

IT'S ALL RELATIVE



Like many other people who do family histories, I have learned a lot about my life and my family's background that I did not know prior to this project. I learned things about my great-grandparents and about life and work in Youngstown, Ohio. However, finding out about my family's history was even more interesting because of the knowledge I acquired from American Studies Class. This class brought all of the little details about my family history to light, helping to clarify things that would not have meant much to the average individual. Finding out about Diamond's Restaurant and the people behind it would not have been as meaningful without AMER 3701. So now I would like to share with you a few similarities I found between my family's story and other aspects of the class.

There were a lot of similarities between my family's story and things we have learned about in class. I really didn't know that much about my great-grandparents, George and Irene Diamond, but in reality their story is a lot like that of the characters in *Out of this Furnace*, a novel by Thomas Bell. *Out of this Furnace* told the tales of an immigrant family and their troubling times as they grew and lived in America working in the steel mills and attempting to maintain strong family ties. Besides the coincidence of names between my grandfather and the grandfather figure in the novel, George Kracha, the way in which the couples first came to America is strikingly similar. George Kracha came over first and sent for his wife Elena, almost exactly like George Diamond coming over, making a living, and sending for Irene when he could make the journey to France.

There were other issues in the novel that reminded me of my family as well. For example, when my great-grandfather first came to America he met up with a group of other Greek immigrants, befriended them, and then they lived together. They stuck together ethnically, as the novel and the class text, *Who Built America?*, said most immigrants did. They continued to speak their native language and shared the same customs. As they grew and married they built communities. The community where my grandmother was raised was very active; they did a lot of things together. They did so much together because they shared so much, for example, language, economic status, social status, custom, and of course, religion.

Just as the books mentioned, religion was very important to their lives. All of the Greeks in my family's community gathered around St. Nicholas's Church, a Greek Orthodox Church, on Sundays. Everyone went to church. It was not only a place to pray, it was also somewhere to socialize, meet people, and keep up on ethnic and community issues. The Greek Church was the center of the town and the Greek community built around it.

Another thing that happened in my great grandparent's time that reminded me of *Out of this Furnace* was the trend of housing boarders. My great-grandfather was a boarder for most of his life. He rented a room and the woman who headed the house took care of some of the chores. My great-grandparents actually housed some boarders as well. While George worked in the mill they rented out a room of their house on Donation Street and Irene took care of the housework for both the family and the man who stayed with them.

I was really interested in my family history when I discovered that my great grandfather worked in the mills. Just like in the books, my grandmother remembers her father coming home at all different hours, getting really bad pay, and always being tired and worried about money. She remembers how work picked up after the depression because of WWII and how things started looking up with the family's finances.

There were also a lot of other things that happened in my family's history that mirrored our class discussions. There were racial differences where my grandmother lived in the 1960s across Belmont Avenue, all of the union meetings that she served in the back rooms of Diamonds, there were also gender issues and trends that I am proud to say my grandma went against, she went to work despite my grandfather's strict objections and when things got bad she opted for divorce in a time where being a working-single mom was very taboo.

My family has a rich and deep history, I always knew that and was very proud of it. However I never knew that my family was so richly involved in Youngstown history until taking American Studies 3701. The Greek community, the Greek Orthodox Church, steel mills, boarding houses, and of course, Diamond's Restaurant, my family has roots in them all and I'm proud to say, so do I.
