

Cesidio Mariani
Italian Immigrant
Queen Frederica
June 12, 1955



I came to Canada from a small Italian town in central Italy. I arrived on June 12, 1955 on the Queen Frederica. I followed my father, who had come to Canada in 1952 because of the poor economic conditions at home. The trip for me was very dramatic. The day that I boarded the ship on June 4, 1955, was a very sad one. My mother and one of my aunts accompanied me and my older sister, Maria, to Naples. We were told that we could bring our luggage aboard and could come off the ship until departure time. However, when we tried to leave the ship, the officer on the ship would not let us go off, while the one on shore would not let my mother on to talk to us. So, I could not say good-bye to my mother who was staying behind with my younger sister, Luisa. I can still hear my mother crying out my name. I cried and waved my blue handkerchief until my mother was no longer visible.

The voyage was fairly pleasant for the first two days at sea. Plenty of good food, games and movies. Then, I got seasick and did not get out of my cabin, which I shared with two other old men, for several days. I hardly ate for the rest of the journey.

I left home with mixed feelings. On one hand I was sad because I was leaving behind my mother and my younger sister. On the other hand, I was looking forward to seeing my father, after over three years.

At the time I arrived in Canada I was 13 years old. After disembarking, we were led into Pier 21. I remember the floor in the reception hall as a place of organized chaos. People standing next to their luggage waiting for custom officers for clearance of their goods that they had brought with them. My sister and I had no problems. However, I remember customs officers removing meat products and bottles of liquor, even throwing some bottles on the floor, breaking them. It was a very busy place.

When we got off the boat, we were tired from the eight-day voyage and not having eaten properly the last few days due to seasickness. Things did not get better. One of the worst things I remember was my experience with the new food, first the bread and then the macaroni. The second worse was my train trip from Halifax to Montreal. The train was

not as comfortable as the one now placed outside Pier 21. It was not suitable to transport people, especially over such a long distance. The seats were made of solid wood and at night they would open, i.e., the back would go flat and the seat would double and used as beds. We had no blankets and, even though it was the middle of June, I still feel the chill of the first night in Canada. The train stopped in every small village that we came across, even though no one got off or on. The train was pulled by a steam locomotive, i.e. coal-burning. By the time we arrived in Montreal, my clothes were black. I will not talk about the colour of the bath water the next morning. I felt sorry for some of my new friends that were going on to Toronto! Coming back to the food- even though I had not eaten a good meal for days and I was very hungry, I could not swallow the marble white, sliced bread, which we bought in Halifax. This experience is still vivid in my memory. Later on the train, we went to the dining car. I ordered macaroni. This was also a bad experience. They were nothing like anything I had ever tasted before. I forced a few spoonfuls down my throat, but I could not take more. I went hungry for another day. We finally arrived in Montreal in the evening of June 13th. I made sure I did not take with me the bread and fish I had bought in Halifax and deposited it on a step in the station.

I was extremely happy that we had finally arrived and to see my father. He was waiting for me and my sister, Maria, with my uncle. They took us to the house where we were to live for a few months. I was bewildered at the party my father had arranged for us. There were quite a few people, plenty of real food and a three-piece orchestra!

The summer for me was very long. It was very hard to make new friends when one did not speak the language. I finally met the son of a friend of my father who had arrived a few months before and became good friends. We are still friends today. With September came another bad experience: school. When I arrived to Canada, I did not know a word of English. For months, which seemed an eternity, I was in class but understood nothing. The only friend that I had made in the summer was going to a different school. There was no one at my school that could help me and my father only understood a very few English words. I was demoralized and depressed. Finally, my father asked a girl of Italian origin to teach me some English once or twice a week. A few weeks later, things looked a lot brighter and I enjoyed school very much and went to university and later I obtained a professional accounting designation, which allowed me to hold several interesting and rewarding positions.

I returned to Italy on several occasions. My wife and three children have also been there and we all enjoyed our trips there. I still love Italy and find it a beautiful country to visit, but Canada is my home.

