

## **DONE Sam Cota Worksheet 1 What Does My Family Know?**

**Name: Sam Cota**

**1) Jot down a few things that your family members have told you about the family.**

*Don't worry about being exactly right. If you can't think of anything now, write down things about your own life or another's that interests you.*

**My father knew how to build anything, and he even built our house.**

**My mother was a great baker of things from Italy and from all around the world. She was also great cook of things from Italy and from all around the world. It is rare to be a great cook and a great baker.**

**My father was the boss of people who tore down and built buildings.**

**They were all in the unions**

**The union men would find ways to work for him instead of other businesses because he was so fair and knew what he was doing and did it sometimes too.**

**My father came from the Alps in Italy, and my mother's parents did too.**

**My grandfather worked on the Brooklyn Bridge.**

**My father played saxophone in a band that played in many villages in the Alps.**

**My family all lived in New York City until they moved to the suburbs. I wished we lived in the city when I was growing up.**

**My parents spoke to each other in an Italian dialect from the Alps, and in English.**

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2) Now tell very short stories about any of these and anything else you remember.<sup>1</sup>

My father taught me and my sisters how to build things with wood. He was especially proud when we learned to measure things right, to the 64th of an inch, even, as he always said that was the sign of the best carpenters. Things would be so sturdy if we did it right.

My father played saxophone in a band that played in many villages in the Alps. To get around in the mountains, you went up and down and side to side, not long and straight. When I went there I couldn't believe how long it would take to walk somewhere that you could see from where you were!

My father played saxophone in a traveling band before he joined the alpine troops. As a result, he got to play the bugle to wake others up, and to be among the first in the marches. Instead of eating the burro's and men's dust, he led them, playing beautiful tones into the fresh mountain air.

My Mother was born in the United States, and was fluent in English, the Belumat dialect and Italian. Because her father and mother had been here for so many years, they spoke an older version of Belumat. When she went to visit in Italy, they thought it was so amusing that she spoke like the old people and not like the young ones. She got engaged to my father there, and sometimes they spoke in the newer version, in Italian, but mostly in English because he learned it very fast (like Morse Code).

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<sup>1</sup> Some families tell lots of stories, and some tell hardly any at all. Some people don't know anything about their birth family, but a lot about their forever family. Sometimes an orphan doesn't even have any family stories to tell. So, tell stories from your own life. Tell stories from the family you choose to have. These stories are just as – more – important.

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In Northern Italy, my father was a master cabinetmaker (the phrase for the most expert wood work) who ran his own small business with his brother-in-law there. He came to North America – Canada and then to the U.S., with almost no money, but with all this expertise. He worked in construction, becoming a union supervisor running large jobs with many kinds of tradesmen, and very much respected by all. Although he could not attend school past fourth grade – it took considerable funds to go further – this kind of expertise and his intelligence as also demonstrated by his facility with such things as business, Morse Code and music were harbingers of his success.

Of course, most people everywhere for all time built their towns in the best places to live. with the best sun and land and water, and usually in the valleys and not on the mountains. Still, dirt and rock paths carved into the sides of the Alps over hundreds of years are how people still get around where no roads can be fit. Going from one side of the mountain to the other in 19xx, my

My father was in the Alpine Troops just after World War II. He learned to use Morse Code faster than anyone else – x words a minute – so he got to sit out many arduous tasks by listening for its long and short sounds, simultaneously translating them into Italian, and sometimes transmitting back. One of the things he could do was to hear faint transmissions from the Russian enemy, and thus keep track of them when they probably didn't realize it.

My father was living in Italy when he met my mother, who came to visit relatives. They got engaged, and he came to Canada, and they got married at Niagara Falls.

My mother was a both a great pastry and savories cook, quite unusual even today give the range of different skills needed in each. She made traditional

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Northern Italian food like risotto, and beef stew with cloves, and ricotta pie. She cooked a lot of local food and also took us around the world and back again, from dishes from southern Italian, German, Swiss, Asian, and New England neighbors, to new dishes that many people only adopted later in the eighties and nineties.

Our maternal grandparents lived with us from when they were middle aged until their deaths, coming out to NJ from Brooklyn after my father and my uncle (married to my mother's sister, my aunt) had built two houses next to one another, and utilizing the skilled plumbers, electricians, plasterers, tile electricians they knew for speciality jobs. Of course, they did the wood.

My uncle was the chief carpenter from Rutgers University, running its wood shop for 30 years. His own custom work can be seen in his home, on the Rutgers yacht, and in the cathedral.

My grandfather owned a construction company great artisans in wood, stone, concrete, iron, plaster, tile. They went all over Western and Eastern Europe as a unit, prized for their excellence and efficiency as so many Northern Italian companies were (including those hired from Italy for work building the great building/roads/churches/museums in the thousand of years newer US. When Russia overran , his company was stolen from him and he and his men had to make their way home with nothing.