

Hungarian Immigrant

LET'S GET ONE THING STRAIGHT: You didn't move to the United States to take anybody's job. At the turn of the century conditions were tremendously difficult in Hungary. You owned a little plot of land, but when wealthy farmers began buying machinery to harvest their crops, you simply couldn't compete. You could either starve or move. When labor contractors began showing up, they promised good jobs and high wages if you would travel to the United States—a real land of milk and honey. The traveling conditions in Europe, on the ship coming over, and within the United States were difficult beyond belief. But finally you arrived in Central City, home of Miller and Jones, a giant manufacturer of railroad cars. Instead of milk and honey you found grease and grime.

Even though in Hungary you were a skilled farmer, here you were called “unskilled labor.” Your pay was low, but at least work was steady—for a while. But then you realized that you were guaranteed nothing. Often you'd work only six months out of the year and be laid off the rest of the time. Needless to say, during these periods there were no unemployment benefits. As an unskilled worker you had no security. At times your friends would not be hired back by Miller

and Jones; younger, stronger workers would be hired to take their places. With no formal education, no access to additional training, and no big bank account, you have little hope of escaping this life of poverty.

There may be little hope for you, but there is hope for your children. In America, education is free. You've been told that a high school diploma guarantees a young person a decent job. Just because you are an unskilled laborer doesn't mean that your children will suffer the same fate. They might be teachers, clerks, shopkeepers, or even doctors or lawyers. That's why you will sacrifice anything to send your children to school. They will be in the same classes with the sons and daughters of bankers and businessmen, architects and artists. They will read the same books, write the same essays, and solve the same equations. In school, rich and poor will mean nothing. Your children are smart. There will be no limit to what they can accomplish. You want them to learn to be Americans, but you are proud of your Hungarian culture and also want them to value that heritage. Your children learn quickly and already speak two languages. You have absolute confidence they will be able to thrive in high school and go on to get good jobs