

Eva Maria Phillips
nee Erdmann
German Refugee
Arosa Kulm



I was 10 years old when I was greeted at Pier 21 by the very first Canadian I ever saw -- a Red Cross Volunteer who offered me and my two younger brothers some milk and cookies. My family had fled Communist Germany with two discreet suitcases and four layers of clothing each. Our voyage to Canada was funded by West German friends and the Red Cross. After spending a week in a West Berlin refugee camp, we were flown to Hamburg and then boarded onto the Arosa Kulm to an exotic place called Halifax.

We children were only told of our destination after boarding the ship. My parents were fearful that we might say something and get the whole family arrested by Communist spies and sent back into East Berlin. You can imagine my surprise and excitement at such an adventure before me. All I remember of the voyage is seeing England float by as we proceeded through the Channel toward our new homeland. I also remember hearing English for the first time, on board the ship where my parents spend diligent hours with a dictionary and phrase book to teach us and themselves the basics. I knew my numbers and colours in English when I arrived at Pier 21. I do remember my brothers and I giggling ourselves silly over the English word "people" because it sounded very similar to the forbidden name of a male body part in German.

Our stay in Halifax was very short -- less than a few hours. I don't remember the immigration paper work portion of our arrival. But I do remember the Red Cross uniforms and the cookies and milk. My father and I were then sent out into the streets of Halifax to find bread, cheese and milk for our long train ride to Montreal. My dad had a cousin and a job at Pratt & Whitney waiting for him in Quebec. We stopped at the first corner store we saw (now a Toulaney's) and bought our provisions. I did not return to Halifax until thirty years later with a husband and two children of my own in tow. My memory of Halifax during all those years was cookies and milk and very steep streets.

Needless to say, I will always be grateful for the opportunities this country offered us. My home is now in Nova Scotia, partly because I was always drawn back to the port that welcomed me and started my Canadian adventure all those years ago.