



36 Letters: One Family's Story

Joan Sohn

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An American success saga

Of course every family has stories and each of these stories is special. We are fortunate to have letters, first-person accounts of our family's experience during a period in history when there was upheaval and change. Perhaps what makes these letters so special is that they are not terribly unique, and that they represent the experiences of a whole generation of immigrants from Eastern Europe. Anti-Semitism and revolution led to violence and fear in the towns. Parents were faced with farewells to children they might never see again, and families tried to anticipate new beginnings in a foreign, and faraway, country. And still, young people met and fell in love.

Joan Sohn found her grandparents' 36 letters, tucked away for 65 years in a small brown paper bag. When she read them, her family's story came alive. Of course, there were missing pieces many of them; and so she began a long labor of love, filling in the gaps.

Thanks to those letters and Sohn's determination, we have that story about people who left their homes for a new start and never returned. They reinvented themselves; they changed their citizenship, their language, their customs, and even their names.

36 Letters is about separation, personal struggle, and achievement. It's about people who landed at Ellis Island and made their way, somehow, to New York's Lower East Side, and then to Philadelphia, where they grew and multiplied and made remarkable contributions to the city's development. The letters are accompanied by more than 100 stunning photographs, maps, and illustrations.

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