

Helmi Kamonin  
Finnish Immigrant  
Gripsholm  
May 1953



HELMI KAMONIN

Pier 21 story written by Helmi Kamonin and translated from the Finnish by her daughter, Leena Smith



Helmi Kamonin and 2 children, Leena and Esa departed from Tampere, Finland, on April 20th, 1953 to Gothenburg, Sweden then on the Gripsholm on April 24th, 1953

Arrived in Halifax on the Gripsholm on May 3rd, 1953

Final Destination: Toronto on May 5th 1953

My husband wanted to see the big New World. So, in 1951, he left for Canada leaving me behind with two small children to continue the daily task of brining up a family as best as I could. It never would have occurred to me to pick up the family and move to a foreign land.

In 1952 my husband gave word for us to join him in Toronto after he had assessed the situation for a year or so there. He felt that we could make a go of it in our new homeland.

We left Tampere April 20th, 1953 with travel tickets and \$30.00 in pocket. My father and sister saw us off at the train station from where we went to Turku, Finland, then took the overnight ship to Stockholm and then on to Gothenburg by train where we remained overnight before heading to the harbour the next morning. And waiting there, was the M.S. Gripsholm. On the 24th of April, 1953 we began our Atlantic crossing. It all seemed so huge in my eyes. There were plenty of travelers already and more came on board from Germany. Immigrants, I assumed.

The crossing went without too many hitches for us. Only one day did we all get sea sick, all 3 of us together. Everything swirled in front of my eyes. We were assisted by ship personnel to the outside decks to get some fresh air and this helped us to get back on our feet.

During the days on board we tried to pass the time by strolling on deck and looking out for sea life. We watched the white caps and even saw some whales.

I tried to make the time go faster with games. By evening the children fell asleep. I sat alone, with thoughts swirling in my head. Had I made the right choice by leaving with small children, now 2 years and 7 years old, to the unknown. After ruminating over the situation one thought was clear. I wished to keep the family together with their father, Esa did not remember him at all, he was so young. And as I explained to him that we were on our way to see Daddy and that he was waiting for our arrival it became even clearer that the right choice was made. Since the head of the household was already there and by now had knowledge of the surroundings and had opened doors to new circles, all would be well.

The crossing took 10 days. We were in Halifax May 3rd 1953. Ahead of us was the train journey to Toronto. I noticed that the train tickets did not include meals. The harbour store was open and I shopped for milk, bread, and canned meat. With this packed lunch we were on our way to Toronto. The train was old fashioned with wooden seats on which I laid out overcoats to make it a little softer for the children to sleep on at night.

It took 48 hours to get to Toronto. Sometimes, we would stop and wait while other trains went past.

We arrived in Toronto tired!

I was so joyful to see that 'he' was already there waiting to greet us!

The Day was May 5th, 1953