

Rudolf and Joanne
Dasberg
Dutch Immigrants
Tabinta July of 1948
Aquitania October of 1949

Their Story by daughter Ena
Dasberg

My father Ruud had wanted to immigrate since he was a young boy in Rotterdam. He was raised on the Zane Grey novels about cowboys and the Wild West that his father Isaac liked to read. As children, Ruud and his sister Netty spoke often of their dream to go to North America and remained eager to do so after the liberation of the Netherlands. They had lost family in the war and like many other Dutch survivors; they



they were looking for a new start in a new land. Netty and her husband Will Aarts settled in New Jersey while dad chose Canada.

Ruud had trained as a herdsman, had experience with farming, and so was quickly accepted. He'd also become engaged to a lovely nurse, Joanne Donga from Groningen, and promised that once he'd earned enough he would send for her. He left in July 1948 and

during his ship's voyage he wrote letters about his experience. She was so touched by the scenes he described that she and his best friend Gooitsen De Vries submitted excerpts to a local newspaper. We still have copies of the newspaper article. I've translated them from Dutch into English so that other family members can enjoy them and have attached them to this account.



Ruud's first experience working for a Canadian farmer was a negative one. The farmer was miserly with his food and expected dad to work digging post holes in the hot August sun with only a poor breakfast to start his day. He even had to ask for an extra piece of bread. The farmer would not pay him the going rate as he thought my father had few options and no choice but to accept a bad deal. However my father knew how to network and had made friends amongst the other immigrants. He heard of a job working as a lumberjack. He told the farmer he was leaving and told the employment office that he was taking a break but would be back. Of course he never returned, as he'd quickly found work elsewhere.

When the logging job finished, he found a position in Downsview, Ontario with a kind and more generous farmer, Mr. Jackson. Dad was able to use his experience and skill as a herdsman and did well with the challenge and risk inherent in working with bulls. My father and mother wrote often but were apart for more than a year before he could arrange for her to join him.

Mom had taken English lessons that year but had only a minimal understanding of the language. During that year apart she almost changed her mind. It took an enormous leap of faith to leave her family, her work and her country to join Dad. She'd even written a letter to him saying she couldn't go but tore it up at the last minute. She traveled on the Aquitania in October 1949 and landed in Halifax. She took the train to Toronto and likely expected a touching reunion. However Dad wasn't there. She had to use her very basic English to go to the Traveler's Aid office to ask for help. Fortunately he arrived soon after but had considerable explaining to do. He'd been delayed because he had to milk the cows before he could leave. They were married a few weeks later, honeymooned in Niagara Falls and then Mom started her life as a farmhand's wife. This city girl hauled water, chopped wood and cooked on a wood stove. The farmer used to tease her by asking "what did you burn today?" Both Mom and Dad



quickly made friends and they were eager to offer help and shelter to others when needed. Everyone shared what they had.

After Downsview they moved to Pontypool near Lindsay and then later Whitby. Our family have been lifelong friends of the Devents, the Kosters, the DeJongs and later the Kampmans, all fellow immigrants, whom they met in those first few years. We had no aunts and uncles close by and so we adopted these friends as our new extended family. It took a long time to save for a trip back to visit family in Holland. There were few phone calls and they stayed in touch with family by letter only for many years.

My parents' early days were hard. I was born within a year of my parents' wedding. Mom tells me that she had to put me to sleep in my snowsuit, as there was little heat at night. The pail of water would be frozen in the morning. The stand for my cradle was made of wood that had fallen off a truck and the chest of drawers from the packing crates that their belongings were shipped in. However they had good times and she said they took risks that they'd never do later in life.

Mom never worried about money because she knew my father would always find work. He'd taken work as a prospector and a surveyor when farming work needed to be supplemented. He had hoped to have enough savings to buy his own farm but had to decide against this finally. When I was three he reinvented himself as a carpenter because General Motors was looking for tradesmen. We moved off the farm near Whitby into town because now he had good pay on the car assembly line. We first lived in an apartment on the main street. Mom returned to nursing and was content to give up farming life. My father and his friends built our first house in 1953. It still stands solid there on Chestnut Street. My sister Alice and later my twin brother and sister Jim and Bonnie were



newborns when they were brought home to that house. Over the years, we moved a few times but stayed in the Whitby/Oshawa area. One of my earliest memories as a young child is being present in the old courthouse when my parents received their Canadian citizenship.

Last year they had their 60th wedding anniversary. Their relationship had survived a one-year long-distance engagement and the challenges of the journey here. They had to depend on each other while adjusting to married life as well as a new country. I'm amazed sometimes at what they accomplished. This year, my parents left their last home for a residence. At a recent open house and birthday celebration at the retirement home, a visitor commented "those Dasbergs -they always like a party!" My mother has always been the heart of our family and her welcome and generosity is legend. Her rule is that you can never have too much food or too many guests. Her skill at organization helped her balance her work as a nurse and running a household. Now my sister Alice, who is also a nurse, follows in her footsteps and opens her house to the family parties. The youngest, Bonnie is equally generous and loves to entertain.

My father is turning 98 this year. He says that it is a blessing to live long enough to see your children grow old. He also taught us that age is relative as he often came to visit with his toolbox after he retired. Ruud and Joanne have great grandchildren that are just now hearing their wonderful stories of those first days in Canada. My father has been an excellent example of a hard working immigrant who rarely took a sick day and created a good and rich life in a new country. He also found time to volunteer with the St. John's Ambulance and sing in the church choir. He's always been a strong believer in education and takes a keen interest in the achievements of his children and grandchildren. It's particularly fitting that his son Jim is a teacher.

Those early immigrant days forged strong ties with my parents' adopted country Canada and created lifelong friendships. Their pattern of hard work and service has endured over decades and now generations. My father's beliefs and hopes were first expressed in the letters that follow, that he wrote so long ago on his journey to Canada.

Dutch to English Translation
TRAVEL TO CANADA

July 19, 1948

When the anchors were lifted and the boat pulled out of the harbour under the sounds of the national anthem "Wilhelmus", it occurred to me that a new chapter in my life had come. I thought only of the good things I had left behind in the Netherlands. At my boarding, I was assigned to steerage, where the men of the ship were billeted.

Here I found a large dormitory, with the beds stacked three high. Fortunately I was assigned the top bunk.

After exploring all corners of the ship, I waited to have dinner as there were several seatings. I belonged to the fourth and final seating. The food was good. At the table I noticed that we were representatives of a multinational group. It did not take long before I spoke with one group in German and the other in French. The first appeared to be Mennonites from Russia. The second was Swiss and French. While we were eating, the ship had already begun to sway. That sway caused by the sea we would learn to know well. Just a little later the first seasick persons could be found. By about eleven o'clock one could see that most people had gone to rest.

Tuesday morning: The first morning I came on deck after a refreshing shower and saw a calm sea, a cloudy sky and very far away a strip of the coast of England. A few fishing boats and passenger boats were the only objects that broke the line of the horizon. This day was also spent with new acquaintances.

My evening meal consisted solely of meat and apricots. Some women had sacrificed their meal to Neptune earlier, and so naturally could not face this. Before we went to bed the Protestants held an end of day service, which was attended by 250 people. I would never have known that something like this on board would make such a big impression. I firmly believe that for people like us who were facing the unknown, our hopes and expectations had increased then. Also we were aware that we were no longer strangers.

Meanwhile, the sea became rougher, and when we were in bed that night, paper bags were distributed throughout. The waves washed over the deck. Of course I need not tell you that in no time, our dormitory became dirtier than a pigsty. I was grateful to be near a fresh air duct and to have followed the advice of an experienced sailor. He said I should have my mind adjust to the motion of the ship, to regulate my breathing and to remain flat on my back. So I had been, until now, saved from making my own sacrifice to Neptune. But I could not say that I felt good. Except for waking a few times from the force of the wave and the sound of the anchor hitting the ship, I soon slept through the usual ship sounds.

Wednesday. In the morning when the count was taken, it appeared that 90% of people were seasick and the rest shuffled lifelessly on the deck. That morning we were in the dining room with just 30 of the 700. Those remaining kept to our goal, to try to run with a full stomach.

However it was a wretched sight. Most people lay down or hung in their hammocks. It was rare when a man took a smoke. Now and then you would see someone fly to the railing and lean over it towards the water. Usually this was followed by strange noises. We couldn't help but occasionally reveal our amusement. It was so ludicrous. When we couldn't hide our expression we then offered our apologies. However they said that if they were in our position they would probably have laughed as well.

Throughout the day the weather remained overcast and the waves had white caps. The only view was of sky and water. By the time we went to bed, the sea was calmer and we heard that the front had gone past us.

Thursday July 22: In the morning it seemed like people were reborn. We heard the chattering of the children's voices once again, and everywhere one saw worn but smiling faces. I believe that nothing is forgotten as soon as seasickness.

It was a beautiful image, a blue sky and the silvery glow of the sun on a relatively calm sea. That day went very fast also. Many faces were burned by the sun. Appetites had returned, and future plans were made and discussed. Similarly, the day ended quickly.

Friday

The next morning the sun went into hiding. It was a day of rain. The people retreated into the recreation room to pass the time reading and writing, and practicing old card games. As always and everywhere you find restrictions of a certain class but here on the boat you make friendships, which for many will be for life. Some days had little detail.

Saturday.

None of us felt like tomorrow would be Sunday morning. The scene was depressing. We ran through a dense fog. Ship signals were arranged, and one was heard. The sea was calm. Everyone's desire was to see land.

Life on board went on as usual and everyone tried in his own way to pass the time. In the evening there was dancing in the recreation room and the dancers imagined themselves to be in a salon. At the end of the day everyone returned to his quarters to sleep. In the morning I woke with difficulty.

Sunday.

The first and last Sunday at sea. This morning, coming on deck, we were struck silent by what we saw: an entirely blue sky and a sun with its blazing rays turning the water silver. The wind blew, but the cold was not lifting.

After breakfast there was a church service. It gave all a wonderful sight. The dining room was completely full. When the minister began to preach, the room was completely forgotten. Sunday, we planned to spend the day with further reading and sunbathing. Suddenly a welcomed message made it's rounds. If all went well, we would reach Newfoundland the next day towards evening .

Monday morning.

Immediately upon waking, we noticed the signs that we were travelling into the fog. By noon the sun shone again and we determined from the heat that we were being carried on a warm Gulf Stream. Everyone rushed to write anything because the mail would be collected by the evening.

It was remarkable that a kind of camaraderie had emerged. Small biases, as we had known in the Netherlands, had fallen away like snow in the sun. There is a saying that abroad, people's willingness to be helpful and responsible is very great . This had happened already as we know.

After watching the crowd and talking with several people, I can only regret that so many of the country's best people and their efforts and talents have had to leave the Netherlands for abroad.

The cry: "Land ho", and the last left their sick beds to look, and yes, we saw on our right there lay Newfoundland. I discovered a lighthouse on the island Berriel, and also a few white houses with red roofs. These were then the first signs of my new homeland. That first glimpse of land reminded us that we'd not seen countryside in a long time. By that evening I saw a beautiful view of the sun setting on Newfoundland. Just imagine the colours of a green land, the purple rocky coast and just above a fiery red sphere setting in a blue sky and all surrounded by white clouds.

The journey was all worth it if only for this one image.

The next day passed as quietly as all previous.

Wednesday

Then Wednesday again showed a different picture. Everywhere you saw activity because the next morning we would arrive in Quebec.

In the afternoon we saw a good view of the coast of the New World. On the left there was America and on the right Canada. All we could see were mountains. That night brought little sleep. We would soon arrive in Quebec and could then say that we had reached the land of Columbus.

Thursday

The landing began early Thursday morning. We started at half past nine, and by around half past ten the necessary formalities had been completed. We all received a welcome gift (cigarettes) from the Canadian government.

We had till half past three until our train left, so I was glad that we had a good chance to see something of Quebec City. The St. Lawrence River runs through the city. It was hot, but I was surprised to learn that it was 87 degrees, especially since the heat was well tolerated. The language heard was predominantly French. The people I saw were as one would expect. The city itself looked clean. One could see that space was not an issue here. Several buildings looked to me like real skyscrapers. Taxis and cars flew in and out. By now it was time for the train to be here. Later we all sat in the Canadian Pacific Railways train which would deliver us to every possible direction. The gathering was thus ended. Now each of us must go his own way. The future that we expected would be achieved only through effort and overcoming disappointments. But we had faith and confidence in that future.

In the train we were given the opportunity to refresh ourselves and use whatever we needed. During the trip I was impressed by the vastness of this country and its wealth of timber.

I had to sit twelve hours on the train since I had a different employer than those in Quebec. Together with another family, I traveled to the same village. Friday morning we were introduced to the two Canadian farmers who were adorned with straw hats. They'd been informed of our arrival by telephone.

Eighteen hours later I was in bed and slept as if I had done so for years here.

Ontario, Canada
Rudolf Dasberg