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Italian Immigrant
Vulcania
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It was July 21, 1955 when the ship Vulcania left Naples' Harbour. The excitement I felt at the prospect of venturing to a new land, all the way on the other side of the ocean, and my desire for adventure (I was 15) made my good-byes to my relatives less painful.

After docking in several Mediterranean ports to pick up passengers, we arrived in Lisbon, the last European city before crossing the Atlantic. In total, the crossing took 13 days. On some of those days, the waves grew in size and the color of the ocean intensified as did my anxiety. On the less extreme days I enjoyed standing at the bow of the ship watching it slice through and part the waters, sea foam spraying, dolphins racing alongside. It was here that I fantasized about the new land.

On the fourth of August 1955 we sighted land - Halifax. By now, my anticipation was so great that the time it took to actually dock seemed lengthier than the entire trip. Fantasy turned to reality and, in spite of my young age, or maybe because of it, I was struck by the tired and sad faces of the other passengers. It was a painful reminder of the places and people I had left behind.

Years later, I still recall the stern faces of the Immigration Officers who mechanically processed us. I had envisioned warm smiles. I guess it was unrealistic to think that these people could warmly process so many thousands of people.

I then boarded a train. My destination: Ottawa. But before doing so we were instructed to buy food for the journey. It was here that I felt the foreigner. It was difficult to make myself understood, to understand. I purchased a loaf of sliced bread, squeezed it to test for freshness, and when I discovered that it had shrunk so much, I purchased another 5 sure that that would be enough for one person. How surprised I was to find just how much bread I really had! It tasted funny, a bitter reminder of what I had left behind. An older woman generously offered me some of her taralli, a taste I was familiar with. It comforted me.

The train ride from Halifax to Ottawa disappointed me. The landscape I had envisioned, one filled with quaint, small homes was not what I saw. Instead, my eyes took in long stretches of flat, dull landscape.

Forty-five years have passed. I am a happily married woman with a family of my own. I have watched this country grow, change, and it has shaped me as much as I have shaped it. I am two people: I am proud to be a Canadian; I am proud to be Italian. This is my story.