

## **Bill Gluck (Jewish War Orphan)**

### **The Voyage**

On June 14, 1948 we were taken to the port city of Bremerhaven, Germany given two American dollars and my first-ever bottle of Pepsi-Cola. I was sure I would get drunk before I finished the bottle and I was ready for anything. At 8:15 am we boarded the SS Marine Falcon, a converted liberty ship that had been built for the US Navy. These ships were ferrying home troops at the end of the war. I believe, through the generosity of the American government, they were supplied to transport us to Canada. I was most impressed with the two level cots covered with snow-white sheets and hanging baskets for sea sickness (just in case). The dining room was spotlessly clean. The tables were covered with spotless white tablecloths. I was very impressed with anything clean and white. There was lots of good food served by white-jacketed, black waiters. Coffee, cream and sugar was left on the tables. We could have as much as we wanted during and after the meals. I was in awe of everything and immediately began keeping a daily journal (in Hungarian) for the duration of the voyage. I still chuckle when I re-read that journal after all these years to see my youthful innocence and excitement.

This was our first ocean voyage. Some in the group became sea sick as soon as the ship left the harbor, others later, as foul weather set in. Soon the ship was bobbing like a piece of cork in the open sea. The poor souls afflicted with mal-de-mer were encouraged to stay on the top deck during the storm. They felt and looked absolutely awful - barely able to stand on their feet with blankets wrapped over their shoulders. I quickly learned not to stay downwind of them. My lifelong friend and room-mate Mike Blum looked like a "Muselman" again, a name the SS guards gave to those in the concentration camps who were skin and bones and would soon die of malnutrition or dysentery. Mike thought he was dying and looked like it. Because I spoke some English he asked me to get him some help from the doctor on the ship. The good doctor laughed at our panic and told us not to worry. He said that when the storm passed or Mike stepped off the ship he would soon be as good as new.

### **Journal entries translated by Bill Gluck**

*Halifax, 23 VI. 1948*

We pulled into the harbour at about 10 am. At 12 noon we disembarked beside a train station where a number of kind people were waiting for us with oranges, cigarettes and chocolates. They bought stamps and mailed our letters for us. And then the train began to roll with us toward Toronto. This time we found ourselves in neat first class compartments that were easily turned into sleepers during the night. The sheets were sparkling white. Besides the fancy equipment on board, we also found the food to be fairly good. Twelve people remained behind in Halifax, the rest of us will be divided between Toronto and Winnipeg. The trip will take 24 hours. It is a most comfortable journey and I am looking ahead for further developments with much curiosity.

*Montreal, 24 VI. 1948*

I had a very pleasant sleep on the train and the food was also fairly good. It was 9 o'clock at night when we pulled into the Montreal railway station. Representatives from the Jewish Congress were already there waiting for us. Dudu's Klara and Csoki from Aschau were also there. We were bussed to the temporary home where we washed and bathed, then four of us - Brandi, Blumi, Yunger, and myself-moved into a neat room. We'll stay here for three weeks. The Personnel in this house are very pleasant. Even though roll call is at 8 in the morning, we the new arrivals, will be allowed to sleep in.

*Montreal, 25 VI. 1948*

I had a most pleasant sleep in a bed that was supplied with upper and lower snow-white sheets. Today we will receive some clothes and some "dough". I wonder what we will get.

## Marie Ori Burns

To my best recollection the name of the steamship that tied up in Halifax Harbor on January 17th, 1948, was the General Stuart Heintzelman. She was a merchant vessel. She sailed out of Bremerhaven, Germany, the voyage lasting eleven days, many of which were violently stormy. They were, to a novice sailor like me, dreadfully frightening.

I was then an eighteen-year-old immigration girl, sailing alone, leaving my family behind on the outskirts of Salzburg, Austria. They and I had endured the life of refugees, called displaced persons, from December of 1944, until December of 1947.

My voyage over the Atlantic at the start brought me three miserable days of seasickness, when I realized that the way to take my mind off my misery was to ask for a job in the ship's gallery, where I was granted a minor service- that of passing out trays to the ship's passengers for three meals a day.

I "forgot" to be seasick. The food was splendid and the crew was great, mostly Americans, I think.

I was most fortunate to be among the early arrivals of D.P's in this wonderful, free and prosperous country, my beloved Canada. To be here felt like being next door to Heaven.

Since I had a basic knowledge of the English language, I was sent to Brockville, Ontario, to serve as a ward-aid at the Ontario Hospital for the mentally ill.

The weather on the day of our arrival in Halifax was cold and rainy and the trip to Ontario seemed nearly endless, as we traveled by train.

My early experience at the Ontario Hospital was frightening, because I had no previous training even in the rudiments of psychology, nor any contact with the mentally ill.

One thing I had determined: to learn to speak English to the degree of perfection I was capable of and also to lose my foreign accent. It was too late for this latter objective. Now I feel that my accent is no hindrance, but, rather, I hope that it adds spice to my speech.

My host Country could not have been kinder, or more generous, and I often thank God for assigning it as part of my destiny.

The Opus No 1 of my life was the loving work of bringing up my daughter and son, aided by my fine Canadian husband, Robert Burns, of Scottish-Irish descent. People joke about him being related to the famous Scottish poet. Robert, by the way, does write Christmas poems to me.

As a miracle, a life-long wish was granted me in 1984, when I had earned the degree of B.A. in English Literature. My joy was double, as my son received his B.B.A. also from Bishop's University, of Lenuoxville, Quebec, on the same day.

I jokingly say that I am walking in my daughter's footsteps; she also majored in the discipline I had.

As added relish, The Record, our Eastern Townships newspaper, published a monthly column by yours truly, giving a small taste in journalism.

This, in brief, is the history of a former refugee, who is now an enthusiastic and patriotic citizen, having obtained my citizenship at the earliest opportunity.

Would it be possible to verify the name of the ship in which I had sailed, as well as knowing the nature of her ownership? I had a handmade souvenir booklet I had kept for years, but have since mislaid.

I owe a great debt of gratitude to God and to Canada for the privilege of being one of this country's citizens.

Yours truly,

Marie Ori Burns

P.S. I failed to state that I was born in Budapest, Hungary, and spent the first fifteen years of my life there, until we evacuated in the spring of 1944. We were being bombed by Soviet planes by night and allied bombers by day.

## **Steven (Istvan) Erdos**

My name is STEVEN (ISTVAN) ERDOS I was born in Budapest, Hungary.

As a Jew, I went through the war- years in Hungary, and after the war, when the Russians occupied Hungary, I decided to escape. Crossing borders at night and dodging border guards with machine guns was an ordeal, but I made it to Vienna at the end of 1948. After a short stay in Vienna I ended up in Salzburg, where I worked for the American Occupying Forces as an interpreter.

It was in Salzburg at the end of April 1951, that I finally received notice that my papers have arrived, allowing me to immigrate to Canada. By this time Salzburg was 'home' at it was a difficult task to gather my small belongings, and particularly difficult to leave friends who had not got them yet.

Everybody came out to the railway station to say goodbye (see picture) and to have a last drink together.

The train took us to Bremen where we were settled into a temporary housing development for the few days we had to spend there before embarking.

The day finally arrived when we again gathered our small belongings and a truck drove us to Bremanhafen- where all the immigrants were concentrated along the planks of the boat. Surprisingly there were Canadian naval officers - sailors and nurses awaiting us but the biggest surprise was a military band playing music while we were processed to enter the ship (see picture)

The boat was the S.S. NELLY a fairly small (32.00 ton) army carrier which had been used before this trip to carry troops during WW II (see picture).

Four of us had a cabin together - it was not too spacious but it was adequate for us.

We sailed out late afternoon from Bremanhafen - the sea was fairly calm

Next morning - a beautiful sunrise- we approached the English coast and admired the beautiful scenery - particularly the White Cliffs of Dover

And then the boat turned into open sea! I am a really bad sailor; sometimes even a small boat ride upsets my stomach! The water was much rougher, and I got sick immediately.

I spent the whole over-sea voyage in my bunk bed. At one point an order came on the loudspeaker that EVERYBODY had to go to the upper deck. I sent a message to the authorities that if they wanted me out there, they had better come and CARRY ME OUT!

I could not eat - only drink. Luckily on the second day at sea there was a knock on the door and a sailor came in distributing MATZA (UNLEVENED BREAD) to Jewish passengers since it was PESACH (Passover). This was the only 'food' which I had till Halifax.

The first time I stepped out of the cabin was when somebody started shouting "I SEE LAND!" From then on I got better and better and when the boat finally docked in Halifax and they needed interpreters for Canadian Immigration Authorities, I immediately volunteered since I spoke Hungarian, English, German, French and Serbian. It was a very pleasant immigration officer and we got along wonderfully. The procedure was to find out the immigrants' real names (some came with falsified papers), then if they wanted to change their names, perhaps to more English sounding ones, also their destination and finally if there was anybody waiting or looking for them at arrival.

It was late afternoon when the officer thanked me for my services and gave me a beautiful book about Canada.

Since I had a few hour time before our train's departure from Halifax, I walked into the city. I had a friend with me and as we walked I mentioned that I DID NOT SEE THE HORSES - because Halifax looked to me like an OLD WEST TOWN that I used to see in western movies.

Finally the time came to board the train. It was a very long ride to Toronto but by that time I was mentally prepared to settle into my 'new country'.

I found a job in the profession I learned, working for an optical company. Shortly afterwards I met a lovely girl and got married. Eventually, my father in law and I started a business, which I had for over 35 years, he having retired after 25years. After initial difficulties we started to make a decent living. We raised two lovely daughters, both university graduates, and are enjoying our three wonderful grandchildren.

I am a proud Canadian! This country has been good to me and to my family. Whenever I travel, I proudly display my Canadian emblem.