


What Freedom of Speech Means To Me

"We're here!" someone shouted. Ten year old Matilda Block was one of the lucky ones to get to the ship's deck first. She leaned over the railing and gazed in awe at the beautiful Statue of Liberty. A crowd of immigrants was quickly gathering behind her, but all of those noises faded into the distance as Matilda quietly recited, "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free." The past several months had been hard for Matilda and her family; there had been a famine in Poland and a lack of jobs, not to mention the horrible persecution they and so many other Polish citizens experienced. They were no longer able to worship, sing, or even speak up for what they as individuals thought was right. Many who rebelled had been taken to prison camps or just shot on the spot. Immigrants from all over the world were leaving everything—homes, family, friends—just to have the freedom of speech they hungered for. All of these thoughts had raced through Matilda's mind all along the trip. But as soon as she laid her eyes on the beautiful Lady Liberty, her troubled soul felt comforted and she whispered, "Thank you, America, for giving us this freedom."

Matilda Block was my Polish great-great grandmother who immigrated to America in 1888-1889. She and so many others longed for the right to speak as they wished, and in America they found this freedom and many more. America is like a puzzle with each piece filled with a freedom that is hard to find in other countries. Freedom of speech is one of those pieces. We, as Americans need to respect and value these rights. I am so proud



that I am related to someone who did value these rights, someone who left everything she knew and came to America for freedom. I am forever grateful that she came here so that I, over a hundred years later, can have the freedom of speech she craved.