

The journey from Germany.

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As a young woman it was difficult for my grandmother to travel to America, especially with two children. Her experience would have been extremely different from my father's or my grandfather's because of the fact that she did have to work average jobs to support her family at the time. I was fortunate enough to have her share this story with me. But throughout the interview she mentioned missing home and all the family she left behind and I was left wondering, was it worth it?

When my grandmother immigrated here she was only 30 with two kids and her husband. "We left basically everything. All the family." This was hard for her because she still was a fairly young woman and would be leaving her brother and relatives to start the journey. At the time "German wives were supposed to follow their husbands", so that's what she did. It wasn't all his idea though. She wanted a better life for her kids even though the life they had in Germany was amazing, it wasn't all perfect.

"My husband, your grandfather, was in large debt with the bank. He owned a few Department stores and had borrowed money from the bank and still had not paid it off" my grandmother told me. He was spending money on vacations and unnecessary things, instead of paying off his debt. He was loaded with the bank's money.

"So when a company up in Arcata offered to sponsor him, he agreed." The company offered to sponsor him because you can't work without a work permit and he didn't have one. Basically the company put in a work permit for him. So they flew from Germany to Los Angeles. "We only had three suitcases." Then they bought a used car and drove the rest of the way.

But it got harder for my grandmother when they got there. Money was low and she had to work jobs like house cleaning and at a Laundromat. Then my grandfather decided he didn't want to work at the company anymore because there was no money to make in Arcata. So they left to come to Marin. But she was surprised when she got here how hard it was to get a job.

"My first better job, I think, was working for Longs", now known as CVS. For her the most difficult thing once she got here was getting a work permit. "It took me ten years," she said. Before she got her worker's permit she had been working without one which is technically illegal. "Believe it or not I always wanted to be a stewardess," she told me. A stewardess is now called a flight attendant. But there's a lot of school and training that goes into being a flight attendant. I know this because my mom happens to be one.

Until just recently she had worked at that same CVS for basically my entire life, and now that I know the history behind it it seems more interesting than before. "It paid enough, but it's not like it was my dream job." she told me. It's unfortunate that, because of the way she had to

support her family she wasn't able to fulfill her dream job. Is it possible that if she had stayed in Germany she would have been able to? Guess we'll never know.

When my dad was my age he had it way different than I do. He was 10 when his family decided to move here. It was a big move for him. He would be leaving his grandmother and all of his family and friends. Imagine leaving everything behind at the young age of ten but on top of that he was told by his parents that they were only going on vacation only to find out once they arrived that they were actually moving and not returning to Germany at all. He and his brother, who spoke no English and were now in this new country, where they knew no one, were everything each other had.

By the time he was 12 his parents were divorced and he was fending for himself because both his parents had to work. "When it snowed on school days, the snow plows would come and clear the streets so the bus could get through and we would try and stop them." my dad said. My dad and his brother didn't have much but they had enough. They made dinner and looked after themselves because their parents had to work to be able to afford necessities. My grandma had hoped for a better life for her kids, but if it meant working 24/7 to be able to give them that it was ok with her. "Life here was much more different than life in Germany." my grandma said. She likes knowing that her kids are able to give their kids the things that she had to work really hard to get.

A lot of my grandma's life revolved around work. That's why they came here. And she had a lot of different jobs too. It's true that it is really hard for immigrants to get good paying jobs. Especially if they don't have a work permit or a visa. She had to base her life around income, like many immigrants.

"It totally helped me once I got my first credit card. I establish credit. Before that I felt like I didn't belong here. It made me feel accepted." she told me. I understand why getting a credit card would help you get settled in a new place. You are basically moving from one place to another with barely anything. Once she got her credit card it made life a little bit easier. It made her believe that she could make it work living here. "I definitely have different opinions now. And I don't know if I could go back to Germany because of how different it would all be." she told me. She thinks that she's been gone too long and it would be hard for her to go back because of different laws and different rules in society. She can go visit but she says that she would have a hard time adjusting again.

During this project I learned a lot about my dad's side of the family's immigration story. I feel like if I hadn't done this interview I would still only know the bare minimum. I'm appreciative to my grandma because she let me in on the story of it all. I like knowing where I come from and how my family came here. It's extremely interesting to me and it gives me a different perspective. I now understand how much of an adult's life revolves around work and supporting themselves and others. I think this was a great learning experience for me and I will definitely keep asking questions to continue to find out more of my family's story.