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Italian Immigrant
Vulcania
December 2, 1964

CANADA'S IMMIGRATION MUSEUM PIER 21



Originally born in Rome, but grew up in a small town 2 ½ hours east. It was November 23, 1964. My last night in Torre dei Nolfi a small town in the Abruzzi Region, it was a



night full of excitement and yet filled with uncertainties. Leaving the familiar surroundings of Italy for the promise land called 'Canada', a place of hopes, dreams and opportunity.

Lying in bed next to my grandmother, both of us unable to sleep, at the tender age of nine, my grandmother kept on reassuring me as tears rolled down her face that everything

would be all right, and someday we would see each other again. That day never came; she passed away at my 16th birthday. As the final hour counted down, the 2 am alarm sounded, in one hour our ride would be at our doorstep to take my mother, brother and myself to Naples to board a ship for Canada. After all the tear shedding, and promises of seeing each other again was done we were on our way to meet my father who left for Canada, January 20, 1964, aboard The Saturnia, with hopes, dreams and ambitions of starting a new life for all of us. He worked hard to pay back the money he borrowed for his voyage and still managed to put money aside for our trip.

After the 2 ½ hour car ride with everything that we owned in a suitcase, we boarded this huge ship called Vulcania, for the Trans Atlantic journey. On board we were assigned our room, and table numbers. As the Vulcania blew its horn and began pulling away from the dock, we along with hundreds of people on the deck, some crying, some waving to relatives and friends, all of our faces puzzled with uncertainties and expectations, but with hopes of a better life. Our first boat stop was Gibraltar. At this stop, vendors with boats surrounded the ship. Ropes were lowered from the Vulcania to these small boats. The vendors would show you a product, if you wanted to purchase it, you would send money down these ropes and in return they would send up your purchase. We of course did not buy anything; we only had enough money for the train

from Halifax to Toronto. It was nine days of stormy seas, and seeing only water splash against our window in our cabin, anything we attempted to eat would come back out, and every time the bow of the ship went in the water I would hear a grinding noise from the propeller being above the water level. There were ropes tied along the hallways for passengers to hold on to as we attempted to walk from one area of the ship to another. I remember seeing an old woman trying to walk along the hallway, she fell, her shoes went one way and she went the opposite way, while on the ground she began reciting the rosary.

On December 2 we landed at Pier 21 in Halifax. It was dark and cold. As we were hustled off the ship along with hundreds of people in line to this huge warehouse that had wooden benches to sit on and steel cages to hold luggage, while

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<i>Giuseppe</i> <i>Rociano</i>	<i>21.6.1953</i> <i>31.8.1955</i>	<i>pass separat</i> <i>valid</i>
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<i>[Signature]</i>		
Data il Définir le Date Ausgestellt am		
<i>9.12.1953</i>		
Nr. 1859913 /P		

waiting to get their personal belongings and then proceed to customs. There was joy and confusion as mothers holding little ones, fathers carrying luggage, children crying as names were being called. Our wait seemed forever, finally our name was called, my mother holding our passport and paper in one hand while holding us with the other, pushing the luggage forward with her leg. All attempts were made to communicate with the custom officer, but that proved to be fruitless. The only means of talking was with hand gestures and nodding. The only English we knew was C-AN-DA (Canada) and WE-AND (Welland), we practiced saying this on the ship. At this point we only had two things on our mind. One was to see my father again and secondly to get the Landed Immigrant Stamp. Finally after a long period of time we got our stamp, now we were on our way to the train that would take us to Toronto. The train seemed dark in colour; the interior was well used with small rooms and narrow hallways. It was supposed to be a two-day train ride but instead took us three days because of bad weather. Looking outside the small windows of the train, I never saw so much snow in all my nine

years. On the train all we could do was watch people eat and hope there would be some left over for us. An elderly gentleman, realizing that we had no food, gave us two cans of tuna and two slices of bread that lasted us the entire trip to Toronto. Once we arrived in Toronto we were greeted by an Italian-speaking gentleman who advised us that my uncle was not here to pick us up, but had purchased three train tickets to Welland. This gentleman escorted us to the platform to make sure that we got on the correct train. A few hours later we arrived in Welland in the opening arms of my cousin who I met for the first time. Once the hugging and crying stopped, she saw what we looked like, with hand me down clothes and on the brink of starvation, before bringing us to her houses where my father and family was waiting she proceeded to a department store called Rite-Way where she purchased us clothes and potato chips. Once we arrived at my aunt's house and the familiar hugging and crying stopped we sat down to eat-eat-eat and eat.

After forty years in Canada I re-visited Pier 21. As I made my way up the escalator to the second floor my heart began pumping faster and faster, tears began flowing down my face 'as I remembered where it all began'. This inspired me to share my story.

