

Legacies

My great grandfather fled poverty in Poland,
arriving in Ironwood Michigan to work in the iron mines.
I share in his descent into those mines
and his success in leaving those mines behind.
I feel the shifting earth
beneath his worn and tattered boots;
I see the lanterns flicker
on the timber beams supporting the earth above his head;
I hear the clatter of the cage
as it carries him deeper into the darkness;
I taste the metallic blood of the dust that cloaks his humanity
so that he is indistinguishable from his fellow miners,
or even the fractured rock walls that entombed him.
I also feel the burst of sun as he returns above ground,
the possibilities carried in the cool fresh air
and the wondrous infinity of the sky above his head.

Plundered and Plunderer,
my great grandfather, Theodore Anton Dietz,
traveled to his new home by railway
on tracks stretching across the continent,
connecting and dividing the country,
tracks laid by slaves and the descendants of slaves,
by Irish and Chinese immigrants
on land stolen from native peoples
and nature's bounty.
He arrived to his new home to work
in a mine owned by Carnegies and Rockefellers,
his hope for the future bound with their industry and domination.
Theodore Anton Dietz,
just one tiny drop among waves of peoples
flooding the promised land
with endless hope and bottomless despair.

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