

My grandmother, Macha (later known as Minnie), emigrated to America in 1911. She was only 14 years old and not only traveled without any adults, but was also in charge of her cousin, who was only 13. They came from what was Russia, or [Lithuania](#), depending on how the borders were redrawn after various conflicts. She went to work in the garment sweat shops on the Lower East Side of New York City.

My grandfather, Yitzak (later known as Simon), came to America about the same time. He had sold herring out of a pushcart around the Baltic Sea seacoast. The family story is that he and his many brothers were all trying to get to America, but by the time they had gotten as far as the German seaport of Bremen, they had used up too much of their money

, and there wasn't enough left for all of them to pay for boat tickets to America — and they didn't want to leave anyone behind.

So, they started a barroom brawl in a seaport tavern and picked the pockets of the people who had gotten knocked unconscious — and that's how they paid to come to America.

Minnie and Simon met and married and opened a paint store. They had two children, one of whom, Irving, became a doctor, and he was my father.

My other grandparents, my mother's family, emigrated from Vienna, [Austria](#). That grandfather,

Otto, had been a doctor in Vienna and emigrated with his wife, Hannah, who had been his nurse. They moved to the Upper East Side of New York City in a section called Yorktown, where many German immigrants had settled. He set up a medical practice and became well-known for inventing an operation that was used in the years before penicillin was discovered. Otto and Hannah had one son and three daughters — one of whom, Elizabeth, became a doctor too

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and she was my mother.

Jonathan, California