

Gerry Lisi
Italian Immigrant
Vulcania
Late March 1954



PIER 21 - PASSED
MEMORIES

This is a true happening which started in Italy in 1952 and ended in Toronto in 1958.



On a cool March morning in 1952, a teary eyed man from Scifelli, Italy, bid farewell to his wife Filomena and five children, Maria, Giulia, Venanzio, Gina and his youngest son Gerardo. As Alfredo boarded the ship which was to take him far across the Atlantic Ocean, to a new land and new life, he could hear the loud cries of his young son Gerardo, calling to his father. This scene was one of many, on that cool morning on the dock in Napoli, Italy. When you are young, time seems to go by fast.

Two years went by very quickly, and this story repeated itself in March, 1954. Filomena and only four of her five children were going to be boarding the ship Vulcania for the long trip across the cold rough

Atlantic. The youngest daughter Gina could not travel with the rest of the family due to a leg injury, which left her with a defect. An operation was not possible due to lack of funds. The laws of Canada were such that it did not allow any immigrants with a handicap into the country. Filomena and her four children bid farewell to Gina to start a horrendous journey across the rough ocean. From the moment that I set foot on the ship until we got off on Pier 21', 14 days later most of my time was spent in the intensive care unit of the ship, as I was dehydrating and not being able to eat! The only thing I remember that kept me going was some pizza and a sip of beer that my mother used to feed me every so often. My mother's assurance that at the end of the voyage my father Alfredo would be waiting for us in Toronto made my pain more bareable. After

spending 14 days in a sick state, we arrived in Halifax, Pier 21 to the most beautiful sight these eyes were to see, LAND!!!

The next 2 days were spent on a very noisy train, eating strange food and watching as the new sites passed by our windows. Finally as my mother had promised, there at the train station in Toronto was my papa, Alfredo, with a big smile and teary eyed. The next four years were spent in trying to complete our family and bring our sister Gina to Canada. After 4 long years we were granted permission and finally the LISI family was Whole again! As years passed there was a void in my life! As fate would have it I met a lovely woman Helen, from Nova Scotia, whom I married on December 14, 1968 and helped me fill that void. The next year July 1969 we traveled to Halifax but I was still haunted by the memories of the Trans-Atlantic voyage. It was like a voice was calling me to visit Pier 21 and set my bare feet in the waters of the cold Atlantic Ocean. As I arrived at the waters' edge, I broke into a cold sweat and my body started to tremble. What seemed like hours, 5 minutes later, as I stepped in the cold water, a calm came over me, my body stopped shaking, and I stopped sweating. It took me 15 years, from the time I first set foot on Pier 21 to return to the same spot to find the peace that I had been missing.

My wife Helen and I have since retired to her family home in beautiful Moose River, Nova Scotia. Yes, in memory of my mother and father who have since passed away I have the LISI name on the SOBEY WALL of HONOUR.

P.S. It would be a great completion to this story, if it was possible to have a reunion of the passengers that arrived on the VULCANIA on that March 29/30, 1954.