

Globetrotting Great-Grandparents: Ancestors Who Crossed Oceans

Have you ever wondered how your family first came to America? Many kids' great-great-grandparents made daring trips across the ocean. They left their home countries, packed up everything, and sailed far away for a new life. Their globetrotting journeys made today's families possible.

In the 1800s-1900s, over 30 million immigrants came to America. Immigrants are people who leave their native country to live in a new one. Most immigrants came from Europe. Conditions there were harsh. Jobs were scarce and cities crowded. People dreamed of owning land and farming in wide-open America. The trip was risky and scary. But it was worth it for a chance at a better life.

The voyage by ship took 1-3 months. Most immigrants traveled in "steerage" class. These cheap seats were crowded in the bottom of the ship. There were no windows or fresh air. Rats and lice spread disease. Children often got sick. But somehow, families endured the miserable trip. When the Statue of Liberty appeared, they knew they had arrived.

At Ellis Island, officials quizzed immigrants before entry. Anyone sick or disabled could get rejected and sent home. Nurses inspected people's hair for lice and eyes for disease. Officials asked about jobs and plans. They checked surname papers too. Many immigrants' names were changed or shortened there. After the inspections, families got released to find jobs and housing.

Some immigrants had relatives or friends in America who helped them adjust. But most started completely from scratch in an unfamiliar place. Language barriers made it hard to get around. Signs, newspapers, and searches for work confused new arrivals. Loneliness plagued them too. Letters took weeks to reach loved ones left behind.

Despite challenges, immigrants persevered. Extended families often lived together to save money. Parents took any work they could—factories, farms, laundries, tailoring. Even little children worked to pitch in. Through grit and sacrifice, families slowly built new lives.

Many homesteaders also moved west in America. Homesteading meant claiming land given by the government. All you had to do was farm the land for 5 years. Then 160 acres was yours! It was a great opportunity, but heading west was dangerous. People risked blizzards, disease, and conflicts with Native tribes. Still, for a free farm, it was worth the risk.

Homesteading families traveled by covered wagon on bumpy prairie trails. Their belongings got dragged behind. Journeys stretching thousands of miles took 5-6 months. At night, wagons circled together for safety. During harsh weather or Indian scares, children hid underneath. There were no stores, so food came from hunting or rationing supplies. When wagons broke, fathers had to fix them. Rivers, mountains, and deserts tested the pioneers. But finally reaching their claimed land felt like a triumph.

Thanks to our globetrotting great-grandparents, our families have a home in America today. Next time you hear an immigrant story, remember: Your ancestors were immigrants and pioneers too. They braved frightening journeys so that you could have a better life.

Glossary

- immigrant - a person who comes to live permanently in a foreign country
- persevere - to continue determinedly despite difficulties
- homestead - a house, land, and farm that a family owns and lives on

Questions

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Why did most immigrants leave their home countries in the 1800s-1900s?
 - a) To find better jobs and opportunities
 - b) To escape harsh weather and geography c) To flee danger and violence
 - d) To travel the world for fun
2. What made the ocean voyage to America challenging for immigrant families?
 - a) It was extremely expensive. b) It took 1-3 months in crowded conditions.
 - c) They had to build their own ships.
 - d) There were no officials or inspections at Ellis Island.
3. Based on the article, what was one way immigrant families adjusted to America?
 - a) Their language skills helped them easily get jobs.
 - b) They had guidance from relatives already there.
 - c) Extended families lived together to save money.
 - d) The government provided food, housing and English lessons.
4. Why did homesteaders head west in covered wagons?
 - a) To find gold b) To start a farm c) To map new land
 - d) To join Native American tribes
5. How does the article show that immigrants and pioneers shaped modern families?
 - a) Their globetrotting stories are entertaining.
 - b) They founded famous companies.
 - c) Their sacrifices provided opportunities for future generations.
 - d) They traveled the world for fun.
6. What is the main idea of this article?
 - a) America provided a chance for a better life.
 - b) Pioneers had an easy journey traveling west.
 - c) Immigrants and homesteaders faced challenges but persevered.
 - d) Languages confused new immigrants.