

Shelly Blom  
Dutch Immigrant  
Groote Beer  
April 16, 1953

CANADA'S IMMIGRATION MUSEUM  
**PIER 21**



Our family left Rotterdam aboard the Groote Beer on Apr. 8, 1953, with \$100 in the family coffers. Making the journey were my parents, Herman and Grada, and their six children, Grace, Ida, Harmen, Albert (myself), Gerard, and Wouter (Walter), who ranged in age from teens to toddler.

My parents had decided to leave our home in Apeldoorn to seek out new opportunities for their young family in Canada. With the escalation of the Cold War, the atmosphere in Europe was one of insecurity. The Second World War had itself been a trial. Under Nazi occupation, my father, Herman, had become involved in Resistance activities, a risk which was finally rewarded with the Netherlands's Resistance Cross in 1982.

The journey across the Atlantic lasted eight days over rough spring seas. With the exception of Harmen all of the family were seasick to some degree. Unlike some families, we were lucky enough to make the journey together, my parents having secured a cabin aboard ship. One of my memories of the journey is of Dad attempting to compose letters to be mailed to Holland upon our arrival in Canada, hindered by the movement of the furniture back and forth across the room as the ship pitched and rolled!

After eight days we arrived in Halifax. However we were not to continue our journey as planned. An official mistakenly suspected that the fever of the youngest was a symptom of a contagious disease and we were all quarantined. This was a scary experience for the children. There were bars on the windows, and no knobs on the inside of the doors of our rooms. We were locked in at the eight o'clock bedtime each night. From our window we had a view of the harbour and our ship. Seeing the Groote Beer pull away from the dock, my mother cried. She had not chosen to come to Canada to be "put in jail."

Five days later we were able to resume our journey westward. In being quarantined we had missed the regular immigrant train. The train we rode took a long and slow route, stopping frequently. On board we slept on hard wooden benches using rented pillows. The food available was sandwiches, so at the Quebec City stop Dad got off the train to try to

purchase some other fare. As the time drew nearer for the train's departure Dad had still not returned, causing great worry; he had all of our money and papers. Just as the train was about to pull away he returned. The Dutch-English dictionary had not been of much help in his search for provisions!

The train trip lasted five days, taking us through many small communities in Northern Ontario. The wildness of the landscape was forbidding to eyes accustomed to the well-developed Dutch countryside. At Kapuskasing the foreman of a lumber camp offered Dad a job, but with his mind on the job his sponsor had arranged, Dad kept the family moving west. Finally we arrived at our destination: Saskatoon.

The family soon met a couple of challenges in its new home. The day after our arrival the town was hit by a spring snowstorm for which we were not prepared. There the Salvation Army came to the aid of the family, providing suitable clothing. Dad's job had also fallen through but he soon found a job at Westeel.

For the first few months we lived in the rough basement of the home of another family. Then on August 4, 1953, we purchased a building lot. Dad borrowed a bulldozer (from a second job he had by then found) to dig the foundation hole. By fall we moved into the first Canadian home of our own: a basement with a flat roof.

Our family has prospered and grown in Canada. In 1956 most of the family moved to Guelph, Ontario, and remain in that area. In recent years both of our parents have passed on, but not without witnessing the arrival of fourteen grandchildren. Like their parents, this new generation has made the best of what Canada has to offer, attending college and university and entering various trades and professions. Some of the second generation now have families of their own, adding nine great-grandchildren to the fold. We are all proudly Canadian and believe Mom made the right decision in suggesting this country when her family sought a new home.