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Hungarian
Revolution Refugee
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Five weeks after escaping from Hungary on 2 February 1957, my wife Valerie, our eight year old son Tom, and I arrived at Halifax's Pier 21 on the Cunard's Saxonia. When we came out of Hungary we had to leave everything behind and the money we had was worthless outside the country. The clothing we wore was ill-fitting (we got those used shoes and clothing in Austria, since ours were ruined during our escape). Our only wealth was the \$15.00 (\$5.00 each) that we received when we arrived in Halifax; and we knew only two English words: "yes" and "no".

We stayed in Halifax in a government building for about six weeks. During this time I borrowed a Hungarian-English dictionary and grammar book that I studied at night. The owner of the books studied them in the daytime. I created my own grammar book and learned words which I felt were essential for basic communication. In the middle of March we went to Montreal and lived in a convent. By then my English was good enough to be able to look for and find a job by myself. At the end of March I started working as a draftsman in the engineering office of imperial Oil Ltd. In May we rented an apartment. At last we had a place which we could call home!

I took evening courses and studied English at McGill University. The following years, utilizing my past experience as an engineer, I continuously improved my engineering skills and progressively increased my professional position and responsibilities. Eventually I became the Department Head and Chief Civil Engineer, and for 15 years I managed a department overseeing 60 engineers and technical staff for Ebasco/Ebastec Lavalin Inc. My wife had no opportunity to attend school and study English since she had a daytime job and took care of all the household work as well. She picked-up the language by talking to people. For the last 17 years of her working career she was employed as an office clerk in a responsible position at the head office of the Prudential Assurance Company in Toronto. Our son Tom became a computer program designer. We now enjoy our retirement and look back with nostalgia to that day when we first saw Pier 21 and Canada, the land of promise for so many people like ourselves.