

TEACHER'S GUIDE

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MISSION 4: "City of Immigrants"

Pauline Newman Describes Her Family's Journey to New York City

In 1901, Pauline Newman left her native village in Lithuania and came to the United States. In the following account, she explains why her family left and describes the difficult conditions of their journey aboard a ship bound for New York.

The village I came from was very small. One department store, one synagogue, and one church. There was a little square where the peasants would bring their produce, you know, for sale. And there was one teahouse where you could have a glass of tea for a penny and sit all day long and play checkers if you wanted.

In the winter we would skate down the hilltop toward the lake and in the summer we'd walk to the woods and get mushrooms, raspberries. The peasants lived on one side of the lake, and the Jewish people on the other, in little square thatched-roof houses. In order to go to school you had to own land and we didn't own land, of course. Very few Jews did.

That was the time, you see, when America was known to foreigners as the land where you'd get rich. There's gold on the sidewalk—all you have to do is pick it up. So people left that little village and went to America. My brother first and then he sent for one sister, and after that, a few years after that, my father died and they sent for my mother and my other two sisters and me. I was seven or eight at the time. I'm not sure exactly how old, because the village I came from had no registration of birth, and we lost the family Bible on the ship and that was where the records were.

Of course we came steerage. That's the bottom of the ship and three layers of bunks. One, two, three, one above the other. If you were lucky, you got the first bunk. Of course you can understand that it wasn't all that pleasant when the people on the second bunk or the third bunk were ill. You had to suffer and endure not only your own misery, but the misery from the people above you.

My mother baked rolls and things like that for us to take along, because all you got on the boat was water, boiled water. If you had tea, you could make tea, but otherwise you just had the hot water. Sometimes they gave you a watery soup, more like a mud puddle than soup. It was stormy, cold uncomfortable. I wasn't sick, but other members of my family were.

When we landed at Ellis Island our luggage was lost. We inquired for it and they said, "Come another time. Come another time. You'll find it. We haven't got time now." So we left and we

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never saw our luggage again. We had bedding, linen, beautiful copper utensils, that sort of thing.

From Ellis Island we went by wagon to my brother's apartment on Hester Street. Hester Street and Essex on the Lower East Side. We were all bewildered to see so many people. Remember we were from a little village. And here you had people coming and going and shouting. Peddlers, people on the streets. Everything was new, you know.

Source: Joan Morrison and Charlotte Fox Zabusky, *American Mosaic: The Immigrant Experience in the Words of Those Who Lived It*, 8-9.