

Aljas Peep  
Estonian Displaced  
Person  
Samaria  
March 17, 1949



I was born in Estonia in 1941 during the first Soviet occupation. My mother and I fled to Germany in 1944, just ahead of the Russian re-occupation. By 1949, things looked bad, with the Berlin Blockade, and we looked to get as far from Europe as possible. We were fortunate to be accepted to emigrate to Canada to join my future stepfather who was already here as a contract farm labourer. We boarded the Samaria, a Cunarder, at Cuxhafen, Hamburg's outport, I believe on March 17, 1949. The voyage was to take 10 days, via Le Havre in France. As we hit the North Sea, lunch was served and I vividly remember a food, green and perilously wobbling on the plate. This, I presume Jell-O, set the tone for the rest of the trip. March on the North Atlantic is great for seasickness. A few days before our arrival I came down with a high fever and was put in the ships infirmary. When we reached Halifax on, I believe March 27, I was carried off the ship to a quarantine hospital section right in pier 21. Who knew what I had? When I came to a few days later, I discovered that my mother was locked up in another section of the building. I spoke Estonian, some remnants of a South German dialect and of English, the following, Hello ,Thank You, and waste paper basket. Not much to enable a conversation.

The first meal I remember was some kind of porridge and milk which I recognized. There was also something I presumed was a kind of fruit. With considerable difficulty I bit into it. It was tough, stringy and bitter, and I spit it out. A nurse came in and rolled on the floor in amazement and laughter, and finally by demonstration explained that this was a banana and to be peeled before eating. Most unusual; you don't peel apples, pears, plums, or for that fact lemons which we had eaten peel and all, dipped in sugar, which UNRRA (United Nations Refugee Relief Org.) had provided us as an antiscorbutic. I was also highly amazed at the way Corn Flakes was packed and served in individual cut-open boxes. Finally I was diagnosed as having measles and released from quarantine and "landed" on Apr 5, 1949. A long train trip brought us to Ajax to what seemed to be a POW camp with barbed wire around it. From there we were directed to our destinations, my mother and I to Orillia in Ontario. Thus, my arrival to Canada, never to be regretted.