

Mike Olexa
by Barbara Olexa
Czechoslovakian
Immigrant
Antonia
April 1938



My husband, Mike Olexa, at age 10, arrived in Halifax from La Havre France on April 3, 1938 with his mother from Czechoslovakia. The ship was named the Antonia. Mike still has his mother's passport which includes his photograph, with the stamp inside.

Mike has a vivid memory of being on the ship and seeing a family of four, mother, father and two teenage sons who were going to Canada. They carried with them a knapsack which was all greasy from its contents of smoked ham, sausage, and bacon. Mike often heard the boys asking their mother for some meat to eat. But their mother was emphatic that the meat was to be saved for when they reached Canada. Their father said to her there will be lots of food in Canada, and anyway, the immigration officials will take the smoked meat away from them. The mother wouldn't listen to him.

After getting off the ship and going through immigration in Halifax, Mike and his mother weren't far behind this family. Mike says he remembers as if it was yesterday, the immigration official ignoring the family's luggage, but pointing to the knapsack which he took and threw with its contents behind the counter. The old lady prayed and cried out asking why they would do that. Her husband told her again, "You bring food into this country and what do you expect."

Mike said the ship they were on arrived late in the night in Halifax, and after proceeding through immigration they were put in the charge of an agent, who put Mike and his mother on a train for their destination: Vancouver, B.C.