

Dr. Edward Wolak
by Son Arthur J. Wolak
Polish Displaced Person
& Holocaust Survivor
Homeland
1951



My father left Europe in late autumn of 1951 aboard the S.S.Homeland, from Southampton, England to Halifax. It was a momentous journey for him as the voyage to the more peaceful shores of Canada followed a very challenging life in Eastern Europe.



Born in 1910 in the village of Jezierzany, a shtetl in the heart of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, he was raised in the historic Polish town of Przemysl in a traditional Jewish family that would face terrible tragedy during the Holocaust. After graduating from high school in Przemysl, Edward attended medical school at the University of Vienna and the Jagiellonian University in Cracow from which he graduated as a physician.

When war broke out in 1939, Edward was serving as a lieutenant in the Polish Army Medical Corps. He was soon captured by the invading Soviet

Army and held as a prisoner of war for a few months until he was released following the defeat of the Polish army. He moved to the city of Lvov where, during Soviet rule, he was employed as a Medical Health Officer. Later, during the Nazi occupation he worked as a doctor in the Lvov Ghetto battling terrible outbreaks of typhus and cholera. As a Jewish doctor forced to wear an armband with the 'Star of David' to identify his Jewish ethnicity, he also faced constant harassment by the German authorities.

In the summer of 1942, after the intervention of a Ghetto policeman led to his release from Gestapo headquarters, where for several days he had been detained, questioned, and tortured after refusing to disclose the whereabouts of his father, he seized the opportunity to escape. He managed to join his parents and brother who were in hiding in the cold,

damp cellars of friends just outside the walls of the Ghetto. They remained hidden for two long years until the Soviet Army pushed the Nazis out of Poland.

Edward, his parents Jacob and Rosa, and his younger brother Irvine were among the few members of their family to survive the Holocaust. Dozens of aunts, uncles, cousins and friends had perished in the ghettos and concentration camps.

Following the war, Edward became Chief Epidemiologist the Polish province of Szczecin, but prevailing anti-Semitism persuaded him that life could be better and safer in Canada where cousins of his mother had settled a few decades earlier.

His parents and brother left

Europe first. They boarded the General Taylor in Bremen, Germany for the voyage to Halifax where, on December 26, 1950, they arrived on Rosa's sixty-fifth birthday. After the bumpy winter's journey across the

(CABIN CLASS) Imm. 181
IMMIGRATION IDENTIFICATION CARD
 THIS CARD MUST BE SHOWN TO THE EXAMINING OFFICER AT PORT OF ARRIVAL
 Name of passenger WOLAK Edward
 Name of ship SS HOMELAND
 Name appears on Return, sheet 2 line 3
 Medical Examination Stamp
 LANDED IMMIGRANT
 Civil Examination Stamp
 CANADA IMMIGRATION
 NOV 13 1951
 A.L.C.
 HALIFAX, N.S.
 (See back)

Southampton - Halifax	
Mr. Emils Saulitis	
Mrs. Veronika Saulitis	
Dr. Eduard Wolak	

Southampton - New York	
Mr. Raymond H. Joyce	Mrs. Roberta Robertson
Mrs. Catherine Joyce	Mr. Carlos Ruiz
Master Francis R. Joyce	Mrs. Pura Ruiz
Miss Margery Joyce	Mrs. Johanna Spiers
Master Keith R. Joyce	Miss Vivien Spiers
Mr. Stanislaw Mekerewicz	Mr. Adel Wahab
Mrs. Lidia Mekerewicz	Mr. Josef Wszeborowski
Mr. Frank Nowak	Mrs. Anna Wszeborowski
Mr. John Robertson	Master Stefan Wszeborowski

Cherbourg - Halifax	
Miss Verena Nussbaum	
Mr. Otello Reggiani	

Cherbourg - New York	
Princess Adelaide de Bar	Prince Emanuel de Liechtenstein
Dr. Walter Eirchler	Mr. Walter Vollart

of

Atlantic, they promptly boarded the train bound for Vancouver. Along the way they stopped in Winnipeg for two weeks to visit Rosa's cousin, Bernard Safrin, a pharmacist who arrived to Canada before the First World War. They settled in Vancouver in January 1951 where they

had been sponsored by Rosa's cousin Fred Silber. Jacob and Irv soon established a successful furniture business in Langley, British Columbia. Irv married Madge Karbus in Vancouver and had two children, Mark and Susan.

A year after his parents and brother immigrated to Canada, Edward arrived to Halifax aboard the S.S. Homeland on November 13, 1951, from where he made the slow train journey westward to join his family in Vancouver. He was accustomed to train travel in Europe, but the route across Canada was long by any definition. This only confirmed for him the immense size of his new country.

Edward came to Vancouver with plans to open an antique store. However, after a few years in business, he closed down his store and decided to return to Europe - his Canadian citizenship safely in hand - where he completed post-graduate medical studies at the University of London's Royal Institute of Public Health & Hygiene, and worked again in the medical profession in both London and Hamburg, West Germany.

With the rise of the Cold War and the construction of the Berlin Wall a strong sign that Europe could again erupt in war, Edward decided to return to Canada, but not before traveling to Australia to explore life in another hemisphere. Leaving Sydney after his marriage to Elizabeth Wisniowska, a teacher and choral conductor originally from Cracow, he decided to make Vancouver their permanent home in 1963, where their two sons, Richard and Arthur, were later born and raised.

Fortunate to have had the opportunity to grow up in Canada, a peaceful democracy far away from the persecution that our family experienced in Europe, it was a great pleasure to be able to visit Pier 21 in Halifax and see with our own eyes exactly where our father and grandparents first arrived in Canada.

Arthur J. Wolak, June 2006