

Ayame chan,

Your ancestors left the Ukraine with Turkey Red Wheat seeds in their trunks. Last time I shared with you how our ancestors came to America and settled in Nebraska. Many neighboring farmers began to take notice of Turkey Red. Its beauty, its adaptability to its new home and its flavor and baking qualities led to its wide adoption throughout the Midwestern United States. In fact, it was the most widely grown variety in the US until 1940. But now, the variety has nearly vanished except for some conscientious growers who remember its deep importance. Before I talk more about why this happened, I would like to tell you stories about the times in which your ancestors moved to America and why the opportunity came for them to start life over in a new place in a land far, far away.

One hundred fifty years ago may seem like forever to you but it really isn't that long ago. I think our ancestors innocently came to America hoping for a new beginning and an opportunity to be a community who worshipped God. They saw posters while in Europe advertising "free land" in America and I am sure this was something that caught their attention. But as I think back now was the land really free and uninhabited? Why would the railroad companies be advertising in Europe trying to attract good and ambitious farmers like our ancestors who have an excellent reputation for their good farming and hard work.

Around 1850 over in England the steam engine was being developed and this new machine made it possible to turn coal into mechanical power that could do the work of hundreds of men. The factory owners could use their machines to manufacture cloth and card wool many other things much faster than doing the work by hand. Little workshops closed and since there was no longer work in the villages people began to move to the cities in search of work. The coal was also used to fire the furnaces to make steel and the steam engines were adapted to run steam locomotives that ran on rails and also steam powered ships that turned massive paddle wheels to ply the ocean. This time was called the Industrial Revolution. Without the steam engine, and the consequent shift of workers from the rural areas of England to the cities, our ancestors would probably never have come to America.

You see, as people left the rural areas of England there were fewer workers to grow food and the increasing numbers of people in the city led to an increased demand for food. But the factory owners were reluctant to pay higher wages. It would hurt their profits. Instead the owners were able to repeal England's ban on grain imports and worked aggressively to invest in ships, railroads and the telegraph that would allow them to import food cheaply from outside the country. Already in the 1850's English and American investors were working frantically to lay a telegraph cable between New York and England. After two failed attempts they finally succeeded in 1866. The main trouble they had was finding a suitable coating for the wire that would withstand the salt water of the ocean and provide good insulation to send an electrical signal under the ocean for more than 3500 kilometers. That's a long way. There was no plastic and rubber made from oil at this time because oil wells had not yet been developed. Industrialists found a suitable material in the forests of Malaysia, a British colony at the time. Native people cut the trees down and squeezed liquid from the trees and it was brought to England to make the wire coating. I do not understand but these people cut down the forests that was their home. Why did they do that? I don't know. Were they forced to? Did they do it for money? All I know is that their lives would never be the same after the trees were gone. The changes that began in England influenced the lives of people and changed the way people looked at the land all over the world. The land and all living things were no longer sacred—they were potential resources to make the economy grow. I can't imagine that the native people of Malaysia saw any practical benefit of making a coating for the Trans Atlantic cable. The cable did benefit the communications companies and also the buyers in Europe who ordered meat and grains grown on the American Prairies.

In addition to the cable there was other big projects that were also going on. A railroad running from New York to California was completed in 1869 five years before your ancestors came to America and the trees of Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan were cut down and turned into lumber to build houses and barns and towns in places like where your ancestors lived because there are no trees on the vast prairies. Coal was mined to fuel the locomotives and run the factories once all of the trees were used up.



Chicago around 1870

To organize all of this a new “center of Empire” was needed and boosters recommended that Chicago be this center. It had natural advantages like water access through the lakes to the Atlantic Ocean it had another advantage and that was the railroad that ran from Chicago to New York harbor. In 1849 Chicago, meaning the place where wild onions grow, was a small trading post on the bank of a river. By 1890 over one million people lived in this city butchering pigs and cows, working in the saw mills making lumber and moving grain onto ships. Railroad workers, bankers, traders, entertainers and community organizers lived and worked to make the city thrive. Wood chips flew as the saws bit into the wood, smoke belched from the factories and steam locomotives. The stench of the meat plants enveloped the city. Workers bustled around the city and trains moved according to the demands of the clock. All were guided as if by some kind of invisible force that guided their actions and gave them a sense of meaning and purpose.

Look at this painting. It embodies this invisible force and the mission of people in America at that time. The beautiful angel in the picture, dressed in white signify everything that is good, is named Columbia which is the female version of Columbus, Christopher Columbus. He was the man who is believed to have discovered America in 1492. He came in search of gold to enrich the king of Spain. Columbia, as an angel, is the spirit of Columbus. She is traversing America from East to West not in the name of some king but in the name of the investors who are

creating this industrial economy. As she travels West what follows is light and a bright future. In her arm she cradles the telegraph cable and as she glides westward she is connecting all of the lands and the peoples to this system and markets all the way to Europe. The ships and



Manifest Destiny 1872

railroads which bring the settlers will also be transporting all the things the farmers grow back to Chicago and beyond. In the space laying in front of Columbia there is darkness. And in the darkness you see the native peoples running away in fear of this angel. The bears and other wild animals are fleeing too. This angel is not kind to them. They soon will be pushed out of the picture and they will be no more. Then everything will be bright and good... for white people at least, that what this painting seems to suggest. What do you think?

As I look at this painting 150 years later I realize that our ancestors were part of this wave of European settlers who came to this country. Our original intent when we left our home in the Ukraine to come to the United States was to be a Christian community that was centered on peace, equality and loving our neighbor. There is no doubt in my mind that our ancestors worked diligently in their new land and carefully crafted a simple life. But the crops they grew, just like all of the rest of the farmers, were loaded onto trains, collected in Chicago, and sold into European markets. We became a part of a system that was way bigger than we could imagine. The new found power unleashed by coal unleashed almost unlimited appetites for economic wealth and might. In one generation, the trees of the northern US forest were all cut down, tens of millions of buffalo were slaughtered and left to rot in order to eliminate the

indigenous people that live in this place before we came. Vast power and incomprehensible wealth was created in this new land. It came about through theft and violence. Soils, 14,000 years in the making, produced bountiful crops for a time, the forests were felled and turned into lumber and sold, and the land was taken from the Indians with a pen. What I mean is that the writing of private property laws and enforcing these laws by the courts and with guns if necessary made common ownership of land obsolete. This is not the way God wants people to live. We can't undo the past but we don't have to be trapped by it either.

The "deep structure" of how the world was created by God is that all lives are interconnected—community is the foundation of life. Our life is possible because of the work of the many and diverse invisible microbes that live in us, and on us and all around us. Invisible microbes live all over the plants and in the soil. We did not make them but without them we can't live. Can you imagine all of these invisible friends helping you every day? It is how the world works and we can only live abundantly in community by God's grace.

But there are also systems that we are a part of guided by invisible forces that want to distract



us and encourage us to destroy life's foundation. When we do that, our purpose shifts from being grateful to being worried about our own survival. This system as we know it hasn't always existed, it was imagined and then acted on and then many others joined together to

create a world that hurts and kills living things. You have the power to imagine a different world and you can begin to live it and invite others to join together with you in creating a world that reflects the way God wants all people to live. I hope that you will continue to love the world that God created and seek what it means to be a people of peace, just as your ancestors did. You don't have to try and find who you are by trying to fit into a picture that someone else has drawn for you. You have the freedom to draw new pictures. Ayame chan, I wonder what kind of picture you will draw?