

Dorothy Van Helvert
Dutch Immigrant
Volendam
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Our trip on the "Volendam" was not a pleasant experience. We left Holland on April 23rd 1950. I was 16 at the time and the oldest of 5 girls, the youngest 2 were boys 3 1/2 and 5 1/2. Because of their ages they stayed with Mom also. We were with many people confined to a small space all sleeping on bunk beds. A lot of us were sea sick and "brought up". The smell was horrible. I often helped a lady with 6 small children, her husband was not allowed to be with her, all males were in separate quarters. The ship was old and filled to capacity, and the Ocean was rough. We were all full of anticipation for the new life that was waiting on us. We arrived late at night, everyone on the boat was singing, (I cannot remember the song). Seeing the Halifax lights was a beautiful sight, but to our shock there was snow on the ground. In Holland all the flowers were in bloom, it was spring.

In the Emigration hall in the Hague, Mom had met Henry (Driek) Van Helvert who had a large family and also wanted to go to Canada. She was very surprised to meet him again on the same boat. At the same time you needed a sponsor for a year, usually a farmer who could use help on his farm. Our sponsor had cancelled when we were already on the boat, and thus when we landed in Halifax we had to stay in the immigration hall until another sponsor was found. That took 6 weeks and was a difficult time for our parents and their seven children who had no understanding of the English language and only a few dollars in their pocket. All our clothes and other belongings were stored in a crate in the warehouse. We had to live out of our suitcases and washed clothes and underwear in the sink at night, drying them on the hot-water radiators. Fortunately, they were able to find an interpreter, Ida Miller, who was a young Dutch war bride. She lived with her in-laws as her husband was studying to become a medical doctor and they had a baby.

In order to pass the time and earn some money, Dad did yard work for these people and I baby-sat their baby 'Robert'. Finally, we were put on a train to Port Rowan, Ontario where an old farmer was waiting for us at the station with a horse and cart. But the house assigned to us was worse than a chicken coop! We certainly couldn't stay there. A Mennonite family took all of us in for the night, said beautiful prayers, and served us a delicious meal. We were very grateful to the Braun family. Luckily, Dad's brother-in-law and his 2 sons were living in

Stratford and we were able to get there by taxi. Subsequently, we were 'put up' by different Canadian families until they found another farmer who was willing to sponsor us for a year. Bob Ballentyne, his wife Marjorie and their little daughter Beverly were great people. We rented a house with no electricity and only an outdoor water pump for five dollars a month. Dad earned \$80 and Corrine and I were soon put to work as well. I was a mother's helper in a family with 3 boys and a baby girl. I was paid \$44 a month, with Thursdays and every weekend off. Corrine, meanwhile, did housework at first and later worked in the kitchen of the local hospital with some of our cousins, the Heus girls. While the rest of the girls went to school, the boys stayed home with Mom.

We lived very isolated lives in the country. Corrine and I took the school bus part-way home and then had to walk another few miles. The first Canadian winter was terrible since we were not used to snow from November to April! We had neither boots nor warm clothes nor money to buy them with. Without transportation it was impossible to get to town to do any shopping or go to church. As soon as we saved a few dollars, Dad bought a 1936 Chevy. He was so proud of it and it got us where we needed to go. Because we were the first immigrants in the area, the Canadian people treated us well bringing us all kinds of things to start our new life with such as bedding, linens, household furniture and food.

We look back with admiration on the Canadian people for the patience and understanding in helping us to make Canada our new home. Very slowly and with a lot of frustration, tears, and laughter, we became familiar with our new country. Dad completed his year on the farm and we moved to St. Catherine's. Dad's sister Beth also moved there. Here Corrine and I worked on the fruit farm at first, and later at a fruit cannery in Jordan Station. Handing over our weekly earnings to Mom and Dad enabled them to buy a large house on Main Street in Port Dalhousie in 1953. Additionally, Mom took in boarders since there were many young men alone in Canada needing a family to stay with. Because of this, Mom became well known for her help to many other Dutch immigrants. The Dutch people adapted well to the Canadian way of life.

In September of 1955 I met Harry Van Helvert. After having lived a few years in the towns of Uxbridge and Stayner, the family of Henry (Driek) Van Helvert had moved to St. Catherine's as well. Henry had bought a large grape farm across the Welland Canal towards Niagara-on-the-Lake. Harry and I decided to get married in May of 1957. A few years later, a friend of ours, together with Harry, built our house. We are blessed with two sons and two daughters. Then in 1965 we received our Canadian citizenship. Canada has truly been a great country for us!

