



## THE CASTLE ON HESTER STREET

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*In this immigration story, a young girl's grandmother contradicts her husband's recollections of what it was like coming to America from Russia. Was he really pulled to New York by a flying goat? Is there truly a castle on Hester Street?*

Julie's grandparents represent the Jewish families from Eastern Europe who fled their pogrom-torn homeland and came to the United States seeking refuge and an enhanced way of life. Most of these immigrants made their way through the gateway of Ellis Island. Nearly half of today's Americans can trace their family history to someone who came into this country via Ellis Island, located just a short ferry ride from Manhattan, New York City. Many settled on the Lower East Side, the location of the real Hester Street.

Those Eastern European immigrants of the 19th and early 20th centuries found themselves working extraordinarily long hours in order to make ends meet. As Grandma Rose explained, "He sold buttons, fourteen hours a day, six days a week. The only rest he got was on *Sabbath*." If not for *Shabbat*, how might those tens of thousands of Jewish people have found the strength to move forward to embrace life in a new and very different world? A well-known adage by the secular Jew, Ehad Ha Am (1856-1927) is: "More than the Jewish people have kept *Shabbat*, *Shabbat* has kept the Jewish people."

### USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

The grandpa in *The Castle on Hester Street* creates fantastical vignettes for Julie's benefit, while Grandma Rose relates the hardships faced by people in their new homeland. Encourage your children to identify portions of Grandpa's stories that could not have happened. As you are reading, you might consider these questions; Why might Grandpa have made up these scenarios? Why did Grandma Rose counter each of Grandpa's stories with one based in reality?

Consider incorporating traditional *Shabbat* activities into your weekly routine: take a family walk on Saturday, play a board game together, read aloud to each other (children are never too old to be read to!); or tell stories from your childhood so that your youngsters learn about your background and heritage.

Older children in your family might enjoy a virtual tour of New York City's Tenement Museum, which can be found at [www.tenement.org](http://www.tenement.org). This museum depicts life for new immigrants in New York City during the time period of *The Castle on Hester Street*. Pj