

Trace of an Accent

The Story of my Grandparents' Double Migration and an
Exploration of the Personal, Social, and Historical Factors
that Shaped their Journey

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I would like to dedicate this historical narrative of my grandparents' journey to them, Oswald and Elisabeth Martin, in thanks for all of their constant love, support, and encouragement. Their sacrifices and determination, as well as their guidance and munificence have afforded me all of the opportunities that they have fought for.

When it was first brought to my attention that my grandparents have a German accent, I was shocked. Although I am told it is very slight, I still cannot hear it at all. My paternal grandfather and grandmother are both immigrants, from post-World War II Germany and Austria, respectively. They can both be considered generation 1.5 immigrants, migrating with their families to the United States in their teens. My grandfather's family, the Martins, and my grandmother's family, the Lorbachs, had both been dispossessed from Eastern Europe, and suffered terribly during the war. From their new homes in Germany and Austria these families migrated again. They came to the U.S. in search of economic possibility and opportunity for future their generations. There is not much scholarship on post-WWII German immigration even though it is the largest wave of German immigration to the U.S. during the twentieth century (Luebke, 176). With this paper I will contribute my family's story to this little known section of a long tradition of German-American heritage. I will attempt to explore how, in the aftermath of two wars within just over twenty years against Germany, my German grandparents and great grandparents were able to establish themselves so successfully within the U.S.

My grandparents are both ethnically German, though neither was born in Germany. Before World War II there was a centuries-long history of German colonies in areas of Eastern Europe. These areas were culturally German, despite the fact that most of the inhabitants had never been to the "homeland." There were literally millions of Germans living in ethnic communities in countries such as Hungary, Romania, and Yugoslavia (Clarkson). German was the spoken language, the heritage and the lifestyle for these *Auslandsdeutsch* or "Volga Germans". WWII brought about the circumstances that would leave both my grandparents as well as many other ethnic Germans to be twice

displaced. As the Russian Eastern front swept through Europe, as well as with the post-war ethnic reorganization or “cleansing,” these Germans were expelled from their homes into Germany and Austria. However, the war-torn nations, which could not even support their current populations, had no room or resources for the incoming refugees.

Approximately one quarter of these ethnic German fugitives would again emigrate to countries such as Canada, Australia and the United States (Clarkson). This double migration experienced by hundreds of thousands is the story of the Martin family escaping Romania to Germany, and then departing again, this time for the U.S. It is also the story of the Lorbach family being pushed from Yugoslavia into Austria and then finally seeking the promise of America.

My grandfather’s heritage in Romania began in 1799, when the family of his ancestor, Peter Martin, was one of fifty families to purchase 10,000 acres of land from Count Esterhaszy, a Hungarian Baron, on a ninety-nine year mortgage. On this land the town Johannsfeld, Romania, was established and the Martins’ investment bore fruit just as the land brought forth harvests. However, the complex politics of the twentieth century led to shifting boundaries and the redistribution of resources. The First World War brought on “economic chaos, political instability and vast areas of devastation [that] went hand-in-glove with bitterness and fear throughout Europe.” The “victors’ peace” that was established in the Treaty of Versailles exacerbated the conditions. The International Committee of Women for Permanent Peace (ICWPP) perceptively protested that its terms “sanction secret diplomacy, deny the principles of self-determination, recognize the right of the victors to the spoils of war, and create all over Europe discords and animosities, which can only lead to further wars” (Foster, 33, 30).

My grandfather explains how, “under the hypocritical slogan of ‘self-determination,’ the haves were robbed by the have-nots. It got to be so ridiculous that [his] grandfather needed a visa to work his farm because the new Romanian-Yugoslavian border went right through it.” When WWII broke out, Oswald, my grandfather, was just a child. His father was taken away into the German army, marking the separation of his family that would take years to reunify. When the Soviet army began pushing the German forces back, they swept through my grandfather’s hometown. He describes feeling like the world was ending as the war raged over his very roof. Once the Soviet army successfully took the area, things quieted down a bit — until one disjunct morning.

It was December of 1944 and Oswald was at home eating breakfast with his brother, Bertold, and mother, Eva Martin, when Russian soldiers came barging in to take Eva to a labor camp. These camps separated tens of thousands of parents from their children. The camps were responsible for the deaths of thousands of Germans “from starvation, malnutrition and disease,” though “other thousands escaped and went to Germany” (Clarkson). According to my grandfather and his mother, the theory behind the labor camps was to force the civilians of the conquered Axis Powers to help rebuild the destroyed cities and repair the wreckage that the Soviets incurred. These camps were not the extermination camps of the Nazis, yet conditions were not good. Eva recalled that the food allocation was determined as a ratio of work completed. She saw those around her who got sick get stuck into a deathly cycle: they would complete less work and then continue to get worse because of their shrinking food allotment until they starved to death. To avoid this fate, my great-grandmother and her brother Klaus staged

a daring escape from the camp and were miraculously successful in getting away. Eva was able to reunite with her husband, but their two boys were trapped in Romania with relatives. Because of the newly fallen Iron Curtain, my grandfather and his brother were completely inaccessible to their parents.

The wartime alliance of the communist Soviet Union with the Western democracies was shaky and filled with mistrust since it began in 1941. In the last months of the war it began deteriorating further and soon, after the war's end, "plans for postwar cooperation ran aground on the Soviet control over Eastern Europe" (Kort, 16-25). Joseph Stalin defied promises made at the Yalta Conference (so did the Western powers) and began enacting plans to create a communist buffer of European countries to protect the Soviet Union's eastern border. To limit the interaction of the communist governments forming in these countries with the democratic western countries a "political, military, and ideological barrier" was erected by the Soviet Union, and termed by Winston Churchill "the Iron Curtain" (Britannica). It was this barrier that separated my grandfather from his parents after the war.

Nicholas Martin, my great-grandfather, was determined to find a way to reach his sons. He applied to the Swiss Red Cross for help, but they told him that, regrettably, they had no jurisdiction in Romania. However, they gave him the address of Eleanor Roosevelt, who was involved in many reunification projects at the time. He did not receive an answer directly from her, but from the French embassy in Bucharest, the capital of Romania. At this time France was the only country with access to Romania. The embassy's letter hinted to Nicholas that penicillin was worth more than gold at the time, indirectly suggesting that something could be worked out. Nicholas used his

connections through the black market (of which he had many) to obtain some of this miracle medicine from the United States army stationed in Salzburg. The U.S. was the only producer of penicillin at this time. He then went to his friend who produced expensive chocolates and who happened to have many of his ingredients supplied by my great-grandfather. They put each amulet of penicillin inside a chocolate and then resealed them with the original manufacturer's seal. As a birthday present to the Executive Secretary of the French embassy in Bucharest, he shipped over the two boxes of these expensive chocolates, made priceless because of the small vials within each piece. Shortly after this my grandfather and his brother received a visit from the police. They were given French visas from the embassy that coincidentally happened to find two of its nationals trapped behind the Iron Curtain. Oswald and Bertold were sent first class on the Orient Express into Germany and were able to reunite with their parents in their new home.

My grandfather notes that while his family was "dispossessed and entirely driven out" of their first home, they "were the lucky ones." Two of his cousins who lived a short distance away on the Yugoslav side of the border were starved to death by the Yugoslav Partisans while their mother, tied up and separated by a fence, was forced to watch helplessly. Yugoslavia also happens to be where the second half of this story begins, the country where my grandmother, Elisabeth, was born in 1940. Although just a young child at the time, she writes, looking back, "The world was at war. Germany was at war. We were Germans. We were supposed to go home to the homeland. Many of those that stayed behind were killed. Many others were swallowed up in the bloody politics of the time. Our family fled Yugoslavia through Hungary into Austria." The

family at first tried to escape to Germany, but when they found that they had relatives in Austria, they migrated again hoping for a better reception. My grandmother was only four upon reaching Austria and had barely arrived with her life. Her experiences during the war are too horrifying for her to recount in detail.

Austria did not receive my grandmother's family with open arms. Though they lived there from 1944 to 1955, Elisabeth explains their situation: "We were legal immigrants, if displaced and unwanted. A third rate peoples." Their defeat in the war left Germany and Austria powerless to "resist the intrusion of [their] own nationals from detached provinces, nor of foreign nationals of German stock" (Kulischer, 105). These immigrants were at first seen as temporary and not encouraged to assimilate. They were assigned to the lowest stations in society. In the post-war period 17 million ethnic Germans were expelled from Eastern Europe and an estimated 2 million died in the process (Tolzmann, 344). Those who arrived had a difficult time finding a place in the devastated society. As West Germany began to rebuild and recover economically under the new Federal Republic of Germany their situation improved, yet many still placed their hopes elsewhere. The Lorbachs, my grandmother's family, began the process of obtaining visas to the United States in 1948 and the Martins began applying in 1951. Both families had their visas by 1955 and commenced preparations for their second migration, this time seeking, as my grandmother phrased it, "the rainbow."

My paternal ancestry in the United States truly began before it officially began. Prior to my grandparents' journey across the Atlantic, and perhaps possibly over the rainbow as well, Oswald's paternal grandparents had been sojourners to the Detroit area. In 1901 Anna and Michael Feiler emigrated to Wyandot to scrape together supplemental

money for their farm in Romania. They returned in 1908 and used the strong American dollar to improve their situation. During the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century it was very common for Europeans migrating to the U.S. to plan to return within a number of years. There were several factors that encouraged this temporary migration. This era was one of industrialization within the U.S., but of deteriorating economic conditions in many regions of Europe. Additionally, steamship travel opened up possibilities because it reduced the cost and length of the journey while making for a more bearable, if not pleasant, trip. Combined with the high wages in America, a sojourn was now more possible and potentially profitable. In 1910, 70% of all immigrants to the U.S. were men, and this demographic was as high as 91% for the Romanian immigrants (Wyman). Temporary migrations like this are typically male-dominated. While my grandfather's grandparents do not fit this statistic, it helps to demonstrate the large trend of return migration of which they were a part.

Since this era of practically unimpeded immigration to the U.S., several legislative reforms were made to the mild immigration requisites of this earlier time. In 1924 the National Origins Act limited immigration to allow a quota for each country of only two percent of the current U.S. population from that country. This act was racially biased to Anglo-Saxon and "old" immigrant groups from Northern and Western Europe, seen as more favorable populations. The act also completely barred the immigration of Asian laborers. After WWII, Germany and Austria were flooded with refugees, including dispossessed Eastern Europeans and concentration camp survivors. In 1948, the U.S. Immigration Bureau passed the Displaced Persons Act, which allowed for 205,000 displaced persons (D.P.'s), and 17,000 orphans to emigrate and be resettled in

the United States (Reimers, 1-12). Other countries, such as Canada, Brazil, and Australia, opened their doors for these refugees as well.

The Displaced Persons Act expired in 1952, the same year that the McCarran-Walter Act was put in place. This act abolished the racial exclusion of the 1924 act, but retained a preferential quota system. President Truman condemned the bill because of its xenophobic limitations on Eastern Europeans, many of whom as refugees still awaited relocation. He asserted “the absurdity, the cruelty of carrying over into this year of 1952 the isolationist limitations of our 1924 law” and vetoed the bill, but it was subsequently overridden (Center for Immigration Studies, 1995). In 1953, President Eisenhower signed the Refugee Relief Act, admitting 214,000 additional D.P.’s. Under a vastly different immigration climate than when the Feilers left for America, my grandparents’ family members all received visas to enter the U.S. They are unsure of which, if any, of these refugee acts affected their authorization, but undoubtedly it was an immensely more complicated process than it had been for the Feilers over fifty years earlier.

Despite the hindrances of immigration approval, there was no question for either the Martins or the Lorbachs that America was the optimum destination. Other countries were actively recruiting Europe’s refugees and D.P.’s, including Australia, where the government would subsidize the immigrants’ trip. By 1955 Europe was successfully rebuilding and recovering economically from the war. Despite these elements, both families, along with many others, maintained the U.S. as their lone prospect. The factors pushing my family out of Europe were overshadowed by the magnetic pull of economic promise offered by America. Not only as opportunity for themselves, emigrating to the

U.S. was seen as an investment for their future generations. Across all three centuries of German immigration to America, the largest factor cited for relocation has remained the quest for an improved standard of living (Adams). In this respect my grandparents' families were very typical of their immigration bracket. Detroit, their specific destination, while perhaps partly selected because of its then booming economy and automobile industries, was primarily chosen because of necessary connections there. My grandmother's aunt lived in Detroit and my grandfather's father had close friends in the area. Not only did U.S. restrictions require immigrants to have sponsors, but this type of "kin-chain" migration is an almost universal process occurring in resettlement.

In the years following the war and during the patient wait for immigration approval to the United States, my grandparents lived the remainder of their ravaged childhoods and varied portions of their teen years in Germany and Austria. Oswald completed the engineering track in his German school. Elisabeth had won a scholarship to a finishing school, and had an apprenticeship in merchandizing. In addition, she had gained two siblings: a brother, Frank, and a sister named Hilda, who were six and fourteen years younger, respectively. Oswald, at 19, was ready to leave Europe and not look back. He had the paradigmatic immigrant personality and was ready to face whatever challenges were ahead of him. Elisabeth, on the other hand, was only 15 as she gathered her belongings to again make a new home in an unknown country. She describes how she wished to be left behind but, "as a teenager, the die was cast." Often the involuntary immigration of those termed "generation 1.5" is overlooked by researchers examining other forms of forced resettlement.

Leaving with contrasting sentiments, journeying by different means of transportation, one by boat and one by plane, my grandparents also arrived with divergent first impressions of their new homeland. Elisabeth traveled with her family aboard *The General Langfit*, an American troop carrier, nostalgic not for her first home in Yugoslavia, but at least for the familiarity of Austria. Upon disembarking she was bewildered by the “frightening vortex of uncertainty” and describes feeling “anxiety, lostness, aloneness.” She writes, “I was totally sad in this big new country with all its economic advantages.” As my grandmother looked back longingly, my grandfather only looked forward with optimism. He had seen enough of Europe’s injustice and sought a new home not laden with memories of bitterness. His family chose to make the journey to the U.S. by plane. They landed in New York, before continuing by train to Detroit. Oswald recalls experiencing initial intimidation from “not only the architecture but also the vibrancy and the dynamism of its people; like a well choreographed anthill and I the only one in slow motion.” Recalling this time, he writes, “I knew it would be difficult and take many years to succeed in my new homeland. Yes, I was intimidated but, having a dynamic personality myself, not afraid of the challenge.”

Thus far, only the factors cultivating the background that my grandparents were bringing with them into this new country have been explored. In addition, there are several centuries of German American immigration, American racial ideologies and intertwining politics that set the stage for what would greet them. Particularly the events within the fifty years since the Feilers had left America drastically changed the climate and conditions for the Lorbachs’ and Martins’ reception. The success of my grandparents can only truly be investigated by looking at the interaction of my grandparents’ personal

histories with the contemporary American social realities awaiting them, realities that were the result of a complex national history.

German-American immigration began in 1608 with the original German settlers in Jamestown. However, Germantown, Pennsylvania, founded in 1683, was the first permanent German colony. Germans are generally considered to be a part of the first major wave of immigration to the U.S. leading up to the 1850's. In reality, the flow of Germans into America has never ceased from the time it began and in fact reached a peak in the decade from 1890-99 at almost a million and a half, 27.5% of the total immigration for this period (Adams). Traditionally, Germans in America sought to preserve their ethnic heritage, despite their reputation as readily assimilated. Just as with many minorities, they established ethnic communities. They also established an incredibly thriving German press and maintained their language through bilingual schools. While receiving some discrimination for not Americanizing quickly enough, the German immigrants came to be seen as preferable to the second wave of new Eastern and Southern European immigrations. The German immigrants have been a very diverse group, not definable by a single religion or common political affiliation (Kamphoefner, 155). However, by their sheer numbers they have shaped the American character. They constitute the country's largest ethnic heritage, as almost a quarter of the population claims German ancestry. The immigration scholar Frederick Luebke asserts the national character has been partly formed "not only by its frontier experience, its plentiful resources, or whatever, but also by the fact that a huge ethnocultural component has German roots" (Luebke, 175). While perhaps the Anglo-Saxon ethic has been the

underlying skeleton to this national character, Germans have been among the many groups that have fleshed out and enlivened the true nature of the nation.

German cultural influence pervades every aspect of American society, but today many of these effects are not recognized as having German origin. While through the beginning of the twentieth century German culture was distinct and established in the U.S., World War I brought about a great shift in this sphere. All of a sudden, for the multitudes of German-Americans, the impossible had occurred: the U.S. had gone to war with their native country. In America, nativist sentiments flared up and were directed primarily at the German community. German Americans were being forced to abandon one half of their identity and, as the national campaign promoted, “drop the hyphen.” They were branded as “Huns” and many German families attempted to legally Anglicize their names to avoid ostracism and harassment. German businesses were bankrupted as a result of false rumors. Historian Cecelia O’Leary related how, “in desperation, a Brooklyn baker offered a reward of one thousand dollars for the arrest and conviction of the person who had circulated a similar story about his having insulted the flag,” as just one example of the detrimental effects of these rumors (O’Leary, 240). Beyond social and economic ruin, German Americans were victims of violence, their civil liberties were commonly denied, and anything German, from music to literature to sauerkraut, became unpatriotic and reviled. The war resulted in a surge of an Anglo-Saxon brand of patriotism, with which “Americanizers had effectively eradicated German American culture, forcing the disappearance of German Americans as a publicly identifiable group” (O’Leary, 241). Because German Americans were already partially acculturated and there were twice as many second-generation Germans as first-generation immigrants, this

transition could be quickly made. However, “it was only from this point on that the behavior of German Americans began to match their image as wholesale assimilationists” (Kamphoefner, 160).

After this national ethnic crisis ended with the war, German Americans again became accepted into society, except in more of a “melting pot” than a pluralistic manner. The decisive testament to this amalgamation is the U.S.’s altered national response to Germans in the second world war fought between these nations. The racial ideology of the dominant group of white Americans had come to include those of German heritage among their ranks. The way that the major enemies of this war — the Japanese and the Germans — were racialized in the nation bears witness to this. America was fighting “the Nazis” in Europe and “the Japs” in the Pacific. Creating an enmity against Nazis and Hitler specifically still allowed room for “good Germans” while the Japanese were viewed as a complete enemy population and were totally dehumanized through war propaganda (Kramer, 3/8/07).

These stereotypes were also reflected in the way in which American citizens of German and Japanese ethnicity were treated. Immigrants of Asian descent had been historically discriminated against in the U.S., both socially and legally. Since the McCarran-Walter Act in 1924, all Asian labor immigration was banned. Asian immigrants who did come to the U.S. were also legally denied the ability to gain citizenship. However, their children born in America were automatically citizens and during the WWII Japanese internment program, of the 120,000 Japanese who were uprooted, two-thirds were American citizens (Daniels, 3). Japanese Internment, a result of wartime hysteria at its most destructive, was a grotesque violation of the civil liberties

of loyal, patriotic Americans. It was especially ironic that the U.S. was waging war against Hitler's racism in Europe while interning its own citizens, not on grounds of legitimate suspicion or even general enemy status but on a purely racial distinction.

Like many immigrant groups, Japanese Americans created small ethnic communities and, while being model citizens, retained some degree of isolation. This was also the pattern, as we have seen, of German Americans until the WWI "drop the hyphen" anti-German sentiment forced them to shed a lot of their ethnic identity (Wittke, 89). This forced Americanization was only one of the factors that saved the Germans from the same fate as the interned Japanese Americans and nationals. Additionally, sheer numbers would have made it a logistical nightmare to round up just German nationals, not to mention German-American citizens. Finally, it was felt that both Germans and Italians would be much more difficult to identify from the American population because their European ancestry gave them the opportunity to join the "white" community (Fox, 409).

These arguments in no way stand to legitimize the exclusive internment of Japanese Americans. Underneath all of these explanations lies a racial ideology. The reason there were not as many Japanese in the U.S. as other ethnic groups was because of the immigration restrictions barring their entry. Racial prejudice also excluded the Japanese from becoming more integrated into American society. As the historian Paul Kramer succinctly and perceptively puts it, "rivers of 'rightslessness' flow down tracks created through history" (Kramer, 3/8/07). The Japanese suffered untold trauma and dislocation, along with the enormous economic losses of businesses and homes, as a

result of the internment. Perhaps the discrimination and consequent forced assimilation of German Americans in WWI partially spared them this worse fate.

Other types of racial discrimination prevalent in the U.S. also became more publicly visible during WWII. African Americans, Native Americans and Mexican Americans were among the groups of “non-whites” that waged a battle for “Double V,” or a double victory against racism abroad as well as racism at home during the war (Takaki, 7). One telling example of the strength of the color line in American society, in which Germans had come to be included on the privileged white side, was the “preferential treatment given to white German prisoners of war in commercial establishments where blacks were excluded.” It was a common occurrence in the U.S. that German POWs would be served at places where African American soldiers were not let inside the door (Cohen, 93). The striking paradoxes of interning Japanese American citizens and allowing segregation and violence against African American soldiers, while affording the enemy prisoners more rights, are a powerful demonstration of the racial climate in America at this time. The transformation of German American identity from that of strong ethnic pride and cohesiveness to the antagonism and resulting deterioration it faced in WWI, to its integration into white American society by WWII all occurred between the Feilers’ temporary trip and my grandparents permanent relocation. This historical context helps explain the cultural framework within which my grandparents would have to negotiate their new lives. It also helps to explain the positive general reception they received in the U.S. despite arriving barely a decade after the end of the second war fought against Germany within a single generation.

My grandfather asserts, “Rather than facing discrimination [because of it], my German heritage turned out to be an asset.” In regards to initial fears he faced coming into the U.S. as an immigrant, for him “the only nervous apprehension was finding a job as quickly as possible, and that proved to be no problem at all.” However, despite the advantages he gained from his favored ethnic background and the booming post-war economy, there was undoubtedly untold struggling and toil in negotiating a place in this new home for both the Lorbach and the Martin families. Out of both families only my grandmother arrived with some knowledge of English. Building a new life from scratch in a foreign land, without even prior knowledge of the language involves courage, determination, and consistently facing and overcoming hardships. Elisabeth gives a more detailed insight into what this looked like and how it was traversed.

After World War II the U.S. experienced its “last great wave of German immigration” consisting of almost one million ethnic German immigrants. Like my grandparents, the majority of these were people seeking to leave the war ravaged nations of Europe and seek economic opportunity in America. Similar to my grandparents, many of these immigrants were highly educated and most were interested in assimilating into American culture and becoming integrated into society (Luebke, 174). Elisabeth points to peer pressure and pride as the primary motivations to assimilate as quickly as possible. Her parents went to night school to learn English and her mother read an English newspaper each evening. She explains, “If you thought you could wear your old clothes, you soon realized that was not going to fly.” This does not mean that German culture was completely abandoned, however. Elisabeth notes, “We very successfully mixed the two” cultures.

Soon after settling in America, my grandmother's youngest sister, Kathryn, was born. As the eldest, my grandmother had to give up hopes of continuing her higher education and "carry her load" for the family by taking care of the younger children. With her sister's birth she describes that she "only saw one more task fall unto me." After finishing school at 17, she began working as a nanny to bring in needed extra money. As a teenager she understandably was resentful of her parents' seemingly thankless dependence upon her, but in retrospect she acknowledges,

I suppose the unsympathetic harshness of my parents in general, not just towards me, was a natural defense mechanism to their reality of lostness, economic struggles of daily life, repaying to my dad's uncle for the fare to America, repaying to the Dr. and Deaconess Hospital for Kathryn's birth, menial jobs (two and three) to save towards the purchase of a house, peer pressure from relatives and "others," going to night school, etc. Hardly time for laughter...But we survived. We made it after a fashion. It was desperation. It was pride. It was hell.

Certainly my grandfather and his parents faced similar struggles, but he does not elaborate on them. His father, Nicholas Martin, found work at the Peter Sausage Co. on Vernor, and Elisabeth's father, Frank Lorbach, worked at Auto Parts Supply Machine Shop at Conner and Mack in Detroit. Elisabeth's mother cleaned houses, requiring my grandmother to take care of her siblings. As these families sweated, scraped and saved, they managed to stay afloat in the sink-or-swim situation they faced. While the life of an immigrant is filled with daily adversities, there were also factors that helped smooth some of these obstacles and make them more bearable.

Church was one area that provided community to my transplanted family. The writer John A. Williams maintains that "the church was more than a worshipping place; it was the place where the immigrant renewed himself as a member of the group, where the traditions of the group were reinforced, where shelter was found from the storm"

(Williams, 137). The Lorbachs attended St. Joseph's Catholic Church. This is a German Catholic parish that held spiritual as well as cultural benefits for the immigrants and ethnic Germans. As time passed and the families became more incorporated into American society, they moved from regular Sunday church attendance toward more occasional, holiday attendance. The gradual shedding of a strong religious identity is also a common feature of immigrant assimilation, yet the church served an important function in the transition period.

Perhaps more central to my grandparents' and, particularly, their parents' transition were the myriad German organizations that had survived the WWI nativism in the Detroit area. They helped to foster some sense of community for my grandparents' families. The Carpathians, The Danube Swabians and even Austrians, all German ethnic regional identities, were a few groups that had their own thriving organizations. These groups offered some relief to German immigrants on the weekends with dances, soccer clubs, festivals and other events. The Austrian Society of Detroit put on an annual reenactment of a coming out party called the Strauss Ball, on whose volunteer committee both of my grandparents served. Don Heinrich Tolzmann, a German American scholar, writes about the influx of post-war WWII ethnic German immigrants who "had maintained their German heritage for centuries outside of Germany, and this adherence, strengthened by adverse circumstances, contributed to the rebirth of ethnic pride among German-Americans." The new immigrants brought "leadership" as well as "enthusiasm" into "many of the older German-American organizations and societies, breathing new life into them" (Tolzmann, 350).

One of these German functions held additional significance for my grandparents, whose long paths from Eastern Europe through Germany and Austria and into Detroit had not yet crossed. Elisabeth was going to school with my grandfather's younger brother Bertold, yet she had no knowledge of Oswald. At a German event at Schwaben Park in Detroit, Oswald was sitting around rather bored when he spotted a stunningly beautiful young woman — this of course being Elisabeth. He immediately asked her for a dance, and she, though painfully shy, accepted but refused to give Oswald her name. Luckily he found out that she went to school with his brother Bertold. Oswald charted out the small school district on a map and each afternoon systematically drove through the neighborhoods until he found her sitting on her porch one day. He made a scene as he threw his car into reverse and parked in front of her house. Oswald apologized for the ruckus and asked Elisabeth to tell her parents that he would be stopping by for a visit the next Saturday. As she tried to mumble an excuse about it not being her house, he just smiled and said, "Tell them anyway."

On August 26, 1958, my grandparents were married. Elisabeth was 19 and Oswald was 23. Soon after, my father, their only child, was born. My grandfather worked for a Tool and Die company by day as he put himself through night school at Macomb College to earn an engineering degree. My grandmother continued to work as a nanny until my father, Siegfried, or "Ziggy," was born. Elisabeth describes this time that her then small family fought to establish themselves: "We, all of us, grew up and/or grew older, grew into the system financially more secure, politically and socially content/disillusioned; our roots became more American, shed the cloak of the past and changed with the fads and colors and realities of day-to-day seasons."

My grandparents followed the common pattern of immigrant incorporation, in that they became culturally assimilated before engaging in the structural components of American society. As they struggled from day to day to survive, there was not time for becoming involved in politics or larger causes. They fought to establish themselves and for them this meant they must adopt the language, dress, conventions, and even the values of their new society. They both explain that they readily made this conversion, happy to respect the culture of the society that offered them so much opportunity. In addition, the social context and historical evolution of German American identity and acceptance in America gave them an advantage over many other immigrants and minorities. Both grandparents now identify to a much greater degree as Americans than with their German heritage. Elisabeth and Oswald both are proud to finally be officially Americans after a long battle for citizenship.

Whatever my grandparents lacked in structural assimilation as recent immigrants they have more than compensated for as American citizens. Oswald began working at Chrysler and had a highly successful career there as an engineer. Now retired, both are incredibly active in their community. They have with their own hands, imaginations and efforts created a “Children’s Garden” in their city, Lathrup Village, as a non-profit, volunteer-based cultural asset to their local community. It is a 4,000-square foot lavishly landscaped park that hosts frequent events for children and their families. Elisabeth is involved the Make Michigan Beautiful group. They are active in numerous other organizations, clubs and local events, and are very well known in their community. They are able to enjoy the fruits of their long years of sacrifice. In addition, they have been able to provide their family with all the benefits that they fought for in coming to

America and navigating through the struggles of making a new life. Now they are proud great-grandparents as well, and have seen the three generations of their blood born with the rights and privileges of American citizenship.

My grandparents recalled this German saying concerning immigrant generations:

Dem Ersten den Tod	The first (generation) get death
Dem Zweiten die Not	The second endure need
Dem Dritten das Brot	The third get the bread

Looking at their lives now, well established and fulfilling, it is hard to conceive of all that my grandparents have overcome to arrive at where they are presently. In one way they experienced all three of the stages of this generational aphorism, yet their underlying motivations were not for themselves but to make a better future possible for their descendants. As I try to pick out their trace of an accent, all I can hear is the familiar and cherished voices of my devoted, adoring grandparents. This trace, this hint of an accent, has led me all the way back to Eastern Europe on a remarkable journey, through two double immigrations, past enormous obstacles and through a rich personal, national and intercontinental history.

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