

Name: _____ Date: _____

Immigration Stories

Directions: Read the excerpts below from interviews with immigrants to America. Then, answer the questions that follow each.

1. Louis T., Polish Immigrant to America, early 20th century

“Where was I born? In a small town in Poland, called Gonitz. I got married when I was nineteen. When I was twenty-one, I had two children. It was two years after the World War, and I found out that I would be called to be a soldier. My wife said she did not want me to be a soldier in the Polish Army. She said better I should try to go to America. I could not get a passport, because I was running away from militaire (military service)...I knew a fella [that] used to take people across the border. So I fixed it up with him that he should take me. This fella had two other men that wanted to go to America...”

Louis was smuggled across the border into Germany, then to Holland, where he boarded a ship for Cuba.

“I wanted to get to Chicago, where I had three brothers and many uncles and aunts. The only way that I could go to Chicago, was to be smuggled into America. After six weeks, I met a feller who said he would take me to America for \$150.00. I had enough money to pay this, so I told him: all right. . . .

[After being smuggled into Florida from Cuba.] Well, the next day we took a train for Jacksonville, Florida. We waited there six hours and then we took the train for Chicago. I'm telling you, when I saw my brothers and uncles when I got off the train in Chicago, I cried like a baby.

Well, maybe you think my troubles was over? No, my troubles was just beginning. I found out that I could not become a citizen, and so I could not bring mine wife and the children to Chicago...My wife was writing me letters how terrible it was in Poland. I sent her money every month. But it was terrible to have to keep quiet about being in Chicago. I could not get citizenship papers, because I was smuggled in. And without citizenship papers I could not bring my family to Chicago. Then my wife wrote me a letter that one of our children died. I had plenty troubles. I couldn't go back to Poland and I could not bring my family to Chicago. I didn't wanna go back to Poland. But I did want my family. When I could speak a little English, I peddled fish in the high-toned places, and I could charge a little more and I made a pretty good living.

Well, then a law was passed that all people who came to America in 1921 and before could get their citizenship papers. Well, I can tell you I got my papers as soon as I could. Then I brought my wife and my daughter to Chicago.”

Questions:

1. What pushed Louis to leave Poland?
2. Why did Louis want to live in Chicago?
3. What difficulties did Louis face living in America?
4. What benefits did Louis receive from living in America?

2. Adam Laboda, Polish Immigrant, early 20th century

"When I [was] twelve my father say to me, 'Adam, you must find a job, because we are so many.' Lots of poor people, oh, yes, many very poor people in Poland. . . .

About my work in America. At first I work in the mill at Gilbertville, Massachusetts...I was a spinner, there, but when I wanted to get married I did not want to board but to have a tenement of my own and the company houses could not be bought there.

So I came to Pittsfield where they told me I could get a job with the Berkshire Woolen, I could not talk English yet and I worked there one day and then the boss told me I would have to go. I did not know why... Well, I found out why I am fired at Pontoosuc; it is just because I am Polack and the other, they are mostly Irish and French, do not like me. It is hard to get acquainted, you see, and then, people were cold to me..."

Questions:

1. What pushed Adam to leave Poland?
2. What difficulties did he face in America?
3. What opportunities did he find in America?

3. Tony, Detroit, Michigan, son of immigrants

My parents lost their respective families to the Nazis during the occupation of their respective homelands. My father was from Poland; my mother, from Hungary...My father deserted the Polish Army to avoid serving for Hitler. Consequently, he was a prisoner of war in Russia after the war. My mother, a young woman when the war broke out, was captured with her ailing parents and placed on a train to concentration camps. She was separated from him and never saw him again. She was eventually imprisoned in Auschwitz and was rescued by the Allies in 1945.

My mother met my father in a relocation center in Germany. Their parents were exterminated. They came to the US in 1949 and, for a short period of time, lived with my mother's brother. My father became a carpenter and they were able to move into their first flat. Our first language was Yiddish. And, all of their friends were, likewise, refugees.."Only in America" was not a cliché but a statement that the streets were truly paved with figurative gold in the form of unique opportunity. And, although neither my parents or their friends had formal education, they all stressed that for their children. Future doctors, lawyers, accountants, businessmen.

Questions

1. What pushed Tony's parents to leave Europe?
2. What were their experiences in America?