

Irina Ben-
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Displaced Person
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My English is not perfect, but I still decided to write you few words and tell you how I feel about Pier 21.

We arrived in Canada on April 18th 1951 on Pier 21.

My husband George, son Andrew and daughter Nina and I was seven months pregnant. Because of that IRO decided to send us from Germany through Paris and Le Havre, where we went on the ship SS Washington to get faster to Canada.

We spoke Russian, German, Latvian and Polish, but we could not speak French or English. All we had with us were 2 suitcases and 1 Dollar, which was given to me for good luck in Germany. But when we entered the cabin in Le Havre, on my bed were 12 beautiful red roses from my dearest friends from Switzerland with a letter to wish us all the best in the new home land.

How sad I was that the customs one man broke every rose petal thinking that I am bringing diamonds! And I had nothing except this one dollar and the roses. Till now I have some petals dried in my book. At that time I could buy for that dollar bread and feed my children next to the pier.

Then we got our tickets to Levi from Halifax and were all night travelling. It was not a very comfortable train for immigrants, I must say-it was cold.

In the morning of 19th April we arrived in Levi hoping that some relatives who came to Canada before us would be there to meet us. I remember that it was a terrible snow storm and we could not see the Quebec City on the other side of the beautiful St. Laurent river at all. So, we came out of the train, I opened my hands to collect some snow to wash the faces of my 2 children (Andrew was 5 and Nina 4 years old) because they were dirty-there was no water on the train.

Suddenly I saw my uncle and aunt running toward us. How happy we were to see somebody we knew and loved in a completely new country for us.

Ferry took us on the other side and we could suddenly see the beautiful old Quebec City.

I will not go into the details-it would be far to long. My husband found a job after 3 days, we lived in an old house which was partly occupied by my uncle who gave there piano lessons.

On September 23rd same year my parents arrived too-so the whole family was together and it was great.

We personally lived in Quebec City 8 years, where we first learned French and from our children, who had to go to an English school, because we were Russian Orthodox, we learned English. For a whole I was cleaning homes for 50 cents an hour and then later typing German articles for one professor at Laval University.

After eight years my husband was invited to work for Ottawa University and we had to move to Ottawa that was very sad for me-we left all the family there.

Now we live 40 years in Ottawa-Gloucester and all there years we never forgot to celebrate the 18th of April-the date we arrived in Canada. We are so thankful to our dear Canada for the possibility to be here, to be Canadians. And what makes me so proud that in all these 49 years we never had any financial help. We worked all the time and could help others to start their life here.

Only on first Christmas in the year 1951 a lady from some organization brought us a ham as a Christmas gift.

Thank you Canada, thank you dear Canadian friends, who helped us to feel here completely at home. God bless Canada and all the Canadians.

Yours thankfully and truly, Irina Ben-Tchavtchavadze

