**Immigration Experiences**

**ROSE GALLUP COHEN, 1891**

***In 1918, Cohen recounts her own and her family's struggle to acclimate themselves to New York after emigrating from Russia at the turn of the century.***

From Mrs. Felesberg we learned at once the more serious side of life in America. Mrs. Felesberg was the woman with whom we were rooming.

…When she asked us how we liked America, and we spoke of it with praise, she smiled a queer smile.

“Life here is not all that it appears to the ‘green horn,’” she said. She told us that her husband was a presser on coats and earned twelve dollars when he worked a full week. Aunt Masha thought twelve dollars a good deal. Again Mrs. Felesberg smiled. “No doubt it would be,” she said, “where you used to live. You had your own house, and most of the food came from your garden. Here you will have to pay for everything; the rent!” she sighed, “for the light, for every potato, every grain of barley. You see these three rooms, including yours? Would they be too much for my family of five?” We had to admit they would not. “And even from these,” she said, “I have to rent one out.”

Perhaps it was due to these talks that I soon noticed how late my father worked. When he went away in the morning it was still dark, and when he came home at night the lights in the halls were out. It was after ten o’clock. I thought that if mother and the children were here, they would scarcely see him.

*Rose Cohen, Out of the Shadow (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1918), 73–74. ©*

**HELEN BARTH, 1910s**

New York was divided into little sections. The Chinese lived in one section, the Germans, the Hungarians, the Poles lived in other sections; and the immigrant was able to walk up and down and recognize his landsmen and speak his own language—you know—Polish, Russian, also Yiddish carried them through very much here.

I know that my father tells a story about our family. They came through Castle Gardens and lived at Baxter Street and that was Italian at the time. My grandmother never spoke a word of English, and didn’t know how to speak Russian either, only Yiddish; she went out looking around and got lost. She was sitting on the edge of the curb, crying, she didn’t know where she was, and a man came over to her and said to her in Yiddish, “Are you lost?”

She said, “You speak Yiddish?” She was all mixed up.

He said, “What are you living here for? Why don’t you live with your own people?”

“We have Jews here?”

“Sure we have Jews here,” he said. “Come with me.” He took her home and told her family that there were real Jews living here and that she should come there immediately to live with those people. They felt very much at home among their own, you know, that they could converse with one another.

None of our immigrants spoke English. But we had schools right away on the East Side. We had the Henry Street Settlement where we took care of our pregnant women, we had the Lillian Wald group, you know, who took up with these. Lots of doctors contributed their help. They were a real sorry lot, but I must say that within the shortest time our immigrants became self-sufficient. The mother was a hard-working woman, scrubbing and cleaning for those children, and when they were allowed to go to school, it was just the most beautiful thing you ever saw. How they appreciated this free schooling and free tutoring!...

*Oral History of Helen Barth; as transcribed and edited by David M. Brownstone, Irene M. Franck, and Douglass Brownstone, Island of Hope, Island of Tears (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 2000), 261–262. Reprinted by permission of the author. ©*