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English Immigrant  
Aurania  
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The circumstances leading up to my arrival and landing at "Pier 21" could almost be classified as unique. An explanation is required in order that one could follow the events which led to my particular arrival.

Our family consisted of my widowed mother, a wonderful brother who was born in 1912 and ten years my senior. I saw the light of day in early February 1922. While we were natives of Cardiff, our mother's income relied solely on a monthly Imperial war pension in the amount of six pounds eight and eight pence. This was received after our Dad succumbed to war wounds not long after I was born.

Mother found it difficult to manage the day to day struggle to keep us all together. My brother at age 16 enrolled in a farm training program and was bent on getting to Canada where farm workers were solely needed. During the twenties and early thirties hundreds of orphan boys and girls were collected up along with city street waifs and in due course were shipped put to Canada without fanfare. Certain homes and agencies took charge of them. In short order all of the children were indentured and placed on farms and homes throughout Ontario, Quebec and the Maritimes.

As my brother was not an orphan, he was referred and connected up to a home operated by the "Father Hudson Society" based in Birmingham. On orders he left home to join up with a group of boys at dockside in Liverpool, and where they all boarded the Canadian Pacific liner "SS Metagama." She cast off on May 10th. 1929 and arrived in Quebec city May 20th. At that time, my brother was sixteen years of age. The train from Quebec was destined for Ottawa. The boys were met there by members of the "Sisters of Charity of St. George." Within 48 hours of arriving at the home of the sisters. My brother was put on a train for Mitchell, Ont. He was met by the farmer there. The farm was located about 15 miles from Mitchell and was part of the town of Bornholm, Ontario. Fifty eight years later I visited this exact farm. Unfortunately my brother expired in 1973.

My mother must have missed and pined for my brother to no end. In short order she made inquiries for her chances of employment in Canada. During that era there were posters in many areas of Cardiff

extolling the virtues of moving to Canada and which included reduced fares and other incentives in an effort to populate the country. In short order she must have convinced herself to take the plunge.

Soon thereafter Mother and I took a bus up to the town of Blaenavon where her Aunt Carrie resided. Due to my age at that time, I can only assume that mother discussed her plans to go to Canada. She would also have broached the subject of looking after me until able to save sufficient for my fare across. I would further imagine that she would have mentioned her certain desire to compensate Aunt Carrie in some further manner or form.

At a later date we headed to Blaenavon once again. On this occasion she was comforted in knowing that I would be cared for and being left in loving hands. I can only conclude that she must have cried her eyes out upon parting with me.

Mother wasted little time as on or about June 26th. 1929, and at the age of 39 she boarded the RMS Aurania and arrived at the port of Quebec on the sixth of July, about two months after my brother arrived at the same port and knew exactly where he was. She also sailed from Southampton. She continued on to Toronto by train and in due course was soon employed as a janitress of a stately apartment house with the address of 198 Bloor Street East. Back in Blaenavon, I must have adapted well to my new home and all stone floors. Aunt Carrie's family consisted of two sons who were both coal miners and her husband Uncle George. As I recall every member of the family was so kind to me. Aunt Carrie treated me like a son. During the evenings twice each week. She would give me money and a note for the pub keeper at the bottom of the town. When I walked a distance to the pub I had to knock on the side door, give him the money and the note. He would return seconds later with a wrapped up flagon of beer. This was a ritual and needless to say, she liked her beer. The fondest memory of living with these wonderful people happened a couple of days prior to Christmas 1929. Where I slept afforded me a full view of the fireplace . Very late during the night aunt Carrie was making and steaming Christmas puddings. Other goodies were also being cooked. All of the aromas emanating from the various pots was truly divine and stayed with me until sleep took over.

I enjoyed being a seven year old among these wonderful people. In all, I was with them for the better part of six months. Try as I might I could never recall harsh words or a spanking. I had certainly cherished my time with all of them.

Come January 1930 Mother must have made arrangements for my voyage to Canada. Before I was fully aware Aunt Carrie put me in a new

summer suit with short pants. Shortly thereafter I was saying my good byes to all who gathered. The Chapel gave me a Welsh bible and someone else gave me a new cricket bat and ball.

As aunt Carrie and I walked slowly down hill to the train station, everyone kept on waving at the top until we fell from sight. Until arrival at Southampton docks aunt Carrie took me on board and must have explained every detail to either a purser or the Captain himself. While this was going on I vividly recalled seeing two smashing ships that were tied up across from us. One was the Mauretania the other was the Aquitania, 15 years later. Before leaving me Aunt Carrie hugged and kissed me one last time. We both cried like babies. I recall this parting quite often years later as she was a true mother to me.

I was aboard RMS. Aurania. We cleared harbour January 19th 1930. Within 24 hours the weather and sea turned vile. Other than crew members no one was allowed on deck. This order remained in effect almost to the approaches of Halifax harbour.

While at sea for fourteen days, my life aboard this ship was truly ecstatic. I recall being the only child aboard and the kid's playroom was all mine. On occasion the odd crew member stopped and played with me. While there must have been eyes on me during the run to Halifax, I could never recall being watched over or scrutinized. The whole voyage was truly a happy experience.

Within a few hours before docking, I remember being in a cabin when a lady came in and presented me with a box that now reminds me of a T. Eaton suit box. She stated that the box was not to be opened until the train was well on its way to Toronto. She mentioned that the contents should last me the whole ride and that it was a gift from the captain. Afterwards and with any boy's curiosity I opened it up. The assortment of food and goodies was out of this world. You name it and it was in this box. Sandwiches, fruit cakes, cookies, chocolates, cheese, crackers and God knows what else. I quickly resealed the box.

I never recalled having any money on me. I never saw a passport either unless it was held by the ship. I do recall a large tag that was pinned or stuck to my coat lapel. While I can only speculate, I believe that the captain talked to some one who was destined for Toronto to possibly keep an eye on me and ensure that I was met when I was arriving there. On the dawning of February 3rd 1930 Aurania tied up to Pier 21 after the long fourteen day crossing. With help I suppose, I landed my bible, cricket bat and ball and my precious "Eaton's" box. These were all laying on the wooden floor of Pier 21.

Luggage and people were all over the Pier shed. Processing the passengers was in full swing. I could never recall being examined or questioned by any customs person. Had I owned a passport, I never saw it. In due course and along with other passengers I must have struggled with my baggage and walked about 75 yards to board the train. It began moving out of Halifax about an hour later. For all of the time I was to be on this train, I could never recall being chastised or told to behave or sit down by anyone. To the person who agreed to keep an eye on me, he or she certainly remained anonymous. My captain's goodies were excellent. Not a crumb was wasted as I surely must have shared some of this with others.

At one point on this ride to Toronto, I must have gotten nose when I got up to visit the next car. This was completely filled with foreign older men and women. The only baggage they had was rolled up in a ball. The women all wore babushkus [sic] on their heads. No one talked and all were eating what sounded like very stale bread and thick pieces of strong garlic sausage. The aroma of garlic, sausage and body odors was overwhelming. The next car was an exact duplicate of the first.

These people were not passengers of the Aurania but must have landed earlier from another ship and had most likely sailed steerage where certain amenities were not provided for the comfort of the passengers. I learned many years later that in the early thirties, Stalin confiscated all the Ukraine's land and possessions and drove them out of the Ukraine. What I experienced on the train would possibly be refugees who were affected by this purge. I will never forget those two cars of unfortunate people.

When our train arrived in Toronto on February 5th I came to a city blanketed by 5 inches of snow on the ground and me in short pants. My dear mother was waiting there, tears and all. Her look of happiness when she hugged and kissed me is a memory that will always be with me. Our family of three were all eventually reunited after a division of approximately nine months in all. While relatively poor in pocket we were rich in all other aspects. As a footnote the venerable RMS Aurania was taken over by the British Admiralty and was converted into a "DEMS" ship (defensively equipped merchant ship). 1939 and was serving as a convoy escort in W.W.2 [sic] I have never heard whether she survived the war. This information could easily be gathered. During her hay day, she tied up to pier 21 on many an occasion.