

## **My Ancestor's Journey**

**My ancestor's trip to America was a very long, hard journey. They were very poor and had to work hard. They experienced prejudice because of their religion. In America, they felt different and out of place. But overall, they were extremely grateful that they had come to America and the trip was worth it.**

**My great grandparents, Maurice and Bertha, were Jews born in Austria Hungary. They were cousins and their families traveled together to America. In Europe, one side of the family worked in a sawmill, cutting wood. The other side worked in a brewery, making beer. My grandpa said that they also probably had a small farm at their house. They lived in a Jewish ghetto, a very poor neighborhood, kind of like a slum, made to separate Jews from other religions. They lived there during World War 1, and there was a lot of fighting going on near their home, so their family moved to Czechoslovakia in 1916. In 1918, when the war ended, they went back to their homeland. My grandpa says that their town was probably destroyed during the war, which is why they decided to leave, to go to America.**

**The journey from Austria Hungary to America was a long one. They first had to get from Austria Hungary to a port where they would board a ship. They took a train all the way to Rotterdam, a port in Holland, where they boarded a ship headed for America. They were in the lower class, they were very poor. It was a miserable trip. As we learned about in**

history class, the lower class part of a ship, called the steerage, was crowded and cramped. Steerage passengers got very little food, slept on uncomfortable straw mattresses, and didn't get any sunlight or fresh air. The steerage was very dirty and disease was everywhere. When they finally got to America, they went to Ellis Island and had to undergo a medical inspection. My ancestors were very scared that the doctor would find something in their eye and they would be sent back to Europe. When they passed the medical inspection, they took a ferry to Manhattan, where they would begin their new life in America.

When my great grandparents got to New York, they had to find work. Bertha worked in a factory, sewing dresses. When the factory owner gave her the job, he told her she would be paid at the end of the week, but he didn't tell her how much. Everybody told her to say, "that's not enough" to whoever paid her because factory workers weren't paid very much. But at the end of the week, she was paid \$12, much more money than she had expected, so she accepted it. She eventually became very good at sewing dresses, and later worked in her sister-in-law's dress shop. She also made most of the clothes for her family. Maurice worked as a busboy, bussing and cleaning dishes, in a restaurant in New York City. When he learned how to speak English, he became a waiter. Lots of big hotels were opening up in Miami, Florida, so there were many jobs, especially for waiters, there. Maurice, Bertha, and their two sons, Ben and Sandy(my grandpa) moved to Miami. My grandpa still remembers the long train ride from New York City to Miami. Maurice started working at the Blackstone Hotel, a big hotel on Miami Beach. In 1941, he opened his own small Jewish deli called Maurice's Restaurant in downtown Miami. The deli did pretty

well, soldiers would go there for roast beef sandwiches. Maurice decided to buy a bigger restaurant, but it failed, causing financial trouble for the family. Maurice had a nervous breakdown and went crazy for a while. He had to go to a mental hospital. Bertha had to borrow money from family to pay back debt while Maurice was in the hospital. When he got out of the hospital, he was offered a job to manage a restaurant in Atlanta, Georgia, so the family moved there.

My ancestors experienced prejudice both in Europe and America. In Europe, they experienced discrimination because they were Jewish. They lived in a ghetto, experiencing segregation. Also, there was a lot of anti-semitism in Europe during that time. During World War 2, this anti-semitism led up to the Holocaust, concentration camps and the genocide of Jews. My relatives who stayed in Europe ended up in horrible concentration camps, dying during the war. My great grandparents were very grateful that they moved to America because if they stayed in Europe, they probably would have died. When my ancestors came to America, they expected and were aware of prejudice. One time that their family experienced prejudice was when they moved to Atlanta. They were living in an apartment when their landlord kicked them out. He said it was because Bertha's food was smelling up the building and the neighbors were complaining. They knew that the real reason was that some of the neighbors didn't like living near Jews, so they had to move.

My ancestors were different than other people because they were not from America. One way they were different was the fact that they were poor. Of course, there were many poor people in America, but where my grandpa grew up, he recognized his lack of money by comparing himself to his friends. When Sandy was growing up, he lived in a

neighborhood where most people were pretty well-off. They lived there because his father never learned how to drive, so he needed to be close to his work, which was near this neighborhood. My grandpa was one of the only kids in his school whose parents were immigrants. He remembers that most of his friends from school went on vacation and owned summer homes. They were interested in things like car racing and girls. My grandpa's parents worked seven days a week, so the family never went on vacation. My grandpa didn't care about car racing and girls, he was more serious and grown up because he had experienced poverty and watched his father go crazy. Another time Sandy knew that he was different from everyone else was when he learned to read. His father claims to have learned English from doing crossword puzzles. His mother and grandmother had a much harder time grasping it, and never fully learned English. In his early years, he was raised by his grandmother, because his parents worked all day. She only spoke Yiddish to him, so as a child, he had a hard time recognizing the difference between Yiddish and English. In school, he would speak in a mix of both languages, and no one had any idea of what he was saying. When it came time for everyone to learn to read, they were put into three groups. Yellow bird was for the kids who were the worst at reading, blue bird was for the middle, and red bird was for the kids best at reading. In first grade, my grandpa, who couldn't even *speak* English properly, was a yellow bird. He had a lot of trouble learning to read because he mixed up Yiddish and English, but he eventually caught on and by the 3rd grade, he was a red bird. When he learned to read, he read a 4-inch thick encyclopedia called the Book of Knowledge, learning lots of facts. He still remembers some facts, 75 years later. For example, he told me recently that the population of Florida in 1940 was

about 1.8 million and now it is around 11 million. By 5th grade, he was one of the smartest kids in his school. Before TV became popular, everyone would listen to radio shows. One of these shows was called Quiz Kids, a national competition where kids, chosen for their high IQs and interest in academics, were quizzed on fun facts. Sandy competed in Quiz Kids



when he was 10 years old.

In this photo of the Quiz Kids competition, my grandpa, Sander, is number 3.

Even though my great grandparents' experience in America was hard, they were very grateful because they could send their kids to college, something they would never be able to do in Europe. Ben fought in World War 2 and when it ended, an act called the G.I. bill was passed. The G.I. bill paid for college tuition for veterans. So, my great grandparents didn't have to worry about paying for college for Ben. Sandy never really cared about school. If he didn't finish his homework in class, he just didn't do it. He kept a streak of *never* bringing a book home. Except for one time, during lunch, he was playing football and he had a book with him. He got hit in the head really hard with the ball and had to be sent home. Because the book was with him at lunch, he was sent home with the book. When he realized he had brought a book home, he was mad that he broke his streak.

When he woke up the next morning, he went straight to school and brought the book back. Instead of doing homework, he worked in a shop, fixing TVs, antennas, and radios. Sandy was paid \$1 for every antenna he helped fix. The shop was owned by an Italian man named Parker Latta. Parker was like a second father to Sandy. He was kind to all the kids in the trailer park, he would show cowboy movies outdoors and they would bring blankets and



pillows. Even after he moved to Atlanta, Sandy still visited Parker in Miami.

This is a photograph of my grandpa, Sandy. Parker made the “technician on duty” sign for him.

He was very interested in technology, so he applied to MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), a tech school in Boston. He got in and while he was in school there, he stayed with his uncle Joe, who lived in Boston. He eventually got a Ph.D. in electrical engineering, and now is a professor at Caltech.



Uncle Joe is the little kid in the middle of this photo, which was taken in Austria Hungary. The

**tall kid in the back is Maurice, my great grandfather.**

**My ancestors had a challenging journey to America, had to work very hard, experienced prejudice, and didn't fit in. But the trip was worth it because if they stayed in Europe, they probably would have died in a concentration camp, and in America, they got to give their children a good education. Their sacrifice of leaving their home, and having a hard time adjusting to their new home is very impressive. They gave up a lot so that their children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and future generations could have a better life than they had, and for that, I am very grateful.**