

The Welcome Mat

Category: Immigrants

written by Ronna L. Edelstein | May 2, 2025

Although my paternal grandma was born in 1895 in a small town outside of Pittsburgh, my other three grandparents were immigrants—two from Russia and one from Romania. My dad's father died in the 1918 flu pandemic, thereby playing a minor role in my family's history.

My mother's parents, however, affected generations to come. They never shed their immigrant status; they failed to learn English, relying instead on Yiddish, and, due to Zayde's job as a peddler, never climbed the socioeconomic ladder. Most of all, they deprived their three daughters of an education, believing that only their son deserved a chance at a better life. Their immigrant mentality had lasting effects on my mom, as well as on my brother and me and even our children.

When Ma married Dad, his relatives—a wealthy American family that owned a thriving shoe store—initially rejected my mother. In their eyes, she came from the wrong side of the tracks. Furthermore, by being denied a college education, Ma spent her life mourning a dream deferred—she failed to become the teacher she longed to be. As a result, she raised my brother and me to focus on academics, making us star students but inept individuals when it came to social situations. Both my brother and I also emphasized school over social skills when raising our own children. Even my great-niece, my brother's granddaughter, gets extra praise from her grandfather and me when she excels academically and little applause for her social skills.

That said, I can state with one-hundred percent certainty that my immigrant grandparents and mother would vehemently oppose the current attitude towards today's immigrants and those still trying to enter the United States. Ma and her family lived in an inclusive environment with other immigrants; no one—neither a neighbor nor a politician—would entertain the idea of deporting them. No one would strip them of their rights as American citizens. No one would separate families due to alleged negative behaviors or beliefs.

My own experiences have taught me that being the descendant of immigrants is not always easy. It can leave emotional scars that taint the ability to build social relationships and diminish one's sense of self. Yet despite these drawbacks, I will forever endorse a country that roots its values in diversity, equality, and inclusion—that puts out the welcome mat for *all* people.

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