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English Immigrant
Ascania
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Recollections of my Arrival
in Canada

I arrived on board the SS Ascania on November 4th, 1949 at Montreal and was greeted by a 3 inch snowfall, which makes life interesting when you only have a light raincoat and ordinary leather shoes.

I was just 17 and traveling alone, although my older sister would be meeting me at the dock and I would be staying with an Aunt and Uncle in Montreal. My luggage was a steamer trunk and a small carry-on suitcase and the passengers had to wait on board until all their luggage had been unloaded and placed in under the appropriate letter in the Custom Shed.

Since I was young, healthy and at the head of the Third Class gangway, I was the first to reach the area for "letter P". The Custom Agent was standing at a small table doing paper-work and when I approached he said he was busy but would be with me in a few minutes and did I know where all my baggage was located. I said yes, I had my suitcase and I would be sitting on my trunk just a few feet away.

As I sat down a First Class passenger arrived and in an imperious tone asked if he could have his luggage checked as he was in a hurry. The Agent politely replied "I'll be with you in a minute." Then it started to get interesting as this gentleman tried to pressure the Agent on the need to make haste. A slightly colder, but firmer, reply of "I'll be with you in a minute and the young lad is first in line" from the Agent was insufficient to curb the demands. Refusing to accept the Agent's reply the First Class "gentleman" adopted a more aggressive tone in the hope of receiving priority.

The Agent put down his paper work and went over to the man and asked "How many pieces of luggage do you have?" The man replied 21. They were a collection of suitcases, boxes, trunks, hat boxes and some were tied shut with rope. The Agent softly said "open them all and when they are open I'll come over and inspect them".

After a few more minutes with his paper work he came over and checked me through. By the time I got a porter and I was leaving the area, I

looked back to see several other passengers had also been checked through and the First Class guy was still opening his baggage.

A guy in the British context is a stuffed dummy usually placed on a bonfire.