

The Kreeft Family  
by Daughter Elisabeth  
J. Kreeft-Meijers  
Dutch Immigrants  
Groote Beer  
September 21, 1952



Immigration Memories of Johannes Cornelis Kreeft and Elisabeth Janna Kreeft Meijers

In 1952 my husband Johannes C. Kreeft and I left Holland with our three small children, Jacomina Susanna, Gerard Jan and Willem ages 5,4 and 3.

We travelled aboard the Groote Beer, leaving September 21, 1952, arriving in Halifax 9 days later on September 30. This was Ineke's 6th birthday. The last morning everyone got up early to see land approaching. We were to arrive at 6 A.M., It seemed to take a long time to disembark because we remember being served lunch on the ship. Our first impressions were the contrast in how freight was handled in the harbour. In Rotterdam large cranes and hoists were used, but here in Halifax ropes, pulleys and manpower moved the freight.

Leaving Holland we were filled with mixed emotions. Crowded conditions and the need to rebuild after the war made it difficult to get ahead. Canada seemed to offer more opportunities, a brighter future and gave us optimism. Parting from loved ones, leaving a fatherland and familiarity filled us with sadness.

Our memories of the crossing are not all pleasant. Our ship was an old army boat used to transport soldiers. It was not a luxury cruise ship. We remember being separated as a family, women and children on one side of the ship, men and young boys on the other side of the ship. I shared a hut with one other woman and her child; my husband shared a hut with 5 other men. We remember having to stand in line for everything, using the washroom, using the laundry facilities and even to have a cup of coffee. The food on the ship was good.

As soon as we approached open water seasickness started in. The woman in my hut was so sick, I had to care for her small child as well as my own. Many people were sick. Children didn't seem to be affected the same way adults were. They had a large playroom with an ample supply of toys, colouring books and crayons. They also ate their meals here.

Often we took the children up on deck to watch the fish and just have a rest from the noise of the busy playroom.

Every evening we had a church service. Our boys helped the minister set the songbooks out on the chairs. The Priest and the Pastor shared a hut but one night both were sick. They suspected that God just didn't want them to preach that day.

One day we had a drill and had to learn about the lifeboats and what to do in the event of a storm. It wasn't really a drill; a large storm was fast approaching. Fortunately we didn't need to use the small boats.

After being processed through immigration we boarded a train in the evening bound for Alberta where our brother in law who sponsored us lived. It would be a 5-day train ride. The train was very dirty and cold. Between each railcar was a potbelly stove. Some passengers found wood around the stations and kept the fire stoked so we had some heat and sometimes hot water for coffee. At stations my husband would go to a convenience store and buy some bread, jam and drinks for us. We had to watch our money carefully. We had left Holland with only \$200.00. The government had helped to pay our way to Canada.

We arrived in Medicine Hat on a Thursday; our brother in law and sister, Ernie and Elsie Van Oostenbrugge were at the train to meet us. They took us to a coffee shop for breakfast and then we drove the hour to their farm in Burdett.

On Monday John began working for Raymond Clark, a local farmer who also owned a farm equipment dealership and lumberyard. He earned \$ 135.00 per month. We paid \$75.00 for room and board each month. After a year we were able to rent our own home in the village and within a few years we purchased our own home. Our family increased from 3 to 5 children. We continued our association with Raymond. He gave John the bookkeeping responsibilities in his business and continued to encourage us to begin our own business ventures as bookkeeper, insurance agent and real estate agent. John was also the Administrator for the Village for several years, which he continued with, after we sold the business. We moved to Lethbridge after retirement.

We have never regretted our immigration experience but are thankful for the opportunities that we, as well as our children, have had in our new country.

Elisabeth J. Kreeft-Meijers