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German Immigrant
Italia
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Emigrants are not
Deserters.

Memories by Gerhard Eichel.

I responded immediately I saw the first ad by the Canadian government placed in one of the Frankfurt dailies. Only five years after Canada and the other Allied forces had defeated Germany, Germans were being encouraged to apply for immigration to Canada.

I had just received my diploma in forestry, and the prospect of ever being able to practice my profession looked very bleak indeed. The largest contiguous forests were no longer in Germany after Stalin had so generously donated the Eastern provinces of Pomerania, Silesia, parts of Brandenburg, East and West Prussia to Poland to compensate for the Soviet Union's confiscation of Eastern Poland. Much of the other forest land was now located in the newly created state of East Germany with its totalitarian regime under Soviet occupation which did not appeal to me at all. I soon realized how hopeless the chances were in West Germany where I occupied about sixth or seventh priority in obtaining employment. On the other hand a look at the map of Canada convinced me that in a country with so much forest and so little population there had got to be an opportunity to practice what I had learned.

I didn't have to wait all that long to be notified that I qualified for admission as a New Canadian provided I had at least some reasonable prospect for a job. So I started writing letters in my best high school English and soon received what I thought was an encouraging reply from the B.C. Forest Service. Preparations began with my dad using all his connections to obtain enough Canadian currency for train fare and initial living expenses on the black market because Germans were still prohibited from possessing any foreign currency. At least the boat passage could be paid in marks.

While dad helped as best he could, mother was much less enthused about my leaving the nest. She no doubt sensed that the parting with her only child would be permanent, and traditionally, at least since the first large wave of emigration in the 1840's, emigration had been regarded very much as desertion of the fatherland. Much of this

perception, of course, was generated by envy as it took considerable effort and determination to make the final decision to pack up and leave the old homestead for an unknown but decidedly foreign country. Only when after the war the CARE parcels arrived from the proverbial uncle in America who often was not at all as rich as people assumed, would emigrants be forgiven their desertion.

My mind, however, was made up as I assembled and packed my meager possessions and booked the cheapest passage at the Hapag-Lloyd travel agency for a berth on the MV Italia of the Home Line to leave Hamburg on 26 April 1952. For me the decision was not as difficult as for others, anyway, because I was already displaced and couldn't or wouldn't go back to central Germany for anything in contrast to those who still had a place to call home to which they could return. One of dad's business colleagues offered to drive us to Hamburg with a short side trip to Lbeck to mother's cousin Traude Johannson. In Hamburg we stayed with dad's brother, uncle Hans and his wife, aunt Frieda. He had worked for years as a security guard in the harbor area and was pleased to take us there for a tour before I was to board after tearful farewells while the brass band played the tunes which are traditionally connected with emigration and reporters interviewed passengers and the captain.

Meanwhile I have had ample opportunity to contemplate and examine the pros and cons of my fateful decision to leave my homeland and start a new life elsewhere. No doubt much of my reason was definitely the widespread "count me out" mentality of pretty well all returning soldiers after service in the armed forces and prison camp. We did not wish to ever again have to perform military service, and when Germany was permitted to have armed forces again, regardless how small and a mere token, the mentality became a major cause for emigration. But my decision to pursue forestry as a career had been made long before the war. Since high schools were almost exclusively dedicated to prepare students for university, I had first of all to prove and display my qualification for academic capability. Inevitably I was asked what it was I wanted to study after graduating from high school, and for me who was only ten years old then the answer, albeit tentatively, was forestry. I was an avid reader of the stories by Hermann Lons who glorified the work of the forester who traditionally was also the only person allowed to hunt game, and of the more nature preservation minded books by Henri Fabre and Ernest Thompson-Seton. I was not the only one of my classmates convinced that a person could practice forestry without being loaded down with the obligatory armament and tradition even if that had to be performed abroad.

After leaving Hamburg and moving down the Elbe river estuary I had to find my bunk deep down in one of the dormitories which was

depressingly airless, crowded and noisy. I learned that for only \$5.00 more I could have got a berth in one of the staterooms for four. So I went to talk to the purser and he promised to accommodate me after the ship left Le Havre if there was a vacancy. That was better. Most of the passengers were emigrating to either Canada or the U.S. After taking on more passengers in Southampton and Le Havre the ship would go via Halifax to New York. One who was not emigrating but took advantage of the cheap fare was either the daughter or the niece of Lynn Heinzerling who was the Associated Press correspondent in Geneva when I was working for AP in Frankfurt. Neither of us, however, was proficient enough in either language to carry a fluent conversation so I soon got acquainted with some of my fellow emigrants. I didn't meet anyone else who wanted to go as far West as I did but at least some could keep me company part of the way.

There was Eugen Pfitzer, a camera technician trained by the Zeiss-Ikon company who was going to Winnipeg for a job. Then there was a medical doctor Dillenberg from Berlin who apparently had been retained by the federal government to serve as practitioner at what I presumed to be an Indian reserve in the Alberta Peace river district. He was about 40 years old and had extensive experience in foreign countries. And there was Isolde Szubinski from Eberswalde near Berlin who sought me out after seeing my name on the passenger list. She told me that her father had owned a business there where he had been in contact with my father's brother Fritz who had died in the flu epidemic of 1918. Her father was threatened with confiscation in 1939 because his grandmother was Jewish and he took his own life. Isolde managed to move to Switzerland for the duration of the war where she learned to repair clocks and watches. In fact she had with her a complete set of tools and instruments to open a watchmaker's shop. But first she needed to learn the language and business practices and for that she had signed on for work in the Jasper Park Lodge. In spite of interrupting our travels repeatedly the four of us managed to meet again in Toronto on the same train West.

The first few days at sea were quite pleasant as we all assembled in deck chairs to make like tourists, properly attended by stewards and the board photographer. Although I took many photos myself, and in spite of being rather desperately short of cash, I couldn't resist purchasing a few of his pictures for the sake of having at least some souvenir of the voyage. I also lifted some of the dining room's fancy printed menus to send later to mom as proof that I was being well-fed and looked after.

Unfortunately the weather turned rough about half way across the Atlantic and most of us were on deck only for the purpose of feeding the dolphins involuntarily. All were glad when the sea calmed as we

approached the coast of Nova Scotia, even though we hadn't seen one iceberg in the thick fog.

After the ship had docked on 5 May 1952 at what I now know was Pier 21 we were urged to make sure to take with us all our belongings because we were not going to be allowed back on board. Just as sure I realized on entering the customs and immigration shed that I had left my hat behind in the stateroom, as was to be expected from someone who had grown up a member of the hatless generation. But the steward was helpful and retrieved it for me this time. I left it behind again in Montreal where it stayed until my wife-to-be came to join me in the fall by which time I had survived another hatless summer.

We had our documents and passports inspected and then had to wait for our baggage to be unloaded and assembled on the spacious floor around us. On recognizing all pieces that belonged to me I had to stand in line until an officer was free to accompany me for the inspection of what I was bringing into the country. I had a large sailor's duffel bag for all my bedding and clothes which didn't create any interest, and a plywood crate filled mostly with books. Most were the textbooks I expected to need in the pursuit of my profession but I also packed a number of current literary publications, especially those by authors banned by the Nazis which were then just becoming available for the first time. On top was my family photo album which I had added mainly to fill up the last space, and which the officer found absolutely fascinating. "Hey, Tom, come over here and look at these pictures", he yelled to one of his colleagues, and the whole procedure came to a standstill while the line-up behind me quickly grew longer and the grumbling louder. It wasn't until much later that I learned how much that photo album had saved me from because among my treasured literature were translations of American authors which at this critical time of the Senator McCarthy hearings were also in Canada not exactly acceptable, such as John Dos Passos. The officer reluctantly closed my photo album, stamped my papers, and I was a Landed Immigrant and on my own.

When I stepped out from where I had entered at dockside, I found myself in front of a long train of "settlers coaches" waiting to be boarded. The cars had wooden bench seats with ample floor space for bulky baggage, and no compartments, and would be our conveyance as far as Montreal. After collecting my westbound shipboard companions we settled in with as much comfort as we could afford. We were advised that the train wouldn't leave for some time yet and so set out for some provisions for the long ride on a train that didn't have cabin stewards and dining facilities to which we had got used to. Here was our first opportunity to learn and practice some of the language that nobody had learned in high school courses, and become acquainted with standard food supplies

which turned out to be just as unfamiliar. While we struggled with trying to recognize the difference between nickels, dimes, and quarters we were shocked to discover that we just couldn't get the type of food we would get for a long train trip back home. The bread was soft and spongy and packed in wax paper, the butter was all salty, there was only soft process cheese, instead of smoked and cured hard sausage they only had what they called baloney and peanut butter, and many other novelties that we didn't even understand. Welcome to Canada.

My plan was to make stopovers to meet three friends who had emigrated before, and to see the sights in Eastern Canada that I might not get the chance to see again for a long time. First to see was my bosom friend Heinz with whom I had grown up from birth. He and his new wife lived in Montreal where he worked for a shipping company. He was at the station to meet me, and for a long day absolutely crammed with information he introduced me to any number of important and novel habits and practices of Canadian life together with the necessary vocabulary. After that intensive study I proceeded to Toronto to meet Susie G. who had been in charge of the flower shop at the Frankfurt High Commissioner's head office casino and restaurant right next to where I had been running the news stand. Susie was my favourite companion because we had much in common and could intelligently discuss books, movies, and other cultural events. She had already joined the Mendelsohn choir. I made a day trip to Niagara Falls and even had enough time to drop in unannounced on the dean of forestry at the university of Toronto who presented me with some valuable publications.

Susie phoned Gusti who had also worked at the casino while studying medicine and after graduating had obtained a chance to intern at the hospital in Sudbury. She would meet me while the train was stopped at the station there. I don't know how we all managed to get on the same train as we were leaving Toronto but the four of us were back together going West. Of course, we had to travel "day coach" class because that's all we could afford. During the night we had to seek a place with empty seats opposite for a more or less comfortable rest. This being not the busy season yet we never had any problems with that after the passengers who had booked a berth had retired for the night. Eugen was the first to part when he got off in Winnipeg, and both "the doctor" and Isolde left me in Calgary after which I traveled alone. I took pictures from the train of all that magnificent scenery but soon realized that the angle as well as the lighting were not always favourable, so I splurged on a few picture postcards that were available from the conductor. I also realized years later that some of the most interesting scenery I didn't get to see because it was night at the time we were traveling through it.

On my arrival in Vancouver I had a grand reception from Heinz's sister and her husband who had since their immigration become well established. Traudel and Wolfgang lived in Kitsilano and were able to introduce me to a lot of valuable information on life on the west coast. I decided to stay a few days to adjust finally to the time zone in which I would remain and soak up as much of the atmosphere and language as possible before going on my last leg to Victoria to report for work. The ferry passage was included in my seventy-five dollar "settler's pass" from Halifax.

I arrived in Victoria at the weekend and just had enough time to present myself to the B.C. Forest Service personnel officer who had written me that nice letter indicating that there would be a good chance that I would be hired if I would show up.

After a brief and perfunctory interview the personnel officer was convinced that I was qualified for the task he had in mind, and I was hired and told to report for work on Monday. I found inexpensive accommodation at the Victoria YMCA and had the weekend to sort out of my meager possessions the items I assumed to be necessary for work away from town. The work consisted of a summer-long forest inventory of all Canadian forests under a multi-year, joint federal-provincial programme.

On Monday morning I introduced myself to H.M. (Mikey) Pogue, the Forester I/C of the surveys and inventory division of the B.C. Forest Service, located in the rented Weiler building downtown, who after a few words welcoming me passed me on to Harold Cliff, his second in command. The field season had already started, and all the crews were in the field being trained and there was no time to lose to get me to join them. I and two other late-comers were going to be driven to the training camp on Minstrel Island next morning. I was allowed to store the bulk of my belongings in the Forest Service warehouse for the duration until the field season ended in the fall, and I was provided with some very much needed supplies and pay for my room at the Y.

Next morning after storing my duffel bag and book crate at the warehouse Harold Cliff drove us up-Island to Kelsey Bay where we boarded the Forest Service launch the "Forester" for the short transfer to Minstrel Island and training camp.

My shock over the unexpected situation in which I found myself placed so suddenly was profound. Here I was fresh from the boat one day and the next somewhere up the rugged central coast of B.C. about as far from civilization as one could get. Most of my team mates turned out to be as innocent and surprised European immigrants as myself, or else

students, and not necessarily all forestry students, and many of them from central and even Eastern Canada, out for a summer job with a superb prospect of a healthy, adventurous outdoor life as well as a chance to earn enough for the next year at university. Because transportation, accommodation, and all food you could eat was provided, the monthly paycheque could go straight to the bank, which for most was a definite advantage. But I also and instantly discovered that in spite of the obvious advantage the B.C. Forest Service appeared to have great difficulties in attracting sufficient competent and experienced personnel for what was plainly a massive project, and which explained to me why my getting a job seemed so ridiculously effortless. Even among forestry students the inventory jobs were highly unpopular and utilized only as a last resort when all else had failed because of their invariably remote locations far from the city and summertime excitement.

It didn't take me long to get used to the lifestyle as I was learning quickly what was expected of me and what use I could make of the basics I had learned in my studies. The days were as long as there was light enough to see what we were doing, and with nothing else to do there was no need to take the weekends and holidays off. Being interested in all the various forest types in this vast province I and most of the other immigrants who were also foresters welcomed the unequalled opportunity to get assigned to a variety of places all over the province and get paid for it. In the fall when students were going back to classes I was kept on to compile the summer's work and prepare the maps and air photos for next season which indicated that as a graduate forester I was definitely regarded as future part chief and management staff. I stayed with the division for three and a half years, always cognizant of Mickey Pogue's pep talk to all new employees: "It'll be hard and often unpleasant work but you'll have a picnic every day. Remember I didn't say every day a picnic".