

The Damiani Family
by Son Sam Damiani
Italian Immigrants
Olympia
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CANADA'S IMMIGRATION MUSEUM
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I still remember that early morning around the end of April 1966 when the whole family, my dad Giulio, my mom Vilde, my younger brother Fred and me together with a family friend and her son who was the driver piled in to their car to go to Naples.

We were immigrating to Canada. Our journey was starting at 3 am and just like what was laying ahead it was

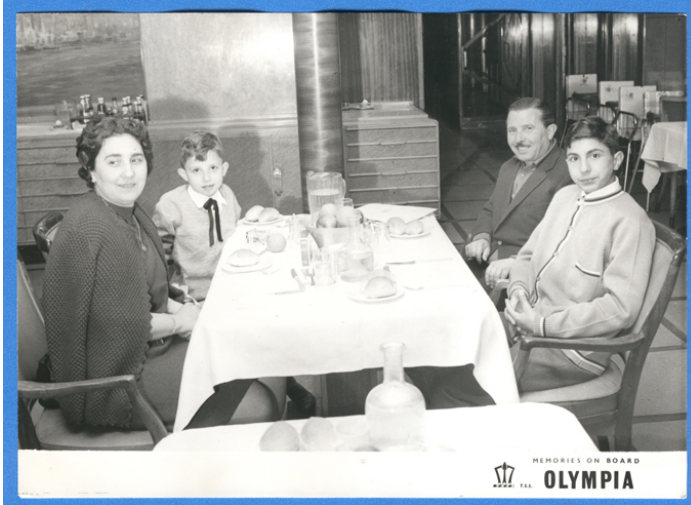
dark and cold. I remember sitting in the back of the car thinking what would happen to us? where would we end up? What was in store for our family? How was I going to make new friends and how quickly I could learn the language.?

It was exciting as well as scary because we were going to the big city of Naples from our small town of Popoli, population 6,000, in the Abruzzi region and we were going to go to Canada by ship.

The name of the ship was Olympia and at that time to a 14 year old it looked massive but thinking back and having cruised with some of the modern ships I am sure that it must have looked quite small by today's standards.

The ship interior was like a hotel and fancy restaurant all wrapped into one and it had a swimming pool to booth which in those days for us it was a rare sight coming from a small town





because luxuries like that were non-existent. You only saw those things in the movies from America.

I couldn't believe all the amenities we had on board, the abundance and the variety of food available.

The trip itself was interesting. It took seven days because we stopped

in Genoa, outside of Cannes and then Halifax. The ride was pretty calm while we were in the Mediterranean but not so once we got into the Atlantic. It is amazing how some details stick in your mind but I clearly remember the PA system informing the passengers that we were crossing the Strait of Gibraltar and this would be the last piece of land we would see for a few days until Halifax. It happened at lunch time and no sooner was the announcement made that the ship started rolling and I have never seen a dining room clear so fast and it was half empty for the next few days until we reached Halifax. I remember my mom being sick the whole time and spent most of the trip in the cabin. Myself, dad and my

brother fared pretty well. The interesting thing was that when you walked around you noticed small containers that looked like they were made of cardboard throughout the ship.. I found out soon enough what they were for when I got sick. It only happened once but it was enough. I still have a



vague memory of the Captain's dinner and if my memory serves me right they were also shooting some kind of movie in Greek.



I also remember that the day before we got to Halifax it was foggy, the ship would sound the horn at set intervals and for some reason they had strung ropes around the outside decks and inside.

I was glad and sad to see Halifax. Glad because we had reached destination but sad because what seemed a vacation to me was over and also realized that the hardest journey into a new country was beginning

What struck me about Halifax was how different it was from Naples. The amount of trees and lack of buildings compared to the port of Naples where everything was concrete buildings and little vegetation. I loved the ruggedness of this country immediately.



Once we came off the ship we were escorted to what seemed to me this huge room with benches full of immigrants. We moved along until we got to the immigration official that finally stamped our passports with the stamp that said "Canada Immigration May 3 1966 Halifax , Immigrant Landed".

An interesting incident happened while we were docked at Halifax. We heard a commotion and what we

found out was that some waiters tried to sneak into Canada with the help of some passengers. The waiters had given the passengers their luggage to be declared as their own. The passengers and waiters got caught but I do not know what happened to them.

Once we arrived in Toronto we were met by my two uncles from my mother's side. They had landed in the 50's together with my mother's mom (grandmother) and they were the ones that sponsored us. My grandfather had passed away by this time. One of the uncles has actually gone back with his kids in the 80's to live in Italy.



My dad who had worked for twenty years in a chemical plant found work with my uncle in a commercial bakery that made the famous "Wonder Bread". He stayed with this company until he retired at 65 and my mom who had been a homemaker all her life went to work as a sewer in the garment district (Spadina) of Toronto. She worked there for a few years, then went to a company that made electronic components until she retired.

Looking back in the forty one years since immigrating to this great country a lot has happened and the pictures can attest to that. From



immigrants to established proud Canadian citizens.

I and my brother Fred went on to university and both graduated. We are both established in our professions. He works as a HR manager for a utility company

and I as a Director of Logistics for a pharmaceutical company. We are both married to wonderful spouses and each of us have three beautiful kids.

My mom is retired and my dad has passed away October 2005 after suffering with Alzheimer for a few years. I admire their great courage because they were established in their own country but felt that Canada had great opportunities for their children and decided to undertake the journey of moving to another country with no jobs or knowing the language.

All of this was brought back as myself and my family had the privilege of visiting Pier 21 July 2007 as part of celebrating our twenty five years wedding anniversary.



It was a wonderful excursion and I was happy that my children and my wife had an opportunity to get a sense of what it was like to be an immigrant but also appreciate how gracious Canada was to welcome all these individuals from other countries and give them opportunities that were not available to them.

I am very proud of my roots and culture but most of all I am proud to be a Canadian and I want to thank Canada for providing me with the opportunity of achieving the life that I have.