



# Video Story Transcript

## Grandma's Story

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**Link to YouTube Video:**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U8Or3Ile2W8>

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Note : The following is a transcription of a spoken story performance and may not reflect textbook perfect English. It will guide you as you listen (or read) along.

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My grandmother never wanted to come to America. That's the story I heard over and over again. Her older sister, Mary, was the one who should have gone. But on that early morning of departure 1887 Mary woke up sick or so she said. She took to her bed crying, moaning. She couldn't possibly go. Now my grandmother was just 13 years old. Hard enough to go to bed and know that you would never see your older sister again. You got to understand, there were no airplanes back then people didn't fly back and forth. Hard enough to go to bed that way, but instead she was woken up and told, "No, you're the one to leave. You're the one who's never going to see her family again." Now back then, you see, you couldn't waste a ticket. It has taken the family years to save up enough money for one ticket. So, my grandma had to wake up, quick, hurry around pack a few things in the carpet bag suitcase her mother had made for Mary and say goodbye to her three sisters and her younger brother Patrick, her mom, and her dad. Because somebody had to go get work in America, send money back home because the family was starving.

My grandmother set out for Dublin, a two-week journey by foot, with another aunt who was supposed to have watched Mary. And as they went down the road, there would have been hundreds of people joining them because millions left Ireland in the 1800s. And all the time they walked, these, these horse-drawn caravans, these carts piled high with fresh fruits and vegetables, would have passed them by. Because the British who were running Ireland at the time, were taking all the food for themselves.

Now, you may have heard of the Great Famine in Ireland. But I found out when I went to visit Ireland, a lot of people call it the Great Starvation because there was food. The Irish just weren't allowed to grow the food, I mean, to eat the food they were growing. The food they grew had to go to the British. They would ship it over to England. So, all the time my grandma's walking; of course, there were no fast food restaurants back

then, nor did anybody have any money if there were any restaurants. So, they started eating weeds and cabbage leaves and grass to try to stay alive. By time they got to the docks in Dublin, some British writers wrote that their faces were stained green. Their mouths were stained green. And this showed just how subhuman, animal-like the Irish really were.

Well, my grandma, she sailed across the Atlantic Ocean. She sailed in what they called coffin ships, like caskets because so many people died on those voyages. Hundreds of people were packed in the bottom of the boat. And there were so many diseases back then... diphtheria, typhus; things like that... cholera. See, the people could only be allowed up on board for maybe an hour or so because they couldn't let people be getting in the crew's way. So, they had to be down below and you can imagine the stench because there were no toilets back then. They used tin cans or buckets for chamber pots. And there was no electricity and you certainly wouldn't want to light a candle; that would be too dangerous. So you just sat in the dark and all this stench. And then people would sleep on these little narrow bunks - three or four people to a bunk. Sometimes sleeping with somebody you didn't know. Nobody could shower and there was lice and all that.

And I tried to imagine my grandmother just 13 years old with this, this aunt and we don't know too many details, but we found out this aunt got sick who was supposed to be taking care of my grandmother. My grandma was taking care of her. And I just think of here sitting in dark like 23 hours a day. Sick people all around us like... six, seven, eight weeks like this. Well, she got to America. Thank goodness! And she worked day and night. And all the time she would send money back home. Now, when she left, her parents said, "Now, don't worry we'll save up some money. We'll send one of the other sisters to help you out." But no sister ever, ever came. My grandma was just alone doing all of that work. And I think about what people have gone through to get to this country, or what they're still going through to get to this country or people who were captured and brought to this country, or people who already lived here but their lands and their way of life were taken. And I think about what a huge debt of gratitude we owe them. I know that my life could not be the way it was if it wasn't for my grandmother's sacrifices. So sometimes I find myself whispering a little prayer. Thank you, Grandma. Thank you.