

Joseph Mihevc  
Slovenian Displaced  
Person  
Saturnia  
June of 1948

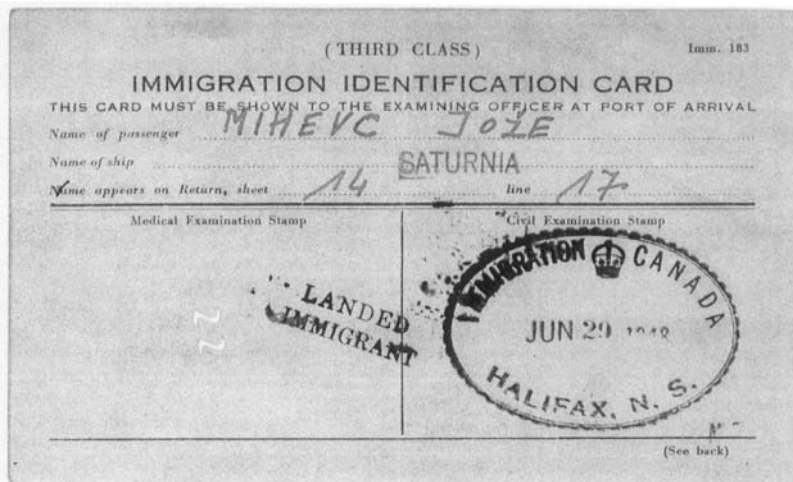


My Trip to Canada

Written by Joseph Mihevc

Edited by Anne Zagar (daughter)

My arrival at Pier 21 in Halifax, Nova Scotia ended a very difficult period in my life. I had been a refugee and displaced person for over three years, having escaped a brutal revolution in Slovenia, my homeland. After the defeat of the German army and its retreat from Slovenia, the communist



revolutionaries took power. They engaged in mass killings of those who appeared on their 'death list', a list that began to be compiled in 1941 and included not only soldiers but also civilians, including women and children. For some unknown

reason and despite my lack of involvement in political affairs, I was on that death list and was forced to flee my country of birth in 1945 at the end of World War II. I ended up in an Austrian displaced persons camp.

Several countries offered to take in refugees, but I chose to go to Canada, because its climate was similar to Slovenia's, it was a peaceful country and a good place to raise a family, and it offered the promise of success and prosperity to those who were willing to work. It was also close to some of my relatives who lived in Cleveland, Ohio, in the USA. The preparations for immigration began in late 1946, when I signed a one-year contract to work on a farm.

Those of us who were immigrating to Canada at that time boarded the train in Spittal, Austria, on June 14, 1948. We traveled to Salzburg, and

then proceeded south to Grugliasco, a preparatory camp near Genoa, Italy, on the Mediterranean coast. We waited there a few days, then were taken to Genoa where we boarded the Saturnia, a ship bound for Halifax. We brought along virtually no personal possessions, and our clothing was shabby and worn.

The ship left in the late afternoon. From the ship's deck, I watched with over one hundred other refugees as the land disappeared from view into the horizon. We were all excited about leaving behind our harsh experiences, but at the same time, somewhat apprehensive about what the future would bring.

The ship stopped in Gibraltar for some formalities, and soon after, we were heading northwest into the open waters of the Atlantic Ocean. In the far distance, we spotted the shadows of the Azores islands. We also enjoyed watching the whales that followed the ship and spouted water as they moved through the ocean. I also had plenty of time to reflect on my situation and on why, in the prime of my life, I had been condemned to die, forcing me to seek refuge in a country totally foreign to me. What did the future hold for me?



During the trip, an American priest celebrated a mass, at which a well-known American singer (I have forgotten his name) gave a beautiful rendition of Ave Maria. The Slovenian group, of which I was a part, also sang during this mass, which gave us some comfort and helped to ease our anxieties.

After about seven or eight days of sailing, the ship sounded its horn, signaling its approach to the Canadian shore that lay ahead shrouded in fog and mist. Shortly thereafter, the ship stopped and a tugboat arrived to drag the Saturnia to Pier 21. We had arrived!

Canadian officials then boarded the ship and set up a few tables to process its passengers. We lined up and each of us was tagged with the name of the city to which we were being sent. I used my knowledge of the Italian language and approached the clerk at the table to ask if there was a chance for 10 - 15 of us to go to the same city. He said that yes, indeed, we could all go together to Owen Sound. I then shouted out, "Anyone who wants to go with me to Owen Sound, step behind me." Several men stepped in line behind me and then we were all tagged with that destination; the group of us was able to stay together a little while longer. After leaving the ship, we went through more immigration procedures, and then we finally received our papers stamped "June 29, 1948 Landed Immigrant."

We were now officially in Canada. The immigration officials had been courteous and kind, and the whole procedure was efficient and welcoming. What a difference from our experiences with officials back in Slovenia, who were suspicious, condescending and barked orders at you.

Shortly thereafter, we boarded the train. As the train proceeded westward, it stopped at various destinations to let people off. We waved goodbye to them from the train and also to the passengers in the cars that passed us on the highway. All in all, we felt welcomed. When the train stopped in Montreal, we were awed by the lights and the hustle and

UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND REHABILITATION ADMINISTRATION  
AUSTRIAN MISSION  
TEAM 331. LIENZ  
C. M. F.

Ref. 12/3779 Team 331.

To : whom it may concern.

This is to certify that **mihevo Jože**  
DP Number A 18214 was employed in this camp  
from 25th Oct. 45. to ~~31st October 1946~~ 31st December 1946.  
as **MECHANIC**. (unskilled labour)  
mechanic-driver  
His work was found satisfactory.

Lienz,  
31st October 1946.  
31st December 1946.

*F. C. Chalmer*  
F. C. Chalmer,  
Director, Team 331.

bustle of people enjoying life as they went about their business without fear and suspicion. It was difficult for us to get over our wartime experiences, to let go of our own reservations and to fully trust the situation.

**Meldezettel für Hauptmieter**

Ortsgemeinde: Flattach/M. pol. Bezirk: Spittal/D.R. Land: Kärnten  
Ortschaft (Stadtbezirk): Fragant Haus-Nr. 34 Tür-Nr. ---

1	Vor- und Zuname:	<b>Jože Mihevo</b>	Laut Amtsstampgile abgemeldet am: <i>11.6.48</i>
2	auch der Eltern:	<b>Anton u. Appolonia Mihevo geb. Premrl</b>	
3	Beruf:	<b>Schlesser &amp; Werkleister</b>	In ausgezogen am: <b>12.6.1948</b>
4	Geburtsort, -bezirk, -land:	<b>Hrusevo, Jugoslawien</b>	
5	Staatsbürgerschaft:	<b>Jugoslawische</b>	nach (Ort, Bezirk, Gasse, Nr.): <b>Kanada</b>
6	Geburtsort, -monat, -jahr; Religion; ledig, verheiratet, verwitwet, geschieden	<b>3./II.1923, röm. kath. ledig</b>	
7	Gattin, auch Mädchennamen und Vor- und Zunamen der Eltern:		in <b>Canada</b> <i>in den DP Lager</i>
8	Kinder unter 14 Jahren:		
9	Frühere Wohnung:	<b>Lager Pogats, Flattach</b>	am <b>12. Juni</b> 1948
10	Ordentlicher Wohnsitz:	<b>Fragant No. 34 Wohnsitzbesch. No. 539500</b>	
11	der Reisedokumente:	<b>Beschäftigungsnachweis No. 062606</b>	
12	des österr. Passvisums:	<b>DP Index A. 18214</b>	
13	Wann eingereist: Zahl, Datum	<b>Fragant, am 12. Juni 1948</b>	

In the morning of July 1, 1948, we stepped off the train in Toronto's Union Station. Immigration officials led us to a dining hall for breakfast. We had never seen cereal boxes before, and one

of the officials showed us how to open the box, pour the milk onto the cereal and then eat it. We very much enjoyed this Canadian 'specialty', especially the sugar, which had been in very short supply during the war.

The time soon came to board the train to our final destination, and the officials once again guided us by checking the destination on our tags. The train moved northward and the last group to step off the train was my group destined for Owen Sound. Newspaper and radio station reporters watched as we stood on the platform and sang together one last time, while various farmers watched and decided who would go with whom. We were then divided up among the farmers and after this distribution, we were not together as a group again. I left with the farmer who had chosen me, and on the way to his farm, we stopped and he bought me an ice cream treat, which I enjoyed very much indeed. In about twenty minutes, I was in Kemble, Ontario in the farmer's home.

The farmer and his wife were very helpful and kind, but I found it very difficult to respond and to relax and be myself, because of the language barrier and the trauma that I had undergone. I finally recovered from my ordeal several years later, when, after much hard work and effort, my dream of peace, prosperity and a family life were realized, something that I had fervently hoped for when I signed up to immigrate to Canada.

Arriving at Pier 21 was the start of a new life of freedom and opportunity in Canada, a country I now call home. I cannot imagine living anywhere else.