

# The Fruits of Freedom: Barbara Feigin's 'My American Dream'

In her recently published memoir [\*My American Dream: A Journey From Fascism to Freedom\*](#), Barbara Sommer Feigin begins by recounting her escape in 1940 as a 2-year-old from Nazi Germany to the United States. She recreates this trek, which ran from Europe across Russia to Japan and then to America, using a journal her father had kept and which her sister discovered 70 years after that amazing flight to freedom.

Feigin then tells of growing up in Chehalis, Washington, where her father worked for Sears, Roebuck & Co. and her mother also held several jobs. From there, she attended Washington's Whitman College on a scholarship, followed by a year at the Harvard-Radcliffe Program in Business Administration. After graduating in 1960, she left Boston for New York City and, over the next four decades, became a renowned Madison Avenue advertising executive. She and her team, for example, gave America the slogan originally aimed at teenagers, "Friends Don't Let Friends Drive Drunk."

Meanwhile, Feigin married, raised three sons, and oversaw the care of her husband Jim when he suffered a debilitating stroke at a relatively young age. Retired today, she remains engaged with her sons and their families.

That's the encapsulated version of Feigin's life. Readers interested in American social history, in the world of advertising, and in customs and changes in these United States in the latter half of the 20th century will find some treasures in this autobiography.

But Feigin's story of her life is important for one reason above all. In her "Introduction," she mentions the

divisiveness and despair in our country today. She adds, “It occurs to me that my story might serve as more than a family record. I hope it will remind us—as Americans—who we are at our core when we try to be the best we can be.”

For the most part, Feigin achieves that goal. *My American Dream* does indeed remind us of the blessings bestowed by liberty, provided we have the gumption and drive to make something of ourselves.

In describing her parents’ deep desire to become “real Americans,” Feigin writes of the [Victory Garden](#) they planted during World War II. Her father regarded the purchase of his first automobile, a Studebaker, as signal proof that he was an American. Both mother and father shed tears of joy on the day they became U.S. citizens. This deep love of their new country had a profound effect on Barbara, as she writes from the perspective of her high-school self in her chapter titled “My High School Years: Becoming an American”:

*My parents continue to emphasize how important it is to be in America because America offers freedom to be what you want, to do what you want, to strive for what you want to achieve. They remind me of the importance of education, telling me again and again that education is the key that opens the door to opportunity. They encourage me always to aim to be the best I can be, and this means working especially hard at academics now that I’m in high school.*

These themes of individual effort, the importance of education, and the freedom to pursue our dreams are stressed throughout Feigin’s story. In her “Epilogue: A Letter to My Sons, My Grandchildren, and Future Generations,” she again points proudly to this formula for success and happiness in life, writing: “I am forever and always grateful to be an American, because only in America could the life I dreamed about and more become a reality. As my mother taught me so

long ago, as all of life evolves and reveals itself, dream big; work hard; and never, ever quit.”

Those last words—dream big, work hard, never quit—formed the mantra Feigin’s mother lived by, and which Feigin taught her own children. In another passage from the “Epilogue,” Feigin again underscores the importance of good parenting. Again, addressing her children, she states:

*I learned much about this from my own parents, who modeled qualities throughout our lives together that I’ve tried to pass along to you. High values and a strong character were vital to my parents as principles for living; their determination, can-do mindset, and resilience helped them to build the future in America that meant so much to them; and their tenacious work ethic made it all possible.*

The value of the family, high moral standards, a strong work ethic, resilience in the face of troubles, and a love for the [American Dream](#): These are the ideals Barbara Sommer Feigin has lived by.

So should we all.

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Image credit: [Pexels](#)

Correction: A previous version of this article misspelled *Feigin* in the third paragraph.