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Mr. Pompei

Religion 1 Period 1

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Hope Project

When Al Bujtor, my grandfather from my dad's side, was eight he escaped Communist Hungary. His journey taught me how important religious freedom is to maintained and how blessed I am to live in a country that promotes religious freedom.

For the first eight years of his life my grandfather lived in fear with little to no happiness. He feared of speaking out against the government, starvation, and the loss of hope. When he was just two years old his father was taken away and sentenced twelve years in prison by the Communist government for trying to promote a party for Democracy. When they took away his father, they took away all their belongings too. Within that night their car, business, and property were gone. His father was lucky he was not killed like the leader of the party was. In 1956 the Hungarian Revolution happened and communism was driven out of Hungary for two weeks. Within those two weeks everyone in the political prisons escaped and his father immediately gathered up their family and planned to escape. He paid an underground person to drive him, his wife, his kids, his brother, and his brother's friends within a few miles of the border. They had to cross a plowed field with watchtowers every kilometer. They hid from the watchtowers by jumping into a burrow because if they were caught they would have been shot. All the men carried knives with them prepared to fight to the death to get their family to freedom. When they

arrived on the Austrian border the Austrians were very kind and helpful. At the refugee camp there they were given food and clothing. After they spent a week with a family in Germany they got on a plane to America. The only English word my grandfather knew at the time was “cowboy” because all the kids at the refugee camps would love when they would play cowboy and western movies. My grandfather’s relative in Gary, Indiana vouched for the family. The relative made sure his father had a job at a nearby steel mill. His father not only defied the government by trying to support Democracy, he also protected some of those who were religious leaders. If you were found to be religious you could not work as more than a laborer. If you were a priest you were sent to the Gulags, which are forced labor camps, and never heard from again. His father was able to assist some Catholic priests in escaping the country. All the priests were incredibly grateful to him, one performed the funeral rite at his funeral.

If it was not for this project, I do not think I would have learned this much about my grandfather’s story. His story not only gave me further respect towards my grandfather, but made me realize how lucky I am to be born in a country where the citizens have freedom of government and religion. Even today there are many countries that restrict the right to practice any religion openly. America’s founding fathers made sure that religious freedom was allowed through Amendment 1 of the Constitution, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.” My great grandfather pushed hard for Democracy and freedom in a place that unlike America, did not permit individuality and freedom of expression. Although he did not become a priest himself, he was similar to Father Dujarié in that he helped

the priests escape. Both sacrificed their safety to ensure the safety of religious leaders. Without either of them several priests could have been imprisoned or dead. I chose to do my project on my grandfather's story to help others realize how blessed we are to be in place that allows for religious freedom. Religious freedom is powerful, through it we can give many people the Gospel and the love of Jesus.