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Immigrant Identity

It was May 13, 1903 when Anna Stroman and her husband, Karl Stroman, received a letter from their dear friend Ernst Weber describing his new life in Detroit. The couple briefly considered leaving Berlin and immigrating to America but was too afraid their unborn child and toddler Marta would abandon their German identities. The Stromans were proud to be German Catholics and were worried that moving to America would prevent their children from sharing this pride. However remaining in Germany was proving to be more and more difficult with Karl’s low wage and the ongoing tensions between Catholics and Germany (Marjorie Bloy, "Bismarck’s Domestic Polices 1871 -1890", http://www.historyhome.co.uk/europe/bisdom.htm). The letter from Ernst however came as a relief. He had informed them of the large German community of Detroit and the prevalence of the German language schools as well as German Catholic Churches (LaVern J. Rippley, “German Americans”, http://go.galegroup.com.proxy.lib.wayne.edu/ps/i.do?p=GVRL&sw=w&u=lom\_waynesu&v=2.1&it=r&id=GALE%7CCX3273300078&asid=9945205fa2e42c6c308a26e56033a694). He also made sure to emphasize the detail that he had opened a new bakery and was willing to hire Karl. That letter alone was enough send them packing and on a ship to America.

It took about a year to finalize the travel plans. The couple eventually arrived with to Detroit on the second of June 1904. It was a struggle to keep the children calm throughout the journey. Anna could tell Karl was becoming impatient with Otto’s continuous whining. Their 8-month old child was exhausted. It was a stressful journey and with Marta getting sick on the way, Karl loosing a valuable pocket-watch from his father and Anna running short on clean clothes for Otto, it was a miracle that none of them had had a breakdown. When their ship had finally arrived to New York on the fifth of October 1904, Ernest was there to welcome them. He had already purchased the train tickets to Detroit (National Museum of American History, “Transportation History”, http://amhistory.si.edu/onthemove/themes/story\_48\_1.html). Ernst quickly took the bags from Karl and loaded them in the carriage while Anna carried Otto. Once Ernst and the family had settled on the train they were finally able to relax.

Stepping outside of the train was like stepping into a new world. Anna hadn’t noticed the people around her in New York or those on the train due to her exhaustion, but now that she was in Detroit and fully conscious of her surroundings, she couldn’t believe what she was seeing. The vast amount of people of different ethnicities, cultures and religions in addition to the abundant factories around them came as a shock (Oliver Zunz, "Detroit's Ethnic Neighborhoods at the End of the Nineteenth Century", https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/handle/2027.42/50936/161.pdf?sequence=1). Ernst had written about the diversity in Detroit but they hadn’t imagined it would be diverse to this extent. The family, still in shock, paid the 5¢-per-person fee and hurried onto the streetcar that would take them to the East Side (National Museum of American History, “Transportation History”, http://amhistory.si.edu/onthemove/themes/story\_48\_1.html). The streetcar slowly came to a stop in front of a small neighborhood flooded with Germans. The area, as Ernst had pointed out, was filled with Germans of different ages, religions and origins (Oliver Zunz, "Detroit's Ethnic Neighborhoods at the End of the Nineteenth Century", https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/handle/2027.42/50936/161.pdf?sequence=1). It was incredible. In front of the house stood Ernst’s wife Emma and their son Walter. The sight of them made Anna’s heart swell with joy. It had been three years since the two had last been united and seeing her friend so happy and comfortable made Anna even more excited. It didn’t take long before Anna and Karl had purchased their own home, enrolled Marta in German school and joined the local Catholic Church (LaVern J. Rippley, “German Americans”, http://go.galegroup.com.proxy.lib.wayne.edu/ps/i.do?p=GVRL&sw=w&u=lom\_waynesu&v=2.1&it=r&id=GALE%7CCX3273300078&asid=9945205fa2e42c6c308a26e56033a694).

It has been 10 years since Anna and her family had arrived to Detroit. They owned a small wooden house in the East Side where they knew they would fit in with the other Germans. She was now pregnant with her third child. It was thrilling news because Anna had always dreamed of a family of five. It was common to see other Germans families with three children and having one more joyful soul in the house couldn’t hurt (Oliver Zunz, "Detroit's Ethnic Neighborhoods at the End of the Nineteenth Century", https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/handle/2027.42/50936/161.pdf?sequence=1). Karl has been employed by the Ford Motor Company for about 7 years, after working with Ernst for 3 years, and could now afford to expand his family. His initial pay was about $2.38 an hour but had doubled earlier this year to $5 with eight hours of work per day (NPR, "A Timeline of Ford Motor Company", http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5168769). It was comforting to see him put his skills in machinery to use and getting paid what he deserved. It was also exciting to see that many of his German friends had joined the work force (Oliver Zunz, "Detroit's Ethnic Neighborhoods at the End of the Nineteenth Century", https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/handle/2027.42/50936/161.pdf?sequence=1). It was, however, disappointing at times when Anna thought about how skillful the Germans were, yet they held very few powerful positions in the companies they worked for (Oliver Zunz, "Detroit's Ethnic Neighborhoods at the End of the Nineteenth Century", https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/handle/2027.42/50936/161.pdf?sequence=1). Marta and Otto were now in a Catholic-German school (LaVern J. Rippley, “German Americans”, http://go.galegroup.com.proxy.lib.wayne.edu/ps/i.do?p=GVRL&sw=w&u=lom\_waynesu&v=2.1&it=r&id=GALE%7CCX3273300078&asid=9945205fa2e42c6c308a26e56033a694). Her fear of her children loosing ties with their German roots was completely gone. Their community was filled with Germans meaning the family- excluding Karl who needed to learn English for work- didn’t feel the need to integrate too much in the American society (LaVern J. Rippley, “German Americans”, http://go.galegroup.com.proxy.lib.wayne.edu/ps/i.do?p=GVRL&sw=w&u=lom\_waynesu&v=2.1&it=r&id=GALE%7CCX3273300078&asid=9945205fa2e42c6c308a26e56033a694). For once in her life, Anna felt completely at ease. She had enough time tidy her house and even skim the German Newspaper *Michigan Volksblatt* (Library of Congress, "About *Michigan Volksblatt*. (Detroit, Mich.) 1860-1915", http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85033857/). Everything was perfect.

Perfection, however, is only temporary. There was no way that Anna could predict the First World War. It was now November 1918 and the First World War was finally over (PBS, "WWI Timeline: 1918", http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/timeline/). It was a shame to see what had become of the once-strong German community. Anna’s heart hurt for those who had lost sight of their true German heritage. Marta and Otto had come home on multiple occasions sharing stories about how German parents had been so worried about their children during the war that they wouldn’t allow their children to speak German at home or even teach them anything about German tradition (Willi Paul Adams and LaVren J. Rippley and Eberhard Richmann, "German or English?", http://maxkade.iupui.edu/adams/chap7.html). They also told her about children and parents who were attacked because they were German (Library of Congress, "Immigration- Shadows of War", https://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/immigration/german8.html). To Anna, it truly felt like America had turned on her and her family. German newspapers were run out of business, schools were forced to remove German from their curriculums, and Churches that had been set up as German speaking or bi-lingual were pressured into cutting the German ties (Mary J. Manning, "Being German, Being American", https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2014/summer/germans.pdf).

Karl, along with many other German men and adolescents, had gone out to fight in an effort to prove their loyalty (Mary J. Manning, "Being German, Being American", https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2014/summer/germans.pdf). Anna was never the same since the day she parted with him. It was a struggle to raise three children and feel proud of herself when everything she had known was falling apart. Karl used to send letters as often as he could, however “as often as he could” turned into never again after Anna had received a the feared telegram that started with “we regret to inform you” (Rob Ruggenberg, "It Is My Painful Duty to Inform You...", http://www.greatwar.nl/frames/default-feared.html). She never mustered the strength to finish reading that letter in hopes that one day a miracle would occur. Anna sat, hugging her three children on her bed reflecting on what has become of them. She spoke very little English, she was now a widow, she had no job, she was part of a hated community and she had three children to look after. She couldn’t help but blame her tragedy on her decision to come to Detroit.

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