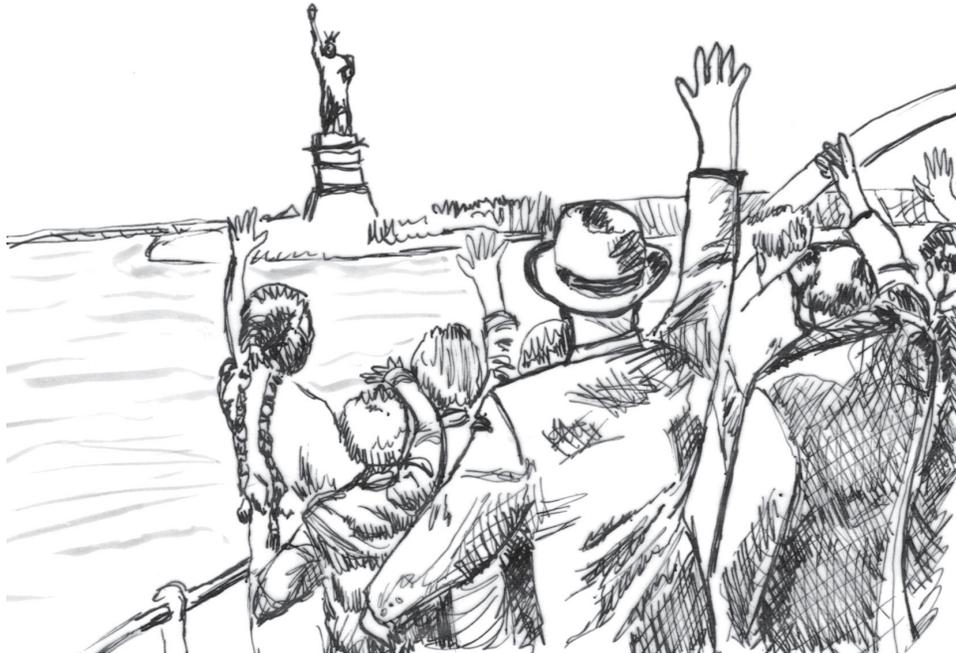


Ellis Island Coming to America



My family is from Russia. We are moving to America. We want a fresh start. We want freedom.

We are poor. We travel in steerage, which is the cheapest. Steerage is on the lowest level of the ship. It is gross. It smells very bad. It is dark. It doesn't have windows. The ship rocks. Many get seasick. I get seasick.

Our trip takes three weeks. We stay in steerage for the whole time. We cannot leave. Many people get sick and a few even die.

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Finally, the ship slows down. We go outside to the main deck. We see the shores of America! We see the Statue of Liberty! It is a wonderful moment! It is what we've been waiting for! People begin to laugh, cry, hug, and cheer.

The ship stops and we board a small boat that takes us to Ellis Island. We are scared because what if they don't let us in? What if they turn us back? We do not want to go back.

When we get to Ellis Island, we get in line. We go into the Great Hall. It is 52 feet tall and very large. It is full of people. We must wait in line for hours.

Everyone gets a number. They pin the numbers to our shirts. Then we wait on line to see different doctors. They check our eyes. They check our hearts. They check our legs. They check our arms. The doctor writes letters on people's shirts using chalk. They write an L on Papa's shirt because he has an old leg injury that makes him limp.

This means we can't leave Ellis Island today. We stay there overnight. The whole night we worry that they will send us back to Russia.

They give us food while we are there. But the food is odd. They give us a fruit that is long and yellow. We have never seen such a thing before. We have no idea what it is!



Ellis Island

The next day Papa sees a new doctor. The doctor says Papa is OK and that we can move on.

Next, a man asks us many questions. What is your name? Where are you going? Do you have money? What will you do for work? Do you have family in America? Is anyone waiting for you?

I tell the man my name. It is Joseph Markovitch. He writes my name. He writes Joe Markov. I am too afraid to say anything. What if he gets mad? Will he send me home?

We are free to go! We get on a small boat. It takes us to New York. I am now Joe Markov. I am now American!

