

Nicola Lavolpicella
Italian Immigrant
Argentina
July 1951



Canadian Museum of
Immigration at Pier 21
Musée canadien de
l'immigration du Quai 21

My name is Luigi and I would like to share the story of my dad Nicola Lavolpicella and how he came to Canada.



It was the early 1950's and the economic conditions in Italy were poor. There were very few jobs and very little food. News came that 'America' could be the beginning of a new and prosperous life and Nicola thought it was a chance he had to take. He would have to leave behind his parents Luigi and Maria as well as two sisters Apollonia and Porzia.

On July 21, 1951 at the age of 23, with only \$20.00 loaned to him from his uncle, he began his trek from Bari, Italy to Canada aboard the Argentina. His room wasn't very well ventilated and it became very hot, so at night he would take to sleeping on the deck. He quickly made friends with others on

the boat and many became sea sick. My father, who went some days without eating wasn't going to let some waves bother him. He just kept eating at every opportunity. After 10 days his voyage had ended at Pier 21 in Halifax. He had arrived in Canada.

After disembarking, my dad and others boarded a train to Montreal. He would start his first job in Canada working for CNR on the railroad, doing 10 hour days earning \$0.70/hour. They supplied room and board for \$1.75 a day. After 3 weeks he switched jobs and worked in the canteen that served the very same railroad employees. He stayed at this job for only 2 weeks, being told by a friend there were many jobs to be had in Ottawa. So he boarded a bus to Ottawa to



start a new life - again! To his dismay Ottawa wasn't overflowing with jobs like he had hoped. It was now 5 months and no job was on the horizon. He was only getting by with the help of someone he barely knew but became a great friend, Pietro Borracci. He was at his wits end. He decided to take solace in St. Anthony's Church where he spoke to Father Ferraro. His fortunes were about to change. Father Ferraro directed him to Macy's Restaurant at the Voyageur Bus Terminal. He would begin work immediately as a dishwasher. He didn't know it yet but his long career as a Chef was in the works.

He would keep enough money to scrape by and send the rest home back to his family. He made sure he paid his uncle Pasquale Turturro, who had lent him the \$20 at the beginning of his voyage, back in full. There



was always a special gratitude shown to Zio Pasquale. It wasn't long before Macy's rewarded him for his hard work and dedication. They would promote him to Short Order Cook.

He had been in Ottawa 3 years and felt it was time for his Dad to join him. Macy's would help sponsor his father and he would arrive in Ottawa in the summer of 1954. Throughout this time he had begun sending letters back and forth with Francesca Tancorre in Bari. They had never met but the connection was undeniable. Both families thought they would be a perfect match, and though it was only through photos and letters, they could feel a special bond. After a little coaxing

from his sister Apollonia, Nicola would send for Francesca to come to Ottawa. Francesca's parents knew my dad well and couldn't have been happier to bring him into their family. They wanted to make sure that they were married before she took the long trip to Canada. It was decided they would be married by proxy.

On September 21, 1954 my mom arrived to be with my dad. They would live in an apartment complex with many others. A friend of the family, Pina Minichelli, kept them apart the first night stating before you can spend the night together you must get blessed by the priest. The blessing must have went well, my mom and dad would welcome my sister Maria





into the world on January 31, 1956.

With their union a steady stream of relatives came and stayed with my parents starting in January of 1957 when my uncle Franco Tancorre arrived.

Over the next ten years our family would grow with the births of

Caterina born May 9, 1960, Lucia born October 22, 1965 and me, Luigi born September 20, 1967.

He would work hard for the next 3 decades, supporting our family and instilling great family values.

Today he is the proud grandfather of 7 (4 nieces and 3 nephews).

Thanks Dad!



The growing family



Nicola and Francesca's 50th wedding anniversary

