

I am the grandson and great grandson of immigrants. Seven of my eight great grandparents were born in other countries and then they or their children immigrated to the United States. All lived under challenging economic and/or political conditions in their home countries. One common trait among them, one that I am amazed by, was their willingness to leave the known in order to have opportunity. None had an advanced degree, or any degree. None was wealthy, but all were ready to work. Surprisingly, none of them ever returned to their country of origin, even to visit. They arrived with only friends and family to provide any assistance.

Great Grandfather Joe was a coal miner in Pennsylvania. He died in a mining accident, leaving his wife and children destitute. His wife never became an English speaker, but she ran a boarding house and she and her children became productive citizens.

Great Grandfather Ernst was a draft dodger- having served once in the Kaiser's army, he was unwilling to serve again and came to the U.S., worked as a stonemason and raised a family. He grew to be an old man who would try to teach his grandchildren German.

Grandfather Tom immigrated from Western Ireland as a young man. His birth family was large and there was no economic opportunity for him. Violent political clouds darkened the sky.

He arrived in Philadelphia, working the hard life of a freight delivery man, a life in which physical confrontations was a frequent occurrence. He was loyal to the local political machine that was loyal to him.

Grandmother Mary also came from Ireland, having a similar situation as her future husband Tom. She and her sisters worked as maids and cooks in the homes of the Philadelphia rich. Although never rich, she and her husband reached the comfort of middle class living.

So, I take some lessons from this. I want to be like my ancestors and have the courage to move to the opportunities of life. It also makes me want to enhance and enjoy my extended relationships in ways that many of my ancestors could not.