

John Tribe
Wartime Visitor to
Halifax
June 1940

CANADA'S IMMIGRATION MUSEUM
PIER 21



Editor's Note: See the stories of Ann Miller and Bill Pineo for additional information.

My sister, Ann Miller, has recently returned from a trip to North America and Europe. One of her highlights was coming into contact with you and meeting Bill Pineo with whom we all shared a "Gracie Fields" experience.

As Ann's younger brother, I was 7 at the time, I also have distinct memories of that day from another point of view and thought, depending upon the interest of the Society, my story may help the overall picture.

Here is my recollection:

It was a fine morning and we were tied up alongside a wharf. I was wandering about the decks. I felt I had the run of the ships but was no

doubt under the watchful eye of someone other than my mother Kathleen who was travelling with my elder sister Ann, 11, and younger sister Mary, 4, and Tom, 2.



I recall being at the bow or perhaps the stern of our ship and waving to a mass of soldiers on the stern of another ship that was berthed end to end with us. I must have waved and some of them waved back. There must have been a loud hailer on the deck, I presume the simple funnel type. Anyway, I pitched it up and shouted "Hello" to

the soldiers. I was quite surprised by a roar of "Hello" that came back. Then I heard someone say, "What's your name?" to which I replied

through the loud hailer "John, what's your name?" To this day I recall the simplicity of the question but the confusion of the answer. Hundred of names came flooding back and I heard none. Anyway, I then rightly or wrongly, knowing she was important, but that's about all, said "Guess who is on our ship?" A loud response of "Who?" to which I replied "Gracie Fields" and got a response of cheers and general noise. I then said "Would you like her to sing for you?" Once again more cheers. So I said "I'll go and ask her."

I could not find Gracie Fields but spoke to someone, no doubt a steward or purser and said "The soldiers on the next door ship would like Gracie to sing for them." The steward/purser said Gracie was "having a rest" but he would pass my message on.

I guess it was now time for my lunch and/or rest, anyway my childish attention span was extended and I forgot the whole business until later in the day.

I was again roaming the decks with my "pet" sailor (keeper?) and this time he carried me on his shoulders as the passengers were all on deck looking over the rail to the wharf.

As I recall there must have been a number of decks to the wharf because although we could look down to the wharf there were also people (soldiers) directly across from my level- most likely the promenade deck. I remember there was a band on the wharf and of course singing. I do not specifically remember any songs. I remember coins being thrown from ship to shore and shore to ship no doubt English to Canadian. That about ends my input.

Funny thing about 10 years ago, I was driving across Europe with some English Gliding friends when a chance reference to Gracie Fields prompted the realization that one of the group had travelled with (Gracie and) his family at the age of 3!

In the mid 1970s I was travelling in Europe with my family. We were staying at Gorrento (Italy) and took a day trip to the Isle of Capri. I recalled 1940 and the fact that Gracie Fields was living on Capri and phoned her residence. The man who answered the phone told me "she was resting" would I call back later. I did not; and we returned to Gorrento. But memories never change.

Hope we make it back to Canada one day. I would love to re-visit Pier 21.

