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Revolution Refugee
Venezuela
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CANADA'S IMMIGRATION MUSEUM
PIER 21



We huddled each night around our radios giving us the news from Budapest. I saw five pointed stars in our town square, weighing many tons, tumble to the ground. Political prisoners were freed from jails. As the army troops moved in the fighting escalated. Each night we had our clothes by our bed ready to flee if they were to bomb our part of the town. The borders opened in October.



My father wasted no time to plan our escape. He was tired of the constant pressure to join the Communist Party, not having any money for the necessities of life and often times taking only a slice of bread with lard as his lunch. Our landlord accused my father of threatening to shoot his dog, but we didn't even own a gun, but because his landlord was a party member the trials went on and on, this of course prompted my father

to make the decision to leave the country as soon as possible. I did not understand what the whispering was about between my father and a young newly wed couple (Kocsis, Antal) that rented a cot in our kitchen. My sister Eva (Erdos) who was six years old and I, who was eight at the time, were told that we were going to visit our relatives, but this couple never came with us. None of our relatives knew about our plan to leave Hungary because my father thought that if they knew they would somehow detain us. As the hours passed we walked some, took a ride with a truck load of soldiers, and rode on a truck that carried pigs, the driver of which turned out to be the husband of a relative. My inner instincts told me as we hitched hiked that this was definitely not the way to either one of my grandparents' homes.

As we walked we got wearier and wearier. My dad had to carry my sister and me alternately. From time to time we would inquire when we would be reaching our destination, which was the home of a distant relative,

near the Austrian border, who would guide us across the border, my dad replied 'see that light in the distance that's where it is', but it seemed it was another light away. We were definitely not going to visit grandma, this I knew. It was now October 30, 1956. The escape itself was not unpleasant. I remember the green grass: it was a sunny day, and it all seemed very easy.

The Red Cross was there to aid us as we crossed the border to Austria. They helped to direct us to hostels. As a child of eight this was a strange and different place but to my dad this was freedom, freedom to think, freedom to plan for the future, freedom to dream. He was 34, mother was 26. We liked Neikirchen Austria a lot with its mountains and pretty scenery. This is where I tasted my first orange. The scent was like a heavenly perfume and oh! Those Austrian chocolates and I can't forget the strange brown drink they called 'coca cola' that I first tasted in a café. My dad was offered a job if we stayed but he declined. His dream was to go to Canada and nothing would change that. We lost the young couple when they were transferred to another location, never to hear from them again. The barracks were getting empty one by one as people were heading to different countries of the world. Then came our turn. We took the train from Austria to Genoa Italy, Dec. 1956 where we were to board the Venezuela, but not before locking my parents out of the hotel room when they went out to see the town. They had to break the door down, we were sleeping so soundly.

Halifax Herald
Jan 4, 1957

1,589 Hungarian Refugees Arriving Here On Weekend

Halifax immigration and customs officers are preparing for another busy weekend when three liners will disembark more than 2,200 passengers — including 1,589 Hungarian refugees.

The refugees will be aboard the liner Venezuela now expected to dock in Halifax Saturday morning from Genoa.

Other liners due over the weekend are the Holland American liner Ryndam, which will land about 100 passengers, and the Greek liner Olympia with 550 passengers. Originally due on Saturday, the Dutch ship Ryndam reported yesterday she would not arrive here before Sunday.

The former French liner De-Grasse, now sailing as the Venezuela, will bring the first group of refugees destined for the Maritime provinces. A group of 550 Hungarians will remain in Halifax at immigration — 450 at the reception centre on Gottingen street and 100 at the immigration quarters at Pier 21.

Deep waters always scared me; I was petrified when I first laid my eyes upon the Venezuela, the ship that was to take us to our new homeland. The trip across the Atlantic was 12 days long. The food was Italian and very strange because I had not eaten anything outside Hungarian food. There was about 1,500 refugees aboard. Everyone eager to reach their individual places in the new country. Our boat stopped in Morocco. The merchants sold their rugs, brass ornaments, etc . . . a lovely city, I can still remember the warm weather in late December. That was the very first time I had seen an African man. They kept busy playing chess, cards, etc . . . very relaxed way of life definitely very different from Eastern Europe. The Venezuela made its way across the Atlantic to Halifax.

I remember as I was laid up in the hospital on the ship, along with my mother, from being sea sick there was a lot of excitement, one morning a baby boy was born on board. I recently got in touch with his parents here in Toronto. As the ship approached Canada the weather got colder and colder. After 12 days of just being sea sick, losing weight on my already frail frame, we pulled into Halifax, January 1957. The army cadet band greeted us. We were then ushered into the immigration building to be examined by doctors. We watched TV and ate corn flakes for the first time without milk as one would eat potato chips. My parents were very enthusiastic, full of life, and had plans for the future. We then boarded the train for Timmins Ontario, a mining town where we would spend our first 6 years of our lives in Canada before moving to Toronto, Ontario in 1963. It seemed like the train ride from Halifax to Timmins would never end. The Christmas decorations were still out on the houses which I found very pretty. The adjustment to Timmins was not easy. I was the only one in a track suit. The kids in school thought I was wearing pajamas.

My father went to work in the Hollinger Gold Mines for a while until he was able to open his own tailor shop. My mother was an excellent cook so she opened her own little restaurant. This was a social place for the young refugees who found work in the mines. We moved to Toronto in 1963. My father went on into manufacturing ladies wear. My brother who was born in Canada became an aircraft technician. My sister worked as a Word Processor at the Ministry of the Environment. I worked in a medical lab. Later, I married a jeweler. We now run a jewelry manufacturing business in Toronto.

The life in Canada has been rich, and rewarding experience. I am definitely happy that my parents made that decision so long ago to come to Canada.