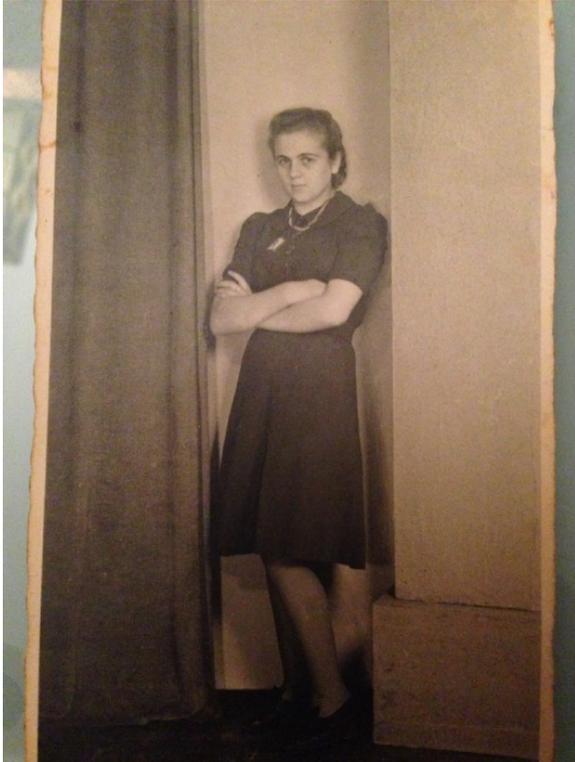


# Stateless: Getting Dumped by America

Since the election, I've been thinking about a document I found recently on [Ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com). My paternal Polish grandparents were refugees; their papers on



the Queen Elizabeth's boarding document listed them as "stateless" — fleeing Nazi Germany postwar, they were looking for a place to call home. They found one, and it gave them jobs, sustenance, and an ethnic community of their own in rustbelt Northwest Indiana. My maternal great-grandparents also immigrated here from Eastern Europe and found coal mining jobs and a local church where they could commune and pray with others from their home country. Their lives were hard but they found a way to build themselves up in the Midwest. Some of their kids and grandkids went to college and they saw our country struggle but grow in small ways; (giving women reproductive and workplace rights, the civil rights movement, and a growing acceptance of the LGBTQ communities).

But the specter of my grandmother's imprisonment in a forced labor camp in Leipzig (this 1943 photo is of her at the Hasag Altenburg camp, wearing a "P" marking her as Polish) and my grandfather's time in the British army never left our family's sense of ourselves. My grandmother had pride about Polish music, traditions, and customs, but talked openly about her four years in the camp; her time in solitary confinement, and brother in the Resistance being shot on the street and his body left there for days as an example to others who dared to resist. (Note: In fact, it's been proven that our ancestor's fears are actually [handed down in our DNA](#).)

In the days since Trump's win, I've been trying to identify a dark yet familiar feeling that's been rising to the surface after too-short moments of forgetting that everything is terrible. It's a feeling from my past; a long, slow, omnipresent ache. It's the pain of missing something that's gone forever; a mourning for something

that once was and can never be again. This morning I recognized the ache. These are breakup pangs; the feeling of losing a loved one forever.

I've been with my husband for 15 years so I'd forgotten the complex sense of loss a breakup brings on; the psychic pain that can be so deep that even when you forget your pain long enough to crack a joke or read a beautiful passage of poetry, you snap back into remembering that, actually, *everything is terrible* because of that missing presence; that lack of connection; the loss of that person's touch, smell, laughter. It's different than a death because the other party still exists; they just don't want anything to do with you.

I feel like I've broken up with my country. No, if I'm being honest, I feel my country has broken up with me. Dumped me with no regrets.

I'm a white woman, a demographic [that horrifyingly voted 53% for Trump](#); (I guess that's internalized sexism for you?) I'm happy to report that those voters weren't my close friends or relatives. I'm also a working-class woman who was once sexually assaulted at dusk in Chicago, in a hip, bustling neighborhood with people nearby; (after I made a commotion, my attacker ultimately fled). As a young woman, I endured a boyfriend who was emotionally and psychologically abusive; I got out right as he was starting to stalk me and things were starting to turn physical. I've been bullied at work, and like all women, have been paid substantially less than my male counterparts.

So when I hear alt-righters (i.e., white supremacists) mockingly refer to women who are terrified by the election results as "triggered," I think that word doesn't go far enough. The fact that an unqualified, xenophobic, sexist, racist demagogue (not to mention an actual sexual predator) has been elected to the highest office in our land instead of an imperfect but supremely qualified woman makes me and millions of others feel as if our symbolic abuser(s)—every arrogant, abusive, misogynist patriarchal man we've known—is supported by our country, yet our vulnerable populations are not. And now he's quickly appointing more [intolerant, bigoted](#) people to support his vile agendas and rhetoric.

To all those urging us to "come together" and accept our President-elect, I say this turn of events is not something that we should accept or be polite about. It's something that should [shock all of us into refusal and dissent](#). (Please [sign the Southern Poverty Law Center's petition](#) to stop white-supremacist Stephen Bannon's appointment as Trump's chief strategist and see author/activist [Rebecca Solnit's list of ways to take action](#).)

Because of my experiences as a woman in America, (which I understand are banal compared to those of other vulnerable populations and minority groups), I am

now mobilized. In the past, I've understood myself as a working-class person who, sure, had *some* privilege allowed by my white skin—but I ultimately felt that my family's continuing struggles to stay afloat meant I couldn't really get too involved in activism. I.e., my family has not yet achieved middle class; I still have student debt, my husband and I were laid off during the recession and were unemployed during our first years of marriage and we're still recovering financially from that.

And, although I came of age as a liberal in the Bush years and never identified as “patriotic” until Obama's inauguration, I possessed enough privilege to have an underlying sense of trust in this country, believing in its system of checks and balances; believing its intention was to do good, even despite its many missteps. In college, I was an activist and believed I could make a difference by canvassing and going door-to-door to engage about environmental issues affecting my polluted home-state. In more recent years, I've been concerned about personal survival and my activism has frankly gone by the wayside, other than occasionally working for remarkable nonprofit clients like [National Domestic Workers Alliance](#) and [Caring Across Generations](#).

But in the past week, that distance no longer feels like an option. For a few days, I've let myself fall apart and fully experience the heartbreak of what is happening. But now that I'm out of bed, ([thank you Sister Simone Campbell for this essay on grief via Bill Moyers](#)), I cannot be part of normalizing what's happening. On Sunday night, Trump tried to reassure the public of his goodwill by saying “stop it” to supporters who are intimidating minorities, then the next morning started a plan to appoint a white supremacist as chief strategist. It couldn't be more clear what his plans are. Comparisons to 1930s Germany are not hyperbolic. And that's it; that's the line. Dissent is no longer an option but a necessity.

I feel that 56 million of my countrymen and women have betrayed me with their vote. Even if they're not racists or bigots themselves, they decided that racism, sexism, and bigotry were okay and not deal-breakers.

My naiveté is shattered—as it should be. I've slacked in the past, but I'm trying to get up to speed. I've just joined the ACLU and donated to Planned Parenthood—donations I can't totally afford because work is thin but I'm okay with next month's groceries being lean because [so very much is on the line](#). I've joined organizing groups to address taking action against the [hate crimes that have begun since Trump's ilk was emboldened by his win](#). I'm planning on marching either in DC or Chicago, the day after inauguration. I've signed the petitions. I've called my congressman.

This white woman has been mobilized. I'm grateful to my friends and colleagues in vulnerable populations who are showing me the way. I understand that I'm only getting a small taste of the treatment the POC, indigenous people, gay and lesbian

people, and non-white immigrants have been feeling since the United States came into existence. So, I am taking action while I grieve. I'm going to stumble, a lot. I'm going to say and do the wrong things and will need to be corrected by those who've been at it longer than I. But this can not stand.

Here's the other thing: Given my grandparents' flight to this country from a place where authoritarianism thrived, I'm feeling without a state now, too. I'm also thinking about the people who either acted on behalf of the Jewish people and "[untermenschen](#),"/subhumans—(a category in which my Polish Catholic grandparents were included)—versus the ones who, in their silence, were complicit.

I've spent all week remembering my grandmother's stories about the black-clothed SS officers showing up at her home to take her away to the slave labor camp. I've been re-reading Anne Frank's journals. This is a moment in history and I know which side I want to be on. This is not a time for politeness; it's a [time for dissent](#).

Of course, this new reality has a ring of the familiar. [Hat tip to Cheryl Strayed quoting James Baldwin](#): *"You think your pain and your heartbreak are unprecedented in the history of the world, but then you read. It was books that taught me that the things that tormented me most were the very things that connected me with all the people who were alive, or who had ever been alive."*

I'm frankly still too angry to ponder hope, but maybe quotes like these will make more sense in upcoming days. Martin Luther King, Jr: *"We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope."*

Until then, I feel cast-away; I am heartbroken and heartsick; I am stateless.