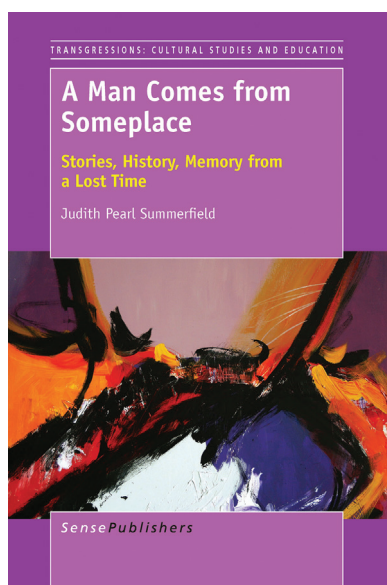


BOOK REVIEWS



A Man Comes from Someplace: Stories, History, Memory from a Lost Time

By Judith Pearl Summerfield

Sense Publishers, 2015

252 pp.

Paperback, \$32

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A Man Comes from Someplace, Judith Pearl Summerfield's study of family history and folklore, defies easy description. Drawing on literary and cultural criticism, history, memoir, and storytelling, the book creates something that feels both innovative and familiar. Summerfield, Professor Emerita

in English at Queens College, The City University of New York, has her origins in small-town southwestern Pennsylvania. Her parents, Martin (Motye) Pearl and Bessie Judd (Judkovitz) Pearl, connected after Motye's journey in 1921 from an Eastern European shtetl (small towns in Central and Eastern Europe with large Jewish populations) to Western Pennsylvania, and settled eventually in Fredericktown. This book chronicles her family's wanderings, drawing from hours of recorded interviews between Summerfield and her father, and an extraordinary cache of letters and images belonging to her Uncle Meyer.

A Man Comes from Someplace is not a conventional narrative. Summerfield spends much of the first three chapters preparing her readers to hear her father's voice: "My objective is to represent the stories as 'performances,' to engage the reader as he did when he told the stories." (xxiv) We read the same story—the foundational story of Motye's survival in the Ukrainian winter, crossing the Dniester River—twice in the book. The first time, in the introduction, the story is narrated by Summerfield. In the second instance, in chapter 4, Going to America, the story is told wholly in her father's voice. Summerfield is transparent about her subjectivity: "I am the 'natee,' the daughter/listener to whom the stories are being told, and also the narrator, the 'I,' who re-presents Motye's stories and tells, as well, about the effects of the stories on her own

life." And she has a persuasive argument about storytelling as a creative act of resistance, "that stories could make a difference in how we see that world and how history is told" (212).

This book offers teachers and students a way of processing larger historical events through storytelling, and it directs genealogists toward a more socially expansive view of family history, along the lines of Summerfield's father's approach: "it was always *story in history* [emphasis mine], the two interconnected. It wasn't just him or his family, it was what was happening in the whole world." (xviii)

In terms of subject matter and readability, *A Man Comes from Someplace* recalls Irving Howe and Kenneth Libo's bestselling *World of Our Fathers*, published in 1976 by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. It is perhaps a sign of the times that *A Man Comes from Someplace* is published as part of a specialized academic series and may be denied the popular audience Howe and Libo enjoyed. It may further be a sign of the times that *A Man Comes from Someplace* lacks the editorial rigor a book of this significance deserves. Typos and errors (e.g., the Bessarabian dish mamaliga is transcribed as "marliga" on page 70), inconsistent typesetting, and map illustrations borrowed from Wikimedia detract from the reader's experience. Nonetheless, *A Man Comes from Someplace* represents an original chapter in cultural studies and social history, one that takes up the challenge of *World of Our Fathers*' final sentence: "Let us now praise obscure men." 