

Jaanus Ruht
Estonian Displaced
Person
Stavangerfjord
1951



My branch of the ROHT family started when JURI ROHT married HERMILDE LEIBACH on 6 Jul 1935 at the Loigu farm, Estonia. Juri was born ERICH ROHT, but when Estonia was liberated from Russia, Juri believed that Erich was not Estonian enough, he changed it to the more Estonian Juri. Hermilde's maiden name would be Estonianized to Leipalu from Leibach by her family, but of course it did not affect her as she was a Roht. My father wrote a touching personal history of his life in 1990 (A Pair of Mittens- The Memoirs of Juri Roht, Les Editions Marquis Ltee, Ottawa).

Estonia was prospering in its newfound liberty from Russia and the family grew:

TOIVO 21 Aug 1937, and JAANUS 2 Aug 1939

On 1 Sep 1939 World War II started to the south in Poland and Estonia again was an unwilling battleground. Our family watched in horror as a battle between the Russian Communists and the German Nazis destroyed my grandfather's Loigu farm.

But, we survived, and my father believed that it was not safe to remain in Estonia. We fled on 31 Oct 1943 via a small boat to Finland, just before the Iron Curtain closed and Russia again absorbed Estonia.

Then Russia started putting pressure on Finland to return all the Estonians who had escaped. My father believing that Finland would yield to the Red pressure decided that we must move on to neutral Sweden.

On D-Day 6 Jun 44, in a purchased fishing boat we made our way past the logs that were coming down the river bordering Sweden and Finland. As a joke I have told my friends that our diversionary tactic was to start a skirmish on the Normandy beaches in France.

We lived blissfully in Sweden and were joined by sister KRISTI on 24 Dec 44. We all started school and my father continued his studies in landscape architecture.

But peace of mind was not to continue. Previously four Russian pilots escaped to Switzerland, and the Reds promptly interred four Swiss diplomats. An even exchange was made, and I am certain that the Russian pilots were promptly executed.

I cannot know for certain, but I read somewhere that the Russians were willing to trade the Swedish diplomat, Wallenberg, who so heroically saved countless Jews, for all the refugees in Sweden. To Sweden's credit the offer was turned down..

My father had decided that Russia would continue the pressure, and Sweden would eventually bow. So all our worldly possessions were packed into a large wooden crate. We departed the ancient university city of Lund by train bound for Oslo, Norway. There we boarded that magnificent old queen of the ocean - SS Stavangerfjord.

Our journey took us to Bergen, Norway, past the Shetlands, Iceland, Greenland to St. Johns, Newfoundland, and finally to Pier 21, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada.

Canada welcomed us with open arms and we enjoyed our life. My father, Juri finished his career as a landscape architect with McGill University and the Canadian government. My mother Hermilde did research in parasitology at Macdonald College and the Universite de Montreal. Brother Toivo went to College Militaire Royal de St. Jean, Royal Military College, University of Toronto and Queen's served his time in the Royal Horse Artillery and now owns his own publishing company,. Jaanus went to McGill and University of Massachusetts and served with the Royal Canadian Armoured Corps. He decided to stay in Massachusetts and is currently employed by the United States Department of Agriculture. Sister Kristi graduated from McGill University and is currently working at the Sherbrooke Hospital in the Dietetic Department.

My parents Juri (aged 88) and Hermilde (aged 90), recently sold their house and are in an assisted living community near the Governor-General's mansion.

On 14 April 01 Jaanus returned to Pier 21, Halifax, with his wife Carol to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of his landing in the New World.