

Stephen Miller Is an Immigration Hypocrite. I Know Because I'm His Uncle.

If my nephew's ideas on immigration had been in force a century ago, our family would have been wiped out.

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Let me tell you a story about Stephen Miller and chain migration.

It begins at the turn of the 20th century, in a dirt-floor shack in the village of Antopol, a shtetl of subsistence farmers in what is now Belarus. Beset by violent anti-Jewish pogroms and forced childhood conscription in the Czar's army, the patriarch of the shack, Wolf-Leib Glosser, fled a village where his forebears had lived for centuries and took his chances in America.

He set foot on Ellis Island on January 7, 1903, with \$8 to his name. Though fluent in Polish, Russian and Yiddish, he understood no English. An elder son, Nathan, soon followed. By street corner peddling and sweatshop toil, Wolf-Leib and Nathan sent enough money home to pay off debts and buy the immediate family's passage to America in 1906. That group included young Sam Glosser, who with his family settled in the western Pennsylvania city of Johnstown, a booming coal and steel town that was a magnet for other hardworking immigrants. The Glosser family quickly progressed from selling goods from a horse and wagon to owning a haberdashery in Johnstown run by Nathan and Wolf-Leib to a chain of supermarkets and discount department stores run by my grandfather, Sam, and the next generation of Glossers, including my dad, Izzy. It was big enough to be listed on the AMEX stock exchange and employed thousands of people over time. In the span of some 80 years and five decades, this family emerged from poverty in a hostile country to become a prosperous, educated clan of merchants, scholars, professionals, and, most important, American citizens.

What does this classically American tale have to do with Stephen Miller? Well, Izzy Glosser is his maternal grandfather, and Stephen's mother, Miriam, is my sister.

I have watched with dismay and increasing horror as my nephew, an educated man who is well aware of his heritage, has become the architect of immigration policies that repudiate the very foundation of our family's life in this country.

I shudder at the thought of what would have become of the Glossers had the same policies Stephen so coolly espouses— the travel ban, the radical decrease in refugees, the separation of children from their parents, and even talk of [limiting](#) citizenship for legal immigrants — been in effect when Wolf-Leib made his desperate bid for freedom. The Glossers came to the U.S. just a few years before the fear and prejudice of the “America first” nativists of the day closed U.S. borders to Jewish refugees. Had Wolf-Leib waited, his family likely would have been murdered by the Nazis along with all but seven of the 2,000 Jews who remained in Antopol. I would encourage Stephen to ask himself if the chanting, torch-bearing Nazis of Charlottesville, whose support his boss seems to court so cavalierly, do not envision a similar fate for him.

Like other immigrants, our family's welcome to the USA was not always a warm one, but we largely had the protection of the law, there was no state-sponsored violence against us, no kidnapping of our male children, and we enjoyed good relations with our neighbors. True, Jews were excluded from many occupations, couldn't buy homes in some towns, couldn't join certain organizations or attend certain schools or universities, but life was good. As in past generations, there were hate mongers who regarded the most recent groups of poor immigrants as scum, rapists, gangsters, drunks and terrorists, but largely the Glosser family was left alone to live our lives and build the American dream. Children were born, synagogues founded, and we thrived. This was the miracle of America.

Acting for so long in the theater of right-wing politics, Stephen and Trump may have become numb to the resultant human tragedy and blind to the hypocrisy of their policy decisions. After all, Stephen's is not the only family with a chain immigration story in the Trump administration. Trump's grandfather is reported to have been a German migrant on the run from military conscription to a new life in the United States, and his mother fled the poverty of rural Scotland for the economic possibilities of New York City. (Trump's in-laws just became citizens on the strength of his wife's own citizenship.)

These facts are important not only for their grim historical irony but because vulnerable people are being hurt. They are real people, not the ghoulish caricatures portrayed by Trump. When confronted by the deaths and suffering of thousands, our senses are overwhelmed, and the victims become statistics rather than people. I

meet these statistics one at a time through my volunteer service as a neuropsychologist for the Philadelphia affiliate of HIAS (formerly the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society), the global nonprofit that protects refugees and helped my family more than 100 years ago. I will share the story of one such man I have met in the hopes that my nephew might recognize elements of our shared heritage.

In the early 2000s, Joseph (not his real name) was conscripted at the age of 14 to be a soldier in Eritrea and sent to a remote desert military camp. Officers there discovered a Bible under his pillow which aroused their suspicion that he might belong to a foreign evangelical sect that would claim his loyalty and sap his will to fight. Joseph was actually a member of the state-approved Coptic church but was nonetheless immediately subjected to torture. “They smashed my face into the ground, tied my hands and feet together behind my back, stomped on me, and hung me from a tree by my bonds while they beat me with batons for the others to see.”

Joseph was tortured for 20 consecutive days before being taken to a military prison and crammed into a dark unventilated cell with 36 other men, little food and no proper hygiene. Some died, and in time Joseph was stricken with dysentery. When he was too weak to stand, he was taken to a civilian clinic where he was fed by the medical staff. Upon regaining his strength, he escaped to a nearby road where a sympathetic driver took him north through the night to a camp in Sudan where he joined other refugees. Joseph was on the first leg of a journey that would cover thousands of miles and almost 10 years.

Before Donald Trump had started his political ascent promulgating the false story that Barack Obama was a foreign-born Muslim, while my nephew, Stephen, was famously recovering from the hardships of his high school cafeteria in Santa Monica, Joseph was a child on his own in Sudan in fear of being deported back to Eritrea to face execution for desertion. He worked any job he could get, saved his money and made his way through Sudan. He endured arrest and extortion in Libya. He returned to Sudan, then kept moving to Dubai, Brazil and eventually to a southern border crossing into Texas, where he sought asylum. In all of the countries he traveled through during his ordeal, he was vulnerable, exploited and his status was “illegal.” But in the United States, he had a chance to acquire the protection of a documented immigrant.

Today, at 30, Joseph lives in Pennsylvania and has a wife and child. He is a smart, warm, humble man of great character who is grateful for every day of his freedom and safety. He bears emotional scars from not seeing his parents or siblings since he was 14. He still trembles, cries and struggles for breath when describing his

torture, and he bears physical scars as well. He hopes to become a citizen, return to work and make his contribution to America. His story, though unique in its particulars, is by no means unusual. I have met Central Americans fleeing corrupt governments, violence and criminal extortion; a Yemeni woman unable to return to her war-ravaged home country and fearing sexual mutilation if she goes back to her Saudi husband; and an escaped kidnap-bride from central Asia.

Trump wants to make us believe that these desperate migrants are an existential threat to the United States; the most powerful nation in world history and a nation made strong by immigrants. Trump and my nephew both know their immigrant and refugee roots. Yet, they repeat the insults and false accusations of earlier generations against these refugees to make them seem less than human. Trump publicly parades the grieving families of people hurt or killed by migrants, just as the early Nazis dredged up Jewish criminals to frighten and enrage their political base to justify persecution of all Jews. Almost every American family has an immigration story of its own based on flight from war, poverty, famine, persecution, fear or hopelessness. Most of these immigrants became workers, entrepreneurs, scientists and soldiers of America.

Most damning is the administration's evident intent to make policy that specifically disadvantages people based on their ethnicity, country of origin and religion. No matter what opinion is held about immigration, any government that specifically enacts law or policy on that basis must be recognized as a threat to all of us. Laws bereft of justice are the gateway to tyranny. Today others may be the target, but tomorrow it might just as easily be you or me. History will be the judge, but in the meantime the normalization of these policies is rapidly eroding the collective conscience of America. Immigration reform is a complex issue that will require compassion and wisdom to bring the nation to a just solution, but the politicians who have based their political and professional identity on ethnic demonization and exclusion cannot be trusted to do so. As free Americans, and descendants of immigrants and refugees, we have the obligation to exercise our conscience by voting for candidates who will stand up for our highest national values and not succumb to our lowest fears.