



Tell Us Your Story

Margaret Eckman

At age 16 and speaking no English, my grandmother, Frances Volkman, fled her abusive father in Germany in the 1920s to come to America, alone. She made her way to the Midwest, where she was to meet a man who'd promised to marry her if she managed to get to the United States—but once she arrived, he turned her down. (I wish I remembered the details of Grandma's story, but she's no longer here to ask.)

Desperate, she traveled to New Jersey, where she hoped to find members of her extended family who'd arrived earlier. There she met and married my grandfather, Dietrich Tete, not out of love (as she made clear to me), but out of necessity. They moved to Nantucket, where my grandfather set up an upholstery business.

Grandma learned English as best she could—without the help of a dictionary, which my grandfather forbade her—but her poor English made it hard to connect with others. Her main joy was in raising her two daughters. I didn't realize how difficult her life was until she began telling me tales of her struggles when I'd visit her on Nantucket; her strength, courage, and resilience still inspire me.



Pictured: my grandmother, Frances Volkman (left); my mother Frances Tete MacKay; and my nephew (Grandma's first great-grandchild), Gregory MacKay

