

Salvatore Caruso
by Son Antony
Caruso
Italian Immigrant
Argentina
November 22, 1952



RECOLLECTIONS OF THE JOURNEY, LANDING, AND TRAIN TRIP

On November 8, Dad left Pisticci by train and traveled to Naples. He arrived there on the morning of the ninth. He went to the Cunard Line company and boarded the Argentina. The ship sailed from Naples on the 10th.

He stayed in passenger class. There were 10 to 12 people assigned to a room sleeping in bunk beds. He met different people and quickly made friends with some of them. The first night at sea, Dad got sick. He was making his way to the deck of the ship and got lost. He ended up walking through the kitchen. The combination of the waves and the smells of the kitchen made him sick (though the food on board the Argentina was good). After that night he seemed to have gotten his sea legs and he was never to be sick on board a ship again.

The ship landed in Genoa for a day. He spent half the day touring the city with some people from the ship. Since they didn't have much money, they went back on board the ship. It sailed to Gibraltar. The ship was moored far from the port and other ships came to it bringing more passengers. He stayed on board. From the deck of the ship, he was able to see the Rock of Gibraltar. Also, other ships came by with people on board selling wares to the passengers on board the Argentina. Some the items were kerchiefs. He recalls that the transaction took place by having items thrown on board from the other ship. They spent a half day there.

When the sea was rough, the crew strung a rope from pole to pole so that people could hang on. The ship then arrived at Lisbon, Portugal in the morning of November 15. The ship spent the whole day there. The captain told the passengers that they could embark, but they had to be back by 6:00 p.m. The ex - king of Italy was in exile in Portugal, and Dad and four others wanted to see him. A cab driver was going to give them a tour of the city as well as the villa of the ex - king for a \$1.00 each. His villa was 15 km south of Lisbon in a city called Cascais. A taxi took them and they saw his villa. However, the ex - king went to France to see his family and so he wasn't there. They signed their names in a guest book and were promised a photo of the ex - king and his family (which Dad

never got). They left the villa and went to see the soccer stadium. A big stone monument was there that was dedicated to the Torino soccer team who last played with Portugal before a plane crash took the lives of all the players. The cab driver then took them to see the Santa Maria church - it was beautiful.

By now it was about 3:00 or 4:00 o'clock and they didn't want to be late for the ship. The cab driver took them to the sea port. Everyone paid the cab driver their dollar. When Dad went to pay, he gave the driver a Canadian dollar (with the face of King George on it). The cab driver looked at the money and then said to Dad, ³I don't want this! This isn't money! I want American money!² The cab driver hailed a police officer who happened to be close by. The policeman spoke Italian. ³ What is the problem?² he asked, and Dad explained the situation. Now at that time, the Canadian dollar was trading at about \$1.10 US. The police officer told the driver that this money was more expensive than the US money. When the driver heard this, he quickly took Dad's dollar and he wanted to exchange all of his American money for Canadian money. Dad told him to get lost. Dad was surprised that a city like Lisbon wouldn't know about Canadian money!

The ship left Lisbon and sailed through the Azores Islands. It moored in between the islands and took on more passengers. Dad was able to see the islands from on deck. He saw Monte Santo Michele. The islands were pretty from the ship. He saw sheep and goat farmers, and some waved to the passengers on board the ship. When they left the island, crew members came to all the cabins below and locked the windows. People asked what was going on. The crew chuckled and said tomorrow we will be experiencing cyclonic conditions. That is, rough waves. The point they were crossing in the Atlantic was the point where many seas came together (the Mediterranean, the North Sea, the Atlantic). Passengers were not allowed to go on deck. They had to hold onto poles and ropes to eat. A lot of people got sea sick. It was scary seeing the giant waves.

For the next five days there was no land in sight, just the big waves on the ocean. Food that was not eaten by the passengers was dumped into the ocean. Many didn't eat during the rough waves, so a lot more food was dumped. You could see the dolphins swimming behind the ship eating some of the food.

After five days, Halifax came into view. It looked like a big farm - wilderness, with no large buildings. Dad was a bit afraid. He thought to himself, ³What have I gotten myself into? I am in North America. What am I going to do?² It did not seem inhabited to my father. As the ship got closer to shore, he could make out small house, rocks, and the building

which was Pier 21. On November 22, the Argentina docked. It was the last time it would carry passengers.

Dad said goodbye to those people who were going to the US. Pier 21 was very big. He didn't know where to go. He went into the building with the others and was preparing to be checked through customs. There was a wait, so he and a few others went to a store in the building to see if they could get something to eat. They went to buy bread. No one was able to speak English, and the store owner didn't speak Italian. They wanted to buy a loaf of sliced bread, but they didn't know how much it cost. So dad got the others to put all their pocket change in his two hands. Dad held it up to the owner, who gingerly picked out a dime. Dad ate the bread, but he didn't like it. He thought that if all bread was this bad in Toronto, he would go back to Italy.

Pier 21 was a big place, though few people worked there. Those who did were friendly. Everyone was checking through customs and each was given a certain time in which they would be checked. Dad waited a day in Pier 21. His two pieces of luggage were checked and he was admitted into the country with no problem.

He boarded the train which would take him to Toronto. He sat in booths that could seat 4 people. Bunk beds were above the seats, and Dad remembered that he always bumped his head on these whenever he stood up. In the morning of November 23rd, Dad saw snow. He had seen snow before in Italy, but never this much. As he looked out the window, he noticed that a great area was covered with it. He noticed small huts in this snow as well. Dad spoke to a person who spoke French. He told Dad that he was looking at water that was frozen, and those huts were ice fishing huts. He held out his hands to show how thick the ice was on that lake. Dad never believed that ice could be that thick. He honestly thought that the French person was pulling his leg!

The train made a stop in Montreal. It was to wait for six hours. Dad and a few people he had made friends with on board decided not to venture out into the city. They were afraid that they would get lost, so they stayed on the train. Dad went to get some food. He saw the word *Ospaghetti*¹ and bought some. It was Chef Boyardee spaghetti, and it tasted terrible. Dad ate it with bread and coffee. He liked the coffee - in fact it was one of the few foods he liked so far. So between Montreal and Toronto, Dad only drank coffee!

Through the windows of the train, he saw a lot of trees, bushes, and snow. He received an application form for free land to farm that sponsored by the Canadian government. He was not interested. He arrived in Toronto at 6:00 in the morning in Union Station. He was impressed by its size.

He was met by his sister, Maria (who had sponsored him), and her husband Rocco, as well as a few others. As he left the Station he saw the huge Royal York Hotel and the very tall Bank of Commerce. He asked his sister about the bread in Toronto. She said that Toronto also sold Italian bread. Dad was relieved. He rested for a couple of days with his sister and her husband, and then he started to looking for a job.

REASONS FOR COMING TO CANADA

In Italy, there was no future for a young man like my father in his hometown of Pisticci. His brother-in-law, Rocco Fogetti, came to Canada first. He applied for his wife (dad's sister) Maria to come. Dad's father came to North America earlier in his life. He knew the opportunities available in North America. He told my dad that there were good opportunities for a barber. Dad thought that Canada and the U.S. were one country at first. He learned about Canada by asking people in his hometown who had visited or had relatives here. Dad was looking for any opportunity. If there were job opportunities in Venezuela, Dad would have applied there! It just so happened that his sister was in Canada, and that's why he came to this country.

His father was an old man, his mother was an old lady. There was nothing for dad in Pisticci. He was working very hard, but there was little money to be had. Either join the army, join the Carabinieri, or leave the country. A year earlier to his departure, he was called by the army for his physical. He passed and was told that within a year papers would be sent requesting his service. My dad also applied to the country's police force, the Carabinieri. It was a good job that paid well. He also applied to come to Canada. He would take whatever application came first. My dad was ready to go into the army, however he received his papers from his sister who sponsored him. In April or May 1952, the Canadian Embassy sent a letter to dad to go to Rome to get a physical from the health inspector. He completed the physical, but he had to go back home to wait for them to call. At the end of October, 1952, dad received a letter from the embassy. He had to send his passport to Rome and then they would send him his visa. He got his visa, then he left Italy on November 10th. Five days after he had left, he had received his notice to serve in the army!

ADJUSTING TO LIVING IN CANADA

The food was good in this country. He wasn't that picky an eater. If it tasted good, he would eat it. He tried French fries and ketchup here for the first time and liked it. His favorite was steak. He enjoyed it very much. You rarely got to eat steak at home unless an animal died. Steak

is still his favorite food. He tried new foods like corn beef and hot beef sandwiches.

The language was tough to learn at first. When he found a job, he located a person whom he had met. He worked for the company that did the laundry for the shop. He had studied English in Italy. He taught my dad common expressions, greetings, and courtesies such as ³How do you want your haircut?² He was told that English was a bastard language. He was told to always begin his questions with the word Oplease¹ so that he didn't come across sounding too demanding.

The weather was very cold. Dad's first winter found him without a coat. He bought a spring jacket from his brother-in-law for \$20. Before he knew how to take the streetcar, dad would walk everywhere. It was cold. In those days, haircuts were 75¢. People usually gave 25¢ tips. During the Christmas holidays, in one week, Dad cut over a hundred haircut and saved \$20. He made \$25/week in wages. So by the end of a week, he had \$45. When he had saved enough money, he went to Eaton's (at College St.) to buy his first winter coat. He paid \$45 for it. He can still feel the warmth it provided for him, especially his back!

Once dad was in this country, he began looking for a job. he read an ad in the Globe and Mail about a barber shop looking for a barber to hire. Dad lived at Dundas and Manning, 237 Manning, and he walked to Dupont and Bathurst (he was afraid to take the streetcar - get lost?). He was freezing. He met a lady there, at 1092 Bathurst, who spoke Italian. ³You're Italian,² she said. She told my dad to go to 44 Front St. West. It was across the customs building. There he would find her husband's barber shop. He told her to write it on a piece of paper. She directed dad to take the Bathurst streetcar. Dad got on the streetcar and showed the driver. The driver told dad when he would get off the streetcar. Dad found the Canadian people very nice and always helpful. He found little discrimination. It took him to Front St., where it made a left (Dad still remembers all the tracks that were on the road.) It then continued to Bay St.

On the northeast corner of Front & Bay, Dad found the barber shop, Martella's Barber Shop, owned by Antonio Martella. He went in and introduced himself to him. He was taken to another room, and Martella started asking Dad questions. ³Are you a barber?², ³How long have you been cutting hair?², ³Can you cut hair?² My Dad understood that Martella still wasn't sure about him so he made him this deal. He would work for him for one day, without pay. If Martella finds him qualified, hire him. If not, Dad will leave, and no harm will be done. He agreed, so the next day Dad arrived with his tools that he brought with him from Italy. Martella looked at Dad's tools and said that if he were to work here

he would have to get new tools. So Dad worked for half a day. Martella was impressed, and hired Dad on. He bought new tools for Dad (\$55.00 - hand and electric clippers, strap, shaving brush, scissors) and would take \$5.00 out of his weekly pay check to pay for the tools. He was to be at work for 8:00 a.m. and work until 6:00 p.m. They were closed Saturday and Sunday.

Dad met a lot of customers while cutting hair. After Dad was working for two or three months, some regular customers started waiting for Dad as they liked his work. As they waited, they read the newspaper. Dad would ask them for the translation and pronunciation of many words. They were always happy to help and they encouraged Dad to keep asking and learning. They were impressed that Dad wanted to learn. They even urged him to attend school. He found a fellow, Ario Gatto, who studied English in Italy. He studied medicine but he knew how to read and write in English, but not talk. Dad went to him twice a week to his home and paid him \$2.00 to teach Dad how to read and write English. Every word he was able to read and write, dad also learned how to speak it. Dad went for over a year to his house. If he was able to go to school, Dad would be able to speak the language very well. He was too busy, however, because work came first.

Dad lived with his sister and her husband at 237 Manning, south of College (1952-54?). They then moved close by to 165 Grace, north of College, where they stayed six years. They finally moved to 476 Winona Drive.

After three days of starting his job at Martella's, Dad was still learning about public transportation. He walked from his home to Dundas and Bathurst. There was the TTC guide girls who sold tickets. He had the address of the shop written on a piece of paper. He showed her the address and she pointed to a streetcar and said ³Go!² Dad got on, however it was not the right streetcar. It turned on Adelaide. It was headed in a different direction. Dad immediately got off at the next stop and walked back to Bathurst. He remembered the train tracks on Front St. and walked there. He then continued to walk to the shop. It was December. When he arrived at the shop, Martella asked, ³What happened to you?² Dad told him to wait, as he went over to the radiator and gave it a big hug. He then told Martella what had happened. Martella told him that there were several streetcars that run on Bathurst and told him which one to take the next time.

DISCRIMINATION IN CANADA

Only the British showed any discrimination against the Italians. The war was still fresh in people's minds, and the British fought against the

Italians. The British were the first to criticize Canada and they made enough money here so that they could go back to England. While Dad was cutting their hair, some would remark, ³Italians are good people, but they are not good for fighting.² Dad stayed quiet. He didn't know how to respond because his English wasn't very good. In the evenings, a group of friends would gather on the corner of College and Manning to talk. Loitering was not allowed. Sometimes the police would come and tell the crowd to move. Yet Dad found that people were always there to help you. They took the time to help you and make you understand about things.

When Dad learned more English, he would defend himself more often. One day, a fellow who was talking about immigrants said, "You know those people, those DP's"

Dad responded, "What do you mean?"

He answered, "You know, DP, like you."

"What do you mean, like me?"

"You know," the man continued, "people coming from Europe."

"I'm not a DP." Dad said defiantly.

"Yes you are."

"Funny," Dad said, looking the man over. "You don't look Indian to me?"

"What do you mean?"

"You know, Indians. They were the first people in Canada."

"Oh, you don't know what you are talking about!"

Dad responded, "When the judge gave me my citizenship, he told me that I had rights just like anyone else in this country." With that being said, the man went away.

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A CANADIAN

It took five years to become a citizen. You had to learn the names of all the provinces and their capitals. You had to know the name of the Queen, her husband and the number and names of her children. In 1958, dad went to get his citizenship. He placed his hand on the Bible and read an oath. He recalls the judge saying: ³Now remember, you are Canadian. You have the rights like any other Canadian in this country.²

They mailed dad's citizenship and he was invited to a reception at City Hall, but he was too busy working.

Dad feels good about being a member of this country. It gave him a new life. He thanks Canada for the opportunity it gave him to start a new life. He made sure to learn about this country and to respect its laws.

Dad found very few Canadians bad. It was a good country. He felt that you should keep your Italian customs in your home. He liked the fact that he could make a lot of money working here. He was able to save money and help out his family. He found Canadians to be honest people. Canadian people gave more support to Italian immigrants than Italian people would give to Canadian people in Italy. He found little discrimination here. In Italy, there was more bureaucracy. Here everyone was treated the same, regardless of your status.

The only thing he didn't like was the weather - it was too cold.