

My Two Grandfathers

Submitted by Karen Bobrow

My Boonton-born Carey grandparents and Russian-born Wardamasky grandparents lived similar lives for eighteen years—both couples residing in similar small towns in Morris County. Mom and her five siblings were born in Boonton, while Dad and his five siblings were born in Rockaway. Both my father and his younger brother were baptized at St. Cyril's Church in Boonton.

At the time of the stock market crash, both families were living within six miles of each other, so they may have read the same newspapers. Both grandfathers were struggling to provide for their families by picking up odd-jobs around town in order to put food on the table and pay the bills. It appeared that they led parallel lives, yet both families ultimately chose such different paths.

Dad always said that his father decided to go back to his homeland because of the struggles they were facing caused by the Great Depression. Yet learning about the difficult journey my Russian grandparents took to America in 1913, it has always been puzzling for me to understand why they felt they had to leave.

My Wardamasky grandparents owned a home, which was uncommon at the time. Mom's parents were never homeowners until 1940, when they purchased their Birch Street home. My father's older sisters and his uncle were working in a factory, they had a boarder living with them, and my eleven year old father got a job working as a caddie at the **Peace Pipe Golf Club**. Why couldn't they somehow figure it all out like my other grandparents did?

It did not make sense until I learned that Joseph Stalin had been advertising in publications in the New York area about the abundance of jobs and housing in the Soviet Union. My father's parents were clearly quite desperate, so in December 1931, my grandfather moved the family to Leningrad.

My father returned to Rockaway in 1941 by himself, because he was the only member of his family who was given the travel documents to leave at that time. He was only twenty-two when he took that trip home. He served in the war, and in 1947, he moved into a home on Boonton Avenue. A few years later he met my mother at Norda Chemical, and they were married at Mt. Carmel Church in 1951. Not all his family survived the move to Russia, so I find the fact that my parents ended up together in Boonton, where they lived together until Dad died in 2008, quite remarkable.