

THE ALIENS AMONG US

The earliest chapters of my biography would include life in the beet fields. As a small child, that was my playground, while my father, mother, and my brother Ed worked. Depending on the season, they hoed, blocked, pulled, and topped up and down the long beet rows. For the farmers, it was cheap labor. For our family, it was a livelihood.

Years before our mother came to join her husband, our father made his way across the East and Midwest working in coal mines. He traveled by freight train, stopping here and there just long enough to get his second wind. Two years was considered an average stay. That trend continued even after our mother came. We never stayed in any one place too long, - until my teen years.

I would not be able to claim that our family fit well into the society around us. It was difficult to communicate, for we spoke only Slovak at home. (I learned English when I began school.) We always made it a point to live in or near a community where some Slovak was spoken. Yet, with all of the challenges that life in the United States presented, our parents never talked about returning to Slovakia. You knew from listening to our father that he was proud to live in his new country, even before he became a citizen, regardless of the hardships.

Our ancestors felt drawn to these shores. If it were not for their courage, pioneering spirit, and hope, we would not be what we are, as a nation or as individuals. These shores have always been viewed as a land of freedom, hope, and opportunity. And, so, they came in 1606 and established the Jamestown settlement. Then, there were those who came on the Mayflower in 1620. There have been many others that have come since, including Michal on the SS. Kaiser Wilhelm de Grosse in 1913 and Alzbeta on the SS. La Savoie in 1921.

Now, they come on a plane and, even, on foot. Some remain legal and some do not. Nevertheless, they all come for the same reason. This continuing tide of hope-seeking individuals has prompted our governments to seek better regulation of immigration. Regretfully, it is being done to the extent of jeopardizing illegal aliens that have lived in our nation for years. The city of Hazleton has already passed a discriminatory law, which may not be upheld in court. Altoona and other cities are considering doing the same.

Obviously, it is necessary in this day and age to protect our nation from outside threats. This vigilance, however, is having the effect of excluding refugees and asylum-seekers who have been victims of the very oppression that we oppose and seek to eradicate. If we, as a nation, no longer have the capability to protect the American public without sacrificing our traditional role as a safe haven for the oppressed of the world, we will have lost our identity and sacrificed our destiny.

As Americans, we appear to have forgotten that all of our blood comes from elsewhere. Its origins are not only in Europe, but in other continents such as Africa, Asia, and Central and South America as well. When we appear to be domineering and arrogant in our dealing with aliens, it can look like we are turning on our own. And, in a way, that is what it is.

We ought never to forget from where we came. Society admires the famous who remember their humble beginnings. As a nation, we need to do the same. To paraphrase a quote from Pogo of yesteryear, "We have met the aliens and they is us!"