

Emidia Tirabassi
Italian Immigrant
Groote Beer
March 5, 1957



On March 5, 1957, at the age of 23, I boarded the Groote Beer in Holland and traveled eight days to arrive in Halifax. I was the eldest of eight children and the first to leave home for Canada. My home was Ascoli Piceno, Italy - located in the province of Marche.

The Groote Beer was a small ship and the waters were very rough. It was rocking so much, several times I thought we were going to tip. When we finally arrived at Pier 21 in Halifax, my legs were still shaking. It was hard to tell if I was on land or on water. I did not speak any English at the time and had to argue with the customs officer over my final destination.

My plans had been made and my ticket purchased to take a train to Hamilton, Ontario where I had friends and relatives waiting for me. The customs officer however was insisting that I travel on to Winnipeg, Manitoba instead. At the time they were soliciting immigrants to go to Winnipeg to work on farms and to populate these more remote regions. After much arguing, the customs officer threw down my passport, stamped it and permitted my travel to Hamilton, as planned.

I immediately boarded the train, it was very cold that day and all I remember from my train journey was a lot of snow - 3-4 ft high. I was later joined in Hamilton by one of my brothers.

I married in Canada, 47 years ago, a woman from the same region of Italy and have 2 children.