

Guntis Ezers  
Latvian Displaced  
Person  
General C H Muir  
December 3, 1948



In June of 1998, I accompanied by my wife, attended the Civil Engineering conference in Halifax. Since both of us had disembarked from ships in Halifax when our families immigrated to Canada, we were interested to learn more. The Tourist Information office directed us to the Immigration Exhibition at Pier 21. Here we learned about the Pier 21 Society and their work to preserve the human history of immigrants who passed through its doors.

My wife and I, as young children, separately with our respective families, left Latvia in 1944 to join the many displaced persons in Germany. After the war, we were supported by several International relief organizations. We lived in displaced persons camps and eventually were allowed, if we qualified, to emigrate. Our parents chose Canada. To immigrate one had to be healthy, politically acceptable and have a guaranteed job in Canada. By this time there were agencies, companies or individuals who would provide a job guarantee and sponsor the person. Usually the sponsorship was limited to able-bodied persons, not families with children. For a family to immigrate, the father would sign a work contract for a year and immigrate alone. After saving immigrates, the father would sign a work contract for a year and immigrate alone. After saving sufficient money to support a family as well as finding a place for the family to live, the family was then allowed to immigrate. In our case both our fathers came to Canada first and we arrived approximately nine months later.

My wife, with her sister and mother, arrived at Pier 21 on December 3, 1948 and I, with my brother, sister and mother in January 19, 1950.

My family's trip across the Atlantic was not pleasant. After waving good-bye to the Cliffs of Dover, we encountered a severe storm, which stayed with us for the entire crossing. We were all seasick and could not enjoy the wonderful meals provided by the ship's crew, in particular the large navel oranges. Our ship General C H Muir, a Wartime troop transport of 10,000 tons, tossed about so severely that we could not sleep in the upper beds assigned to us. All four of us slept in the two lower beds. A trip that was scheduled to take ten days took fourteen, three of which were on anchor outside Halifax harbour. The waves were too high to allow safe entry into the harbour.

One can imagine how glad we were to walk across the gangway into Pier 21.

It was a memorable and emotional experience to visit the Pier forty-seven years later and gratefully acknowledge that passing through these doors into Canada provided us opportunities unsurpassed anywhere else.

During the convention The Canadian Society for Civil Engineering designated the Halifax Harbour Ocean Terminals including Pier 21 as a National Historic Civil Engineering Site. That evening the Society arranged, in the Immigration Hall at Pier 21, a wonderful Maritimes lobster dinner.