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*This essay was the final project for the Principles of Style class, in which we had to rewrite our original personal essay (see “Family Heirlooms”) in the style of the author we had analyzed (see “The Development and Refinement of Truman Capote’s Style”). This is an example of how I can adapt my style to fit a specific need.*

Family Heirlooms (in the Style of Truman Capote)

My father has always told me that I have his grandmother’s pale, porcelain skin that defied time’s wrinkles due to her predominantly indoor life (making pieorgi, knitting an *odeyalo* (she never learned the English word for blanket), and being the commander-in-chief of household duties.) She had my grandfather (and then my own father) drive her to and from the local psychic every Saturday for her weekly fortune. She divvied her faith between the superstitious and her Orthodox Christianity, spending Sundays at St. Clement’s, adorned with her head scarf and rosary. The mechanical city of Detroit, despite its heavy snowfall and bone-chilling winters, was a world away from that of her former home: the USSR.

Even to this day, Eastern Europeans are seen as emotionless and tight-lipped. After years of suppression, a people are conditioned to be tough, resilient, sturdy. Poverty induces a dwindling of culture and traditions, leaving people to fend for what they can just get by with. If you were to ask my *prababushka* about life in the USSR, she would shoot it down faster than Lenin’s tenure as Chairman. It was always greeted with a fair, firm “that was in the past.” And then she would give you a look so you would know not to ask again.

She had been faced by many tragedies in her lifespan, yet she wouldn’t let anyone be the wiser. Things could be dreadful, but such was life and you had to move on. (“Pick yourself up by your bootstraps,” as my dad would say.) After suffering under the iron fist of Soviet Russia for 18 years, she was sponsored by her sister and moved to Michigan. Misfortune lingered not far behind, as not long after her sister fell off a ladder to her death. She later met my *praded*, who “passed away” before my father was born, and later remarried a Polish man. According to my mom he hung himself (such information was necessary to disclose when meeting with my psychiatrist), but my father vehemently denies this, getting Soviet red in the face upon hearing such rumors. Of course, Karolina never discussed this, it was in the past after all.

Southern Michigan and Ohio are home to large Polish-American and Russian-American populations. This didn’t deter any red scare from infiltrating the area though, as my grandfather felt pressured to convert to Catholicism in the 50s. He tried his best to prove himself American—enlisting in the army for WWII, attending university, working a not-blue-but-not-white collar job, moving to the suburbs. The little fraction of a square acre of land that his small sun-bleached yellow home plopped on was perfectly American in the most unsuspecting way, just as he hoped it would be. Not that there was anything to hide, but just to relish in white middle class normalcy, just like his neighbors in their picket fenced in squares.

My dad grew up in this cushy white bread neighborhood, educated entirely through Catholic schools and even named Kirk, which is Scottish for church. Karolina couldn’t pronounce this Anglican name though, so she called him *Corkie*. In my grandfather’s later years, he couldn’t call him Kirk either, often identifying him as Tom, my uncle, as a result of multiple strokes. Mispronunciation isn’t something unfamiliar to my family though, as externally very few people properly enunciate our surname. (Dz is treated as a single letter in many Slavic languages, and when before a vowel is pronounced as a J with a hint of a Z at the end.) I used to be quite embarrassed about this as a child, not wanting to be anything unusual (My hometown was largely Irish-American, Italian-American, and Jewish-American.) This led to me becoming complacent with the blundering and butchering of my surname, not wanting to draw any more attention to it than need be. Today, however, I take pride in my last name; it is unique and the story of my ancestors. And if/when the day arrives that I may become married, I certainly won’t be relinquishing it. I feel honored to write it on my academic papers, the pen pad at the cash register, anywhere. I wear it as a badge of honor, for those who’ve possessed it before me have embellished it with substance and integrity.