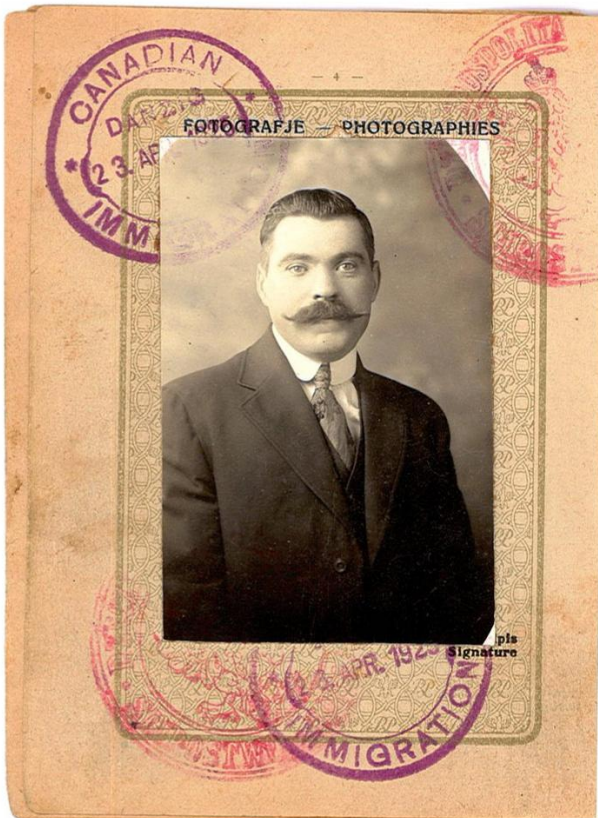


Michael Shwedyk  
Ukrainian Immigrant  
Albertic  
November 29, 1929

My Dad was born Iwan (Joannis) Szwedyk (John Shwedyk), on August 14, 1887 in Horbkow, Ukraine which is a town not far from Lemberg, now Lviv. He was a gentle man, soft spoken, hard-working, and intelligent, with amazing fortitude. He had just one sibling, a younger sister. Their parents both died at a fairly young age and Dad and the sister sold their property and assets. My maternal and paternal grandparents were born and died under Austrian rule.



My Dad served two years in the Austrian army in Serbia, which he described as a semi-civilized people at the time. Although I don't recall many stories of Dad's youth, I recall he was a cavalry man in the army. Imagine the conditions that one would experience in a war around the turn of the 20th century in Eastern Europe. They faced hand-to-hand combat, brutal weather conditions, unspeakable living conditions, and unwelcoming people.

Dad had his eye on a red-headed local girl, Katarzyna (Catherine) Makowski (born July 3, 1893), but had reservations about starting a family in a land constantly at war. With fear of a

World War looming, he did get married on November 26, 1911.

My parents, especially my Dad, wanted to give their kids a better life; a life with prosperity and opportunity, a life without the brutality of the wars that he experienced. So when the opportunity presented itself, he headed toward Canada with a dream to set up a better life for his family.

He arranged to visit Canada as a place to immigrate to. He left his pregnant wife with her family and came to Quebec City. While Dad was in Canada, my mother gave birth to my oldest brother Grzegorz (Harry). I don't know exactly when Harry was born, but it was some time before 1914 in an Austrian nationality.

When World War I started in 1914, Dad was marooned here in Canada. What to do? As a horseman he went to work in the forests at Smiths Falls for the CPR clear forests and hauling lumber out to the rail line. I suspect that he was destined for the prairies like most eastern European immigrants at the time. The prairies were bleak and desolate and in need of development. Canadian Immigration wanted Ukrainians stationed there. They were hearty, hard working people who were used to climate similar to what they'd experience in the prairies. I'm not sure exactly how Dad ended up at CPR, but I am grateful he ended in Ontario.

The lumber camp life was a rough and tumble life of hard work, hard drinking and much fighting. So as a small man (jockey size) he made a career change to a steel mill in Hamilton. When a co-worker fell into a crucible of molten steel, he quit immediately to work as a construction laborer.

In 1920, Dad returned to Horbkwow and fathered, Paraskewja (Pearl), Stefan (Steve), Petro (Peter), and myself, Michal (Michael). Europe was in a dreadful state with a depressed economy and very high inflation. He used the example that a pound of butter and a loaf of bread "cost a wheel-barrow load of money". People survived on what they grew as well as wild edible roots and vegetables. We were humble people.

Pearl, the only girl, was born in 1920 under a white Russian nationality. Steve, Pete and I were born in 1922, 1923 and 1925 under Polish rule.

With a dream of a better life in mind, Dad patiently waited to return to Canada. He finally got passage in 1925 on a rusting hulk by working for his fare by shoveling coal into the boilers.

In 1929 he arranged for my mother, and her brood to come to Hamilton. We sailed first from Danzig to England. On November 9, 1929, Mom accompanied by her five children, sailed from Liverpool, arriving in Halifax Nova Scotia at Pier 21 on November 17, 1929.

One of my earliest childhood recollections was an incident on that sailing when we were a day or two out at sea. As kids we spent a lot of time on deck marveling at how the bow plowed through the waves. This one day, we were standing on the ship's deck. There were dolphins swimming alongside the ship and at times out-racing us. This was quite an

amazing sight especially at my age, four. There were probably several dozens of dolphins and they were fascinating to watch.

I stood at the rail beside a young couple, the mother holding the baby in front. What and why it happened I don't remember, but the mother turned the infant toward the water to show him the waves. She spoke to the infant to look at the display the dolphins were creating, "Michu, Michu look at the fish." she said in Ukrainian. Michu is "Michael" in Ukrainian.

The infant must have squirmed out of her grasp and into the waves. The woman was right beside me when the incident happened. My memory seems so vivid. There was extreme commotion and panic.

People were terrified, not knowing what to do, or how to help. The crew members appeared and called to the bridge. By the time the message reached the control room and the ship circled around the infant was irretrievably missing. I recall even my mother

appearing to check whether any of her children were involved. My first reaction at the sight was horror. It was an awful blow to watch. My second reaction was to assure my mother that I wasn't in any way responsible. It's funny how you think as a child. Simply by observing the incident you feel in some way responsible. It is a tragic memory, one that I've remembered all my life and thought of often.

I don't remember Halifax where we landed or the train ride to Hamilton. Dad had rented or purchased the middle house in a triplex on Caroline Street a block north of York Street while Dad was looking for a country place. He bought a 4-acre property east of Mount Hope that had a blacksmith shop and a cement building for grain storage.



A few years ago my daughter Pieta, visited Pier 21 to gather whatever information she could find about our trip and our landing at Pier 21 in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Although she didn't know when we left the UK, or specifically what port we left from, she knew from my papers that my landed immigrant status that was granted on November 29, 1929. Her search for the records was difficult because there were no records of ships landing on that day. Working with the Pier 21 staff they broadened the search to ship landings two weeks beforehand. Working through ships' registries, passenger by passenger, they discovered that the ship we were on arrived at Halifax on November 17, 1929. We traveled on the SS Albertic, a ship in the White Star Line.

On the ship's registry, we noted a few things that were news to us. We were third class passengers. The ship's registry indicated that our place of birth was Poland and that our home city was Horbkow. My mother's name in the registry was Chyma Makowska born in Tartakow Poland. My mother came to Canada with \$50 in her possession. We noted that from the ship's registry and that we were destined to live with my father, Iwan (John) Szwedyk at 24 Grace Street in Hamilton. The mystery about the differing dates of the landed immigrant status and the arrival at Halifax is solved in the ship's registry too. Two of my siblings had medical conditions that required us to be detained. I have no recollection of the detention facility.

The ship's registry tells a story; the story of a Ukrainian family destined for a new land and a better life. I can't imagine how difficult it would have been for my mother to leave her mother behind, knowing that she would likely never see her again. Moving to a new country, making the journey with children alone, without the benefit of the language of the country she was moving to, and with only a few possessions. My father was also a brave man, willing to follow his dream for a better life for his children while facing great challenges and obstacles.

Life was hard for immigrants. They faced bleak homesteads, financial difficulties, food shortages, sickness, and differences in politics and religion. They worked hard to transform the land, learn the language and create a better life for their families. I'm grateful to my parents for being so brave and starting me on my wonderful life's journey in Canada.

I have lived in the vicinity of Hamilton, Ontario all my Canadian life. I am now 84 years of age. I live with my lovely wife of 57 years, Trudy (Gertrude Drenters). We have five daughters (all married), ten grandchildren and one great-grandchild on the way. We've been blessed with our life in Canada.