This is a story about my grandfather, Arthur Kohlstrunk, and his father, Walter Kohlstrunk. Walter immigrated to the U.S. from Germany in 1913, and I've always found his immigration story fascinating, as it wasn't exactly planned. He had been a member of the Germany army from 1910-1912, in the field artillery division, and hated it. He was released from the army in 1912 and quickly got a job as a steward on a passenger steamship so he could see the world. He was able to travel to Asia, South America, and the United States. When the war broke out, the German Kaiser recalled all former soldiers to Germany to rejoin the military. My great-grandfather did not want to return to the military and fight for the Germany, and fortunately for him, the ship he was working on happened to be docked in New York Harbor when the order came through. Instead of returning to Germany, he simply left the ship and took up residence in New York City. This meant he was free of the Germany army, but he also could never return to Germany. In fact, he never again left the United States or saw any of his family.

Walter married another immigrant, Olga, and raised three children: Gerda, Arthur, and Ruth. My grandfather joked that the names got more Americanized with each kid. The family lived in the small town of Boonton, New Jersey. Their neighborhood had many other immigrants from Europe, including people from Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Italy. Of course, there were also many Germans. My grandfather always spoke of how Boonton was a true melting pot full of so many cultures. They didn't make friends with many of the non-German families until the kids started going to school, however. Until then, the Kohlstrunk family only spoke German at home, so the kids didn't speak very much English. When Gerda was old enough to start school, Walter and Olga got a visit from the Public School Supervisor to tell them that Gerda would not be able to start until she learned English. They immediately switched to exclusively speaking English at home, and never went back. This meant that although all the kids started out speaking German, they all gradually lost most of that knowledge as they got older and exclusively spoke English. I know my grandfather wishes he could remember more German so he could be more connected to his roots.

I will finish this off with a funny story my grandfather used to tell about growing up in Boonton. One day his family got a number of calls asking if everybody in the family was ok after the accident. They were all confused as nobody had been in any accident. It turned out a coal truck had flipped over in town, but somehow the town gossip had turned "coal truck" into "Kohlstrunk!" It was a real life game of telephone. But they appreciated how much everybody in town was concerned about the family.

I've always loved listening to my grandfather talk about his family. I'm excited to share his story and preserve it with other stories of immigration.