knowledge and awareness of the Holodomor, something that when you look at it, or hear it, or smell it or whatever strongly reminds you of the Holodomor. Can you tell us what you brought?