

Pompilio De Francesco
Italian Immigrant
Augustus
March 10, 1958

My Story by Pompilio De
Francesco



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

I was born in a little town in Italy called Guardiaregia, in Molise, in the province of Campobasso, on December 4, 1929. I grew up in the forested mountain area and I scrambled to get a 5 year elementary education under Mussolini's dictatorial fascist regime. At the end of my last school year, Italy entered the Second World War with the rest of the nations.



I was tense and stressed during World War II; food was scarce for my family and all the townspeople and the rumble of the war planes that filled the sky every day echoed in my head. My grandfathers had travelled to North America earlier in the century and told me stories of how rich and beautiful North America was. They had made some money working in Canada and the USA before they returned to Italy. In their mature age, they saw that they had made mistakes in North America and in their return to Italy.

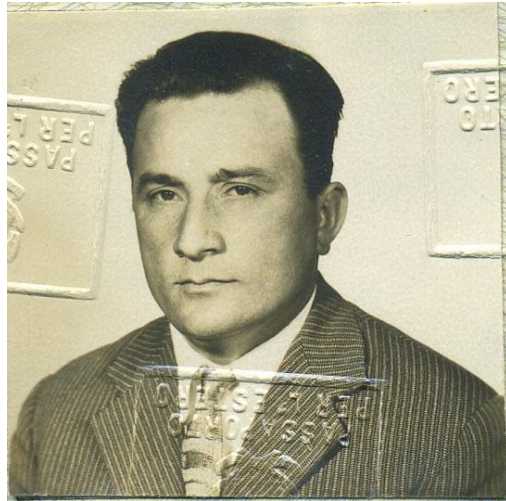
We were brainwashed by Mussolini's propaganda. We were told that Italy needed to find its "place in the sun" among the nations by expanding into places like Somalia and having its own empire. Italy had high population density. It was up to 700 people per square kilometre around Lombardy and 500 around Naples, but Canada was said to have only 1 person per square kilometre. They told us that Canada was a country with great resources but a small population of around 10 million, and that even with the short Canadian growing season there was plenty room for all of us who were scraping together a living in Italy.

During World War II, 1943 was the worst of all years. When I was 13 years of age, in the middle of October, the Germans retreated. Ten hours later, a company of 20 Canadian soldiers arrived in town. It seemed that the danger of war was over but this was only a short dream... Yet, it didn't take long to notice the difference between the Germans and the

Canadians. The Germans demanded food from us with threats, but these young Canadian guys asked for fresh milk, eggs or a bottle of wine in exchange for warm blankets, underwear, pants, and shirts. This reinforced my concept of Canada and the hope to someday move west as my grandfathers did.

About ten years later, in the 1950's, some stone masonry workers from my home town went to Canada. According with Canadian immigration law, contractors from my hometown had first settled in Canada between 1920-1925. They were the De Carlo brothers and they had sponsored quite a few people who were qualified stone masons.

This second wave of emigration in the 50's was the turning point for all of us born in Guardiaregia. People with last names like Pallotta, De Francesco, Rotundo, Albanese, Vecchiarelli, De Carlo, Sampogna and many more left for Canada. My turn, Pompilio De Francesco, arrived when I was sponsored by my father-in-law, Domenico Nicolangelo Rotundo.



I boarded the transatlantic ship Augustus with my family on the 2of March 1958 in Naples. This was a happy adventure for my wife Rosa (Angelarosa) and our daughter Carmela. We had a little room with bunk beds and a small sink. My wife and daughter saw their first films on the trip. My wife would always remember watching "Via col Vento" ("Gone with the Wind"). On the third day of travel, we found ourselves on

the Atlantic Ocean with a high turbulent sea. Many people were sea sick during the voyage, but my family and I made it to Halifax in good shape. It felt good to put our feet on terra ferma in Canada on March 10, 1958.

The weather in Halifax was cloudy and gloomy, however, this did not dampen my spirits. The first thing I did was enter a food store. I was impressed with the variety of food I saw, but I was going to Toronto, Ontario. We boarded a train and in Toronto, we stopped at beautiful Union Station. We saw Queen's Park, City Hall and the Bank of Canada

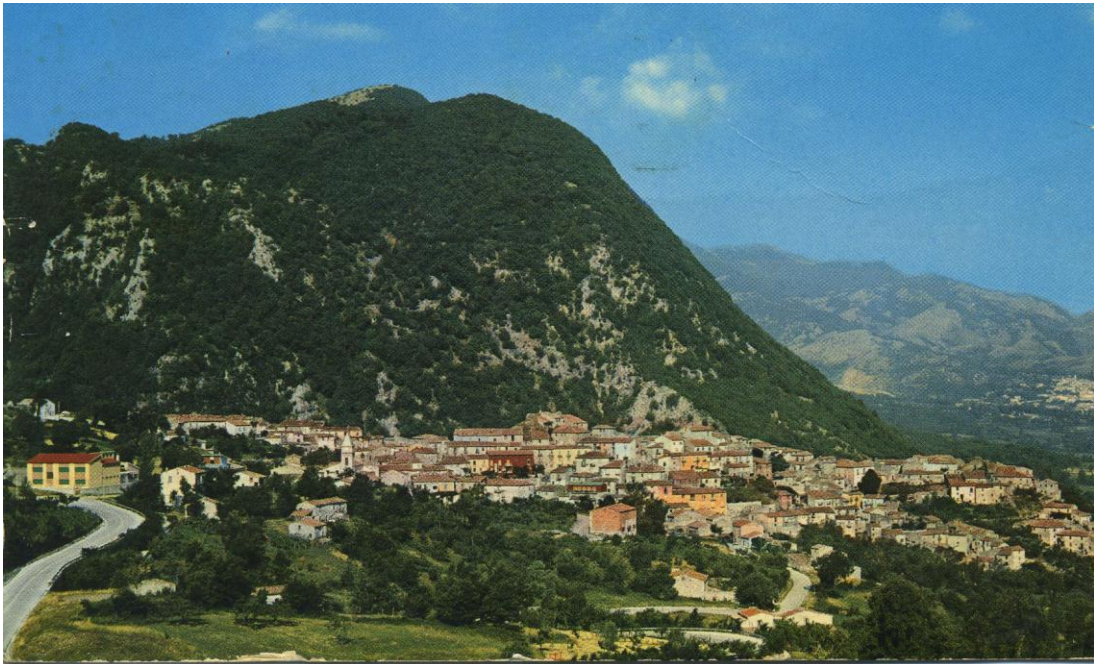
Tower. We went to live in a flat on EarlsCourt Avenue. With lots of determination, I put my family on solid ground without any help, taking any work I could find. In the summer of 1961, I went to Thompson, Manitoba for three months to work for Inco.

Although the wages were good, I was reluctant to bring my family there as there was no college or university for my children to attend when they got older. Returning to Toronto, I found a job with the Oshawa Group where I happily worked for 31 years.

I am now 80 years old. When I reflect on my life in Canada, I can say that I was a determined young man who worked hard. My wife stayed home to look after our four daughters who all went to college or university. I thank God because He took me by the hand and guided me to Canada, land of plenty.

Thank you Canada. Thanks for the good people I encountered. Thanks for the freedom. Thank you God, for everything.

Written December 12, 2009, in Mississauga, Ontario.



Pompilio and Rosa's hometown Guardiaregia, Italy



Pompilio, Rosa and Carmela, plus Pompilio's parents, Giovanni and Filomena and his two brothers, Salvatore and Vittorio. Taken in Italy before the family moved to Canada.



Pompilio and Rosa's three eldest daughters, Carmela, Letizia and Filomena, circa 1963



Pompilio and Rosa's three eldest daughters: Carmela, Letizia and Filomena, Christmas 1967



Pompilio and Rosa De Francesco's 50th Anniversary



Rosa and Pompilio in the 1990's



Rosa and Pompilio with Nicole, Filomena, Letizia and Carmela at their 49th Wedding Anniversary party in 1993