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Introduction to the work: This nonfiction essay about my Rutgers family history frames how Rutgers' Beloved Community has inspired my social justice initiatives in learning and teaching at Rutgers.

My Scarlet Bloodline

My blood runs more Scarlet than almost anyone I know. I say that because I have Rutgers lineage going back to my great-grandfather. The place he was born no longer exists. He was born in "the Pale," where Jews were ghettoed into the marginal borderlands of Russia.

Despite high-tech searches, I have never been able to locate my great grandfather's side of the family on a map. I imagine his enclave like the one portrayed in *Fiddler on the Roof*, only less technicolor, more a screen of heavy white snow; more biting cold; an insidious wilderness more dangerous than even a survivalist of the modern era could anticipate. It is likely my great grandfather did not even have a last name or any real need for one in his tiny village. Family lore has it that my great grandfather narrowly escaped anti-Jewish violence in Russia by using stolen or fabricated passports. The last name on those passports was Jaffe, which carried on through today to serve as my last name. The name "Jaffe" among Eastern European Jews is a little generic. It means beautiful.

I cannot trace my family roots back any further than my great-grandparents because everyone who did not escape anti-Semitism was murdered.

So my family tree starts at Rutgers. My great-grandfather, impoverished, Yiddish-speaking, eluded anti-Jewish quota systems that kept Jewish people out of universities, and almost finished a degree in Engineering here on the Banks. He was so determined to get all he could out of Rutgers that he was puzzled by the concept of snow days; even when students on campus did not dare to head out into a blizzard for class, my great grandfather fashioned makeshift skis out of wood, and he glided happily down the the old Raritan from way off campus, always ready to learn. Snow was no obstacle for someone who had survived in Siberia. However, his parents convinced him to drop out one semester shy of graduation. After all, there was no chance that a Jew would be hired as an Engineer.

He sent my grandfather to Rutgers. My Grandpa Jaffe went to law school here and became a workers' compensation judge in New Jersey. He had a fierce sense of social justice at a time when divisions between ethnic and racial groups were high. Many bosses and supervisors who gained from their white privilege were not happy that my grandfather ruled in favor of people of color, who came to court fighting for equal rights

in their workers compensation cases. During the civil rights movement, my grandfather was living near Plainfield, where race riots broke out. We can't know for sure who put the bomb in his mailbox--a bomb that exploded and burned off my grandmother's eyebrows--yet we know that he faced not only anti-Semitism but also a lot of pushback for submitting decisions based on his dedication to civil rights.

Now, you can probably see this coming, but I'll tell you anyway: in accordance with family tradition, my father also went to Rutgers for his undergraduate degree, *and* my mother graduated from Douglass. The day after they graduated in 1968, they got married.

And here I am, Rutgers born and bred: (BA, '96; MA, '04; PhD, '08; MSW, '18). As an undergraduate English major, I won the senior thesis award for arguing against a literary canon of white males--which was, believe it or not, a new idea at the time. During my MA and PhD work on Black-Jewish relations in American literature, I was central in creating debates in the English department that led to real change: could I take my foreign language exam in Yiddish? Back then, half the faculty questioned whether or not Yiddish was a "real" language. It took six months for them to decide that it was. I could practically feel my great-grandfather *kvelling*. And I could always feel my grandpa's fierce sense of justice as if it were my pulse, so I went to the School of Social Work. Because of the people there, I was empowered to help give voice to injustice in five collections of case studies.

Most importantly, I've been teaching writing in this Beloved Community for over two decades. My students--over two decades of students--fill me with hope. They make up for all the family I can't find on a map. And I think I fill them with hope, too: a hope conjured by the image of my great-grandfather on his makeshift skis, running down the frozen river, Scarlet blood pumping through his heart, unstoppable in his drive to overcome all the small-mindedness that shadowed his dreams.