Memories of Babi by Aranka Siegal

Piri is a city girl, but every year she goes to visit her grandmother Babi on her farm in the Ukrainian village of Komjaty. There is a lot that Piri finds strange, even scary, in Komjaty, such as the ghost in the form of a rooster who supposedly haunts the cemetery! But Piri loves country life: making corn bread, eating plums right off the tree, venturing out with her grandmother in the early morning to hunt for mushrooms. And during her time with Babi, Piri learns lessons that will stay with her all of her life, about the importance of honest hard work, of caring for the less fortunate, and of having the courage to stand up for those who cannot stand up for themselves.

In these nine stories, Aranka Siegal paints a tender portrait of the love between a grandmother and granddaughter, inspired by her own experiences with her grandmother.

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My Personal Review:
While her Newbery Honor Book, Upon the Head of the Goat, tells the story of her childhood in Hungary during World War II and the sequel, Grace in the Wilderness, recounts her experiences after liberation, some 20 years later, Aranka Siegal revisits her childhood before the war. Focusing on the time she spent with her beloved grandmother, Babi, who lived alone on a small farm just across the Hungarian border in Ukraine, Siegal's nine interrelated stories impart simple yet valuable lessons of faith, honesty, hard work, compassion, and courage. She paints a nostalgic but realistic picture of country life - gathering mushrooms, spinning thread, baking challah, and plucking chickens - but also exposes the tensions between Christians and Jews and the undercurrents of anti-Semitism, revealing Babi's fate at the hands of the Nazis at the end of the final story. The
 appended recipes add charm to this beautifully written, delightful collection. Ages 10 - 12. Rachel Kamin

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