

Immigrants at Work

Prepared by Shannon Warren for the December 7, 2015 edition of The Journal Record

Barely a toddler at the time, I don't remember much about the neighbors who used to babysit me. She was a strawberry blond and he was a dark-haired man. Both had exotic accents. Later, I learned this kind, older Jewish couple fled France during the Nazi occupation. That was my first experience with refugees, but as a descendent of Irish sharecroppers who escaped the potato famine, I was predisposed to relate to them.

Neither groups were welcomed with open arms when they arrived here. Jews faced anti-Semitism (still do) and the Irish were initially met with brutal discrimination. It takes backbone to overcome prejudice and forge a future in a scary new country, but they seized the opportunity to thrive. I admire their courage.

When working in Human Resources for a worldwide hotel chain several years ago, I attempted to overcome labor shortages by hiring immigrants. The INS screening process was rigorous, extremely lengthy and frustrating. Nonetheless, I had the privilege of working with Vietnamese, Chinese, Iranians and several Europeans who persevered through the maze of red tape. All had the same goal: work hard to achieve the American Dream.

Over the past few years, my seriously ill husband benefitted from a talented international team of doctors at Mayo Clinic who worked diligently to relieve his suffering. They were world-class. We never had any concerns about their religious preference, ethnicity or country of origin. What truly counted was their benevolence, skill and intelligence.

Steve Job's father was a Syrian refugee. Two of YouTube's co-founders were immigrants: Jawed Karim from West Germany and Steve Chen from Taiwan. In fact, according to a February 2015 *Inc.* article, "an estimated 40% of Fortune 500 companies have been started by immigrants or their children" thereby creating tremendous market value. The same article cited a *Fiscal Times* piece that, in 2011, indicated 56% of engineering, 51% of computer science and 44% of physics doctoral degrees were awarded to students who were not American-born.

With an average of 10,000 baby boomers exiting the workforce every day, smart businesses will give immigrants a chance to fill the skill gaps. They bring talent, courage, resiliency, resourcefulness and a strong work ethic. They boost our economy through an increased demand for consumer goods, earning wages and paying taxes. More importantly, welcoming them reveals the best of American character.