

They should build a statue to my father's mother, the American Woman: Peter Jedick

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In this undated photo on West 47th Street in Cleveland, the author's grandmother, Mary Jedick, is holding the author, a young Peter Jedick. Behind her is her daughter-in-law, the author's mother, Ann Jedick, and the author's cousin, Paul Jedick. The house in the background is not the family home but gives an idea of what a double house in that neighborhood looked like. Courtesy of Peter Jedick



By **[Guest Columnist, cleveland.com](#)**

ROCKY RIVER, Ohio -- Since it's all the rage lately to tear down statues to famous Americans, I have a replacement to propose: My grandmother, Mary Jedick. Maybe call it "The American Woman."

Yes, seriously. The older I get, the more I think about her life and what a great American she was.

Mary Gracon, her maiden name, was born on a farm in Pennsylvania in 1891. When she turned 16, her family sent her back to their village in Poland to find a husband. There she married my grandfather and namesake, Peter Jedick. He was considerably older than her and, according to family legend, it was an arranged marriage.

Upon coming to America, Grandpa found work as a fireman on the railroad. The fireman had the hot, back-breaking job of shoveling coal into the train engine's steam furnace to make it run. They bought a two-family house on the west side of Cleveland.

You need an active imagination to appreciate their lifestyle. They started raising a family and my grandmother birthed nine children on the dining room table. They were so poor that Grandma would send the kids down to the nearby railroad tracks to pick up pieces of coal that fell off the coal cars, then use them to augment their coal-fired furnace.

Try raising all those kids in the lower half of a double house with another family of screaming kids living above them. Their half only had two bedrooms with curtains for doors, one bathroom with a large bathtub, no shower, a kitchen, a large dining room and a small living room. How did anyone go to the bathroom and where did they all sleep?

Then she had to feed them, clothe them, send them off to school and keep them from killing each other. And try shopping without a car or even a nearby supermarket. She had to take two streetcars to the West Side Market.

And how did she carry her items home? She put them in a metal wired two-wheeled cart that she had to drag home. Try doing that a few times while you're pregnant.

She also preserved peaches from the backyard peach tree. They came in handy for fruit during the long winters.

One time, I discovered a huge tree stump with a flat top in the basement. So I asked her what it was for.

"Oh, that was where Grandpa chopped the heads off the chickens."

What? My grandfather would behead them, pluck the feathers, clean them and then hand them over to my grandma. No frozen packaged chicken breasts for her. Did my dad and his siblings ever eat anything besides chicken soup? I wish I'd asked them.

And how did she clothe them? The clothes were handed down from kid to kid to kid until they fell apart. And guess who kept sewing them back together? Not Grandpa.

Oh, and how about washing all the kids' clothes and Grandpa's dirty railroad gear? Her washing machine was basically a large washtub. She had to push the clothes through a ringer that squeezed the excess water out of them.

And since she didn't have a dryer, she had to either take them outside to hang on the clothesline or, in the winter, drag them up two flights of stairs to the attic clothesline.

My grandmother died when she was 87 years old. It was during a terrible blizzard, one of the coldest days in Cleveland's history, that she caught pneumonia from sweeping the front sidewalk with her broom. Why? Because she believed it was her responsibility to help the neighborhood children walk to the nearby grade school.

Like my father used to say about our old Studebaker car: "They don't make them like that anymore."

Author and historian Peter Jedick lives in Rocky River. A longer version of this essay was first published on the [AMAC.us](https://amac.us) blog at <https://amac.us/blog/society/they-should-build-a-statue-to-my-grandma-the-american-woman/>.
