

A Great-Grandfather and a Hero

My hero is only known to a few people in this world, but he holds a special place in my heart. This man survived a POW camp, immigrated to America, opened a successful business, and provided for his family. He was strong, brave, patriotic and humble, but most importantly he was my great-grandfather, Victor Sipic.

My great-grandfather has been a hero to me ever since I learned the stories of his life. The most incredible is that he survived four brutal years in a Nazi camp. The memories of this experience stayed with Victor for the rest of his life - a life that was nearly cut short on a number of occasions. Victor's most terrifying experience was after refusing to continue to work as forced labor in coal mines while being starved. As a result, the Nazis lined up all the men and machine gunned some of them. Luckily the bullets ceased just a few feet before reaching my great-grandfather. When recalling this event to a family member, Victor stated that he lost his best friend and believed he would die. He was tortured by the thought of never again seeing his wife and son.

Another incredible moment in Victor's life was his immigration to America. Since he was unable to return to his own country after the war because it was taken over by communists, Victor came to the United States where he worked hard in the steel mills. For ten years, he mailed every cent back to Serbia to support his wife and only son. The job was draining and incredibly difficult for a body that had been through beatings and starvation, but Victor was determined to give his son everything he lacked when he was growing up. And since he could not be present during his son's youth, Victor made sure to send letters as often as possible to the young boy.

Because of this encouragement, Victor's son studied hard and was the first in his village to attend college. He soon joined his father in America (after a 25-year separation) and the two of them opened a successful restaurant. Neither of them could have imagined how the business would impact their lives. It was one of the most popular restaurants in Chicago and it allowed Victor and his wife to live comfortably on their farm in Indiana. The income also allowed their child to provide well for his wife and three sons.

Victor was always proud of being an American. He showed his patriotism by flying an American flag over his home and throwing a massive Bicentennial party for his customers in 1976. I believe Victor's proudest moment was the time a United States Senator from Indiana presented him with a plaque and US flag that was flown over the Capitol. The Senator was so impressed by Victor's catering services and life story that he felt it necessary to give him something special. To Victor, the flag was a great symbol. It was a representation of the freedom and success that a man from a peasant village with no money or education could achieve in America. Victor kept this flag flying outside his home and never forgot what our country had done for him.

This patriotism reached Victor's grandson (my father) at an early age. It was largely because of Victor that my father joined the United States Army. He served for many years and completed a year-long tour in Iraq. My father is currently working as a Chicago Police Officer and always

says that his patriotism was inspired by the young immigrant who only wanted to provide for his family. Now my father is able to support his own family at a job that always made Victor proud.

To conclude, my great-grandfather is my hero because of his strength, bravery, and patriotism. He led a brutal and challenging life but still was able to provide for his family. I couldn't imagine arriving in a country with a completely new language and atmosphere after living through the most awful moment in my life. To be separated from your wife and child for twenty-five years, work for a decade in a labor-intensive job, and then venture into a competitive business. But despite all these challenges, Victor died a comfortable man and an inspiration to all who knew him.

It is because of all these reasons that I look up to my great-grandfather and consider him my hero. Even though he passed away years before my birth, I love him more than most could understand. I hope that in some way he is able to know how much I value his life and wisdom, and that he is proud of all I do to preserve his memory.