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French Immigrant
Italia
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Pier 21 Memories

It was the year 1953, when my courageous mother ventured to Canada on the ship the Italia. September was cold and windy, and crossing the frigid Atlantic Ocean to a country foreign to her both in language and culture was frightening, still, she was excited to have left the war-torn native city of Fournies. She and Dad had had many encounters with Hitler's bombs and the economy was slow to heal its numerous wounds. Besides being still a young bride of only eleven years she was eager to see her husband, who had made the same journey six months prior. Canada demanded that new immigrants have a home, furniture, and work before the remainder of the family would be allowed to come. I remember my mom not allowing us on deck for she was afraid that the whales might upset the ship and we would all drown. Besides, she was tired, my brother was to be born only four weeks and my baby sister was still in her crib drinking the bottle, she was only one year and four months. My older sister of eight years and older brother of eleven years were excited as I, five years, nine months, of the adventure to foreign lands.

Yes, she was brave my mom, having left her family, her country, she didn't have too many belongings or heirlooms to take long. Hitler had helped himself to those, however, he did not get my dad's racing bicycle. He had buried it in the garden just before the Nazis came to the door, who knows how many more bombs or bullets his bike would have produced to murder the innocent, like his two cousins who had forgotten to shut the light that fatal night when the sirens made their warnings, perhaps they were laughing for those who remained. How many little children accompanied my mom? Four and one to come the following month, Halloween day to be exact. This festive day meant nothing to the French culture, however us kids sure adapted to the Canadian culture that day. He was a big baby, the biggest of us all at birth, eleven pounds. She came by train from Fournies in northern France, to la Havre in her condition with all the little ones, with no friends or family to help her. She borrowed the money to pay the fare, however we stayed in our cabin most of the time as our meals were brought to us there. My mom thinks to this day that she felt that she had been treated as a refugee for whom the passage had been paid for by the government.

