

Grace 'Gysje'
Koenderink
Dutch Immigrant
Groote Beer
April 16, 1953



My parents Herman and Grada Blom left Holland on April 8, 1953 with six children: Gysje (Grace) of Cambridge, Ontario Arendje (Ida) of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Harmen of Guelph, Ontario, Albert of Fergus, Ontario, Gerard (Gerry) of St. Clements, Ontario, Wouter (Wally) of Burford, Ontario and \$100.00 to get started in Canada, to a sponsored welding job for my Dad and housing in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

After a wild trip of storms so bad that even a number of stewards were seasick. Dad would sit on the floor of our cabin and catch our shoes, when he got one the owner would immediately put it on before it went sailing again. At mealtime you held on to your plate or it would have gone to one of your table mates. Our table steward would sing operatic arias to keep his seasickness at bay. Dad's birthday was Apr. 10 but we were unable to do much celebrating as every thing on the ship that was loose was lashed down, and the majority of the passengers were busy feeding the fish. We did see ice bergs and whales as well. We finally arrived at Pier 21.

We were the last passengers to leave the ship as Wally had come down with the German measles and we were put into quarantine. Wally was put in the sickbay of Pier 21, Dad and the three boys in the men's dormitory and Mom and the two girls in the women's dormitory.

Our suitcases, passports and landing papers were confiscated. The doors to the dormitories were closed at 10pm. Locking the doors wasn't necessary as there were no handles on the inside and the windows were barred. At night we washed our underwear in the bathroom sink for the next day because we didn't get access to our suitcases. Meals were served cafeteria style and we'll never forget Gerry's face, when the lady who was serving, kept stabbing a potato to put it on his plate and it kept breaking up. She finally looked at the potato and at the fork, put the fork down and reached in and with her bare hand picked one up and put it on his plate. Gerry's eyes almost fell out of his head. After the first 48 hours my Dad was given a paper that allowed us to play at being a tourist in Halifax. But before that we stood on the balcony of Pier 21 and in tears watched the Groote Beer leave again for Holland. For two cents we would have gone with her.

On the fourth day our things were given back to us and we were put on a train for Saskatoon. The one thing we learned to say on the train was "tickets please". The two words that were asked after every stop and that train stopped at every Village and Lumber camp. Dad was offered a job at the Lumber camps as he was not only a welder but also a good mechanic, and Mom was offered a job as camp cook which they declined. Mom thought that Canadian housewives were terrible house keepers until she found out that the screens on the windows made even the whitest curtains look sort of gray. Upon arrival in Saskatoon we moved in with another Dutch family that we already knew from Apeldoorn, Holland. But their house was so small that some of us had to walk two blocks to the home of another Dutch family to sleep and that was a cold walk as we didn't have the clothes and boots suitable for a Saskatchewan winter. Thank goodness summer arrived just after Mother's Day. Dad's job didn't exist but he did find one eventually, and I also found work. Housing for a large family was not to be had. But with the help from Dutch people and a Lumber Yard that was willing to give credit a lot was bought and a basement built, our first real Canadian home. For health reasons Mom and Dad moved to Guelph, Ontario and later to a farm of their own near Rockwood, Ontario. After Dada injured his back in an industrial accident, they had to give up the farm and they moved back to Guelph. As it took a long time before he got any compensation, in fact it took years, Mom found a job in one of Guelph's hospitals and worked their for years in the diet kitchen. Dad was never able to go back to work and as his health declined Mom had to give up working to care for him for the rest of his life.

After Dad passed away Mom's own health went downhill. She had open heart surgery but never really recovered and ended up with her kidneys failing. All their children have done well and all are married. They had 14 grandchildren and 9 great grandchildren. Dad died at the age of 81 in May of 1995 of heart disease and Mom died at age 80 in October of 1998 of kidney failure. Wally is looking forward to a kidney transplant as his kidneys have failed and he is now on dialysis. Gerry is going to give him one of his kidneys. We have a great family when the chips are down, it is all for one and one for all. We hope the surgery is soon as all is a go with my brothers and we only have to wait for the doctors and the hospital to be ready. This is just a little aside in the hope that all you people out there will sign your donor cards. Canada has done much for you. Maybe you can give some Canadian something back without which they will die. Canada is a wonderful country. We became a successful farmers and are very proud to be Canadians.

Thank you Canada.