

An Immigrant's Daughter

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I was born the daughter of European immigrants, smack in middle of the baby boomer years. As a first generation American, parents and grandparents from another world. They landed on Ellis Island to begin a similar struggle faced by all immigrants today.

Grandma, orphaned in Poland during World War I, trekked to Brooklyn with some cash from her brother—earnings from his Viennese haberdashery business. She opened a dry goods store under the L train, and endured long hours laden with fatigue.

I learned a lot about my grandmother's struggles in her retrospective journal, discovered in her closet thirty years after her suicide. She spoke of World War I breaking out on the streets of her childhood town, and her struggles moving to Vienna and eventually to the United States.

Growing up in an immigrant home, wasting anything was a sin. Like they do in Europe, my mother went to the supermarket every day, and shopped for fresh food. If I didn't finish all the food on my plate, I was punished. Dinner conversations were laden with immigration stories of belongings packed into small suitcases and crossing the Atlantic, like I now pack my words onto the pages of my journal. My parents and grandparents spoke of illnesses aboard their overseas ship and more dead bodies that they could count. Each day they were thankful for life in their new homeland. They were grateful until the day they died. My story is a new chapter in an immigrant daughter's life.