

Peter W. Clarke
British Evacuee
Child and English
Immigrant
Rangitata
March 1940

CANADA'S IMMIGRATION MUSEUM
PIER 21



Peter William Clarke, born June 24, 1932
Esme Mary Clarke, born February 21, 1928
George Anthony Clarke, born March 24, 1935



We arrived in Halifax in
Halifax March 1940 aboard
the S/S Rangitata owned
by the New Zealand
Shipping Co.

My sister Esme returned to
U.K. November 1944
aboard S/S Rangititi also
NZSC

My brother George and
myself returned to U.K.
May 1945 aboard S/S

Ranchi owned by the P& O Line and I believe was scrapped shortly
thereafter.

I believe it was unusual for three siblings to be evacuated by my mother who was a very determined and persuasive lady. My recollections are dim after the number of years that have elapsed, particularly during the time of my departure from U.K. Remember my mother telling me that we would be going to Canada and the reasons for it but that my 3 ½ year old sister, Stasia, was too young and would have to remain with my parents. I do remember questioning the danger of U-boats but was told that Germans would be advised that evacuees would be aboard and that we would be afforded safe passage! With the gullibility of the young, I accepted this and from then on thought of it as a ripping adventure.

We traveled by train from Grimsby, Lincolnshire, to the Clyde and were mustered somewhere near Glasgow in a large building with a massive dining area and a large high glass roof. All I can remember to eat was bread and margarine and putting salt and pepper on it to impart some

taste. Probably not true as I was a particularly finicky eater as a child but, nevertheless, that is my recollection.

Very shortly after arrival we boarded the vessel. It was a cornucopia of candy bars, sweets and ice cream and some did get sick. There were escorts on the vessels of the Indomitable Nanny type and we did give them quite a hard time. It was not until many years later that I realized and appreciated what unselfish heroines they were as I believe it was voluntary service.

Little to remember of my arrival in Halifax but vivid memories while on the train of going through what must have been hundreds of miles of forest. After probably one or two nights on the train we arrived in Windsor, Ontario and sent to the Manor of Catholic orphanage run by the Sisters. We are Catholics and there were quite a few other children there but I don't know if they were from the same ship or what their situations were. My memory is hazy. The building is still standing facing the Detroit River but no longer our orphanage.

We were at the Manor for approximately a week. My brother George was adopted by an Irish-Canadian family who had two grown daughters and their father worked as a customs officer on the Detroit/Windsor Tunnel. He was horribly spoiled and during the 5 years stay I probably only saw him a half dozen times and each occasion ended in a fight. We were both quite horrid.

My sister, Esme, and I were taken in by a wonderfully kind French-Canadian family where I also was spoiled. The family had eight children of which one son and two daughters still remained at home. I settled in quite comfortably but unfortunately between the two daughters of the host family and my sister, some sibling rivalry developed and she went back to the Manor after approximately two years.

My host family had been quite prominent in the area but had lost nearly everything due to the depression and business setbacks. At the time of our arrival he was getting back into business again and regaining a modicum of prosperity.

My next five years were very happy times for me with summers spent at their cottage at Belle River on Lake St. Clair. My father or Pipi, built me a rowboat/sailboat and my mother or Mimi, made the sails so summers were spent sailing, swimming and other adventures and socializing as Pipi came from a family of eight so there were always lots of people around.

Pipi really indulged me and I adored him but Mimi was the one who supplied the discipline required, tempered with a lot of love. I loved and miss them both dearly.

Inevitably the time arrived when I had to return to England. I had a hissy fit on the platform of the Windsor Train Station on the day of my departure. I would happily have stayed in Canada had it been an option.

Assimilation was difficult upon my return to U.K. and I must have been a trial to my parents. Everything was rationed from food to clothes no coupons to get more English type clothes. Started grammar school in September 1945 with my Canadian accent and Canadian clothes, both of which were objects of derision. Was a year older and a year behind my classmates and in 1948 was transferred to the Nautical College and went to sea as a Merchant Marine Cadet in 1949 with the Ellerman City Line. Although I did not know it at that time, they had been the owners of the City of Benares which was torpedoed later in 1940 with loss of life of CORB children and ended further evacuations.

I married in January 1953 and in 1955 worked my way over to Canada delivering a small vessel from Rotterdam to Montreal for the Hudson Bay Company. Went to Hamilton, Ontario and got employed by a steel company and my wife joined me a few weeks later. Shortly thereafter my wife and I visited my Canadian family and both of us were welcomed and treated as family. The parents are long dead and I was fortunate enough to be at their funerals.



They were, and still are, a wonderfully kind family and accepted our four children as their own grandchildren. Really the only grandparents they know on my side of the family. We were all truly blessed.

Canada has been good to me and I have been fortunate enough to have never had a single day of unemployment. Best country in the world!