

Feike Prins
Dutch Immigrant
Beaverbrae
February 24, 1950

CANADA'S IMMIGRATION MUSEUM
PIER 21



I was born 1923 in Sibrandahuis, Friesland (the Netherlands). My wife, Johanna, was born in 1924 in Rotterdam. She was a city girl and I lived and worked on the family farm.

In 1945, after the war was over, I left the farm and went to Rotterdam to join the police force. In the Fall of 1945 I met Johanna, at a Saturday night dance.

We dated for 4 years--Rotterdam had been so heavily bombed in the war that you couldn't find a place to live, so we put off getting married.

In 1949 the local

newspaper was advertising a sponsorship program for farm workers to immigrate to Canada. You had to work on the sponsoring farm for at least one year. I talked to Johanna and suggested that we get married and then I could go to Canada alone to work for a year--if it worked out, she would come later. Johanna didn't want me to do this so we decided to go together. In January 26, 1950 we were married and just a couple of weeks later we said goodbye to all of our friends and family. At the time, we didn't know if we would ever see them again. My father was very supportive of the idea but my mother didn't like it at all. Johanna's parents were against it as well, but were supportive of us once the decision was made. We were very sad to say goodbye to everyone, but we were excited as well. On February 13th we boarded a ship in Antwerp,



Belgium. At the time, the harbour in Rotterdam was still too damaged from the war.

On February 24, 1950, we arrived in Halifax at Pier 21. The ship we traveled on was called The Beaverbrae. It took two weeks to get to Halifax and was one of the most miserable trips we'd ever experienced.

They separated the men and the women on the ship for sleeping, so we could only see each other during the daytime. Johanna was terribly seasick the entire ride (as were many others) and lost a lot of weight. I had to get the nurse on board to see her several times. And the food was terrible--I still can't eat spaghetti and meatballs to this day. Two days before we arrived we saw the first snowstorm. It was still snowing hard when we arrived in Halifax. Although we were very tired, we were also excited to start our new life.



Once we got off the ship, we had to get processed--it didn't take too long as there were less than 1000 people on our ship. We had to show our passports and then we were given a landing card (which I still have to this day). We had to wait 2 hours for the train, which would eventually take us to London, Ontario. Our final destination was Lobo, Ontario. The train ride took 3 days. It only had wooden bunks with no blankets or mattresses--it was a difficult ride considering many people were still ill from the ship ride. We had to buy our own food so we had to be careful about how much we spent. We were only allowed to take \$89.00, each with us into the country. One day, one of our fellow passengers on his way to Alberta (with his wife and ten children) came to our car to play cards with us for a little while. When he tried to go back to his family, he was told that his train car had been unhooked and had gone on to Alberta. He had no way of contacting his family and he was only wearing his long underwear. We all gave him some clothes and money so he could get off the train in Montreal and ride it back to meet up with his family. I always wonder what happened to him and how he made out.

We arrived in Toronto on the second evening and we had to stay overnight in the trains. Two of us went across to the CNR railroad and got some blankets and mattresses and took them back over to our train, which was CPR. The next day we arrived in London at 5:00pm. There had been a bad ice storm and all of the telephone lines North of London were down so we couldn't phone our sponsor to come and get us. We tried to get a taxi but none of them would agree to take us due to the weather. Finally a policeman helped us and persuaded a taxi to take us to Lobo. The driver took us over highway 4 to the Ilderton Side Road but then he got stuck and couldn't go any further. He left the car running for us and went to get the farmer. They came back with a sleigh and 2 horses. The cost of the ride was \$3.50. I gave him \$5.00 and told him to keep the change--the man never knew that he took my last dollar.

Unfortunately, our luggage had gone astray during the trip so we had no clothes and no money--not even any work clothes to work in the barn. It took 2 weeks to get them back. We were making only \$80 a month. The farmer bought me some boots and overalls and said he'd take it out of our \$80.00--he never did though. The farmer was a single man with an apple orchard (5000 trees). I helped on the farm, mostly milking the



cows, because he had cut his hand off in an accident and could no longer do the milking. Johanna cooked and cleaned. It was a very big adjustment for both of us, but especially Johanna, who was a city girl her entire life. It was amazing to me how she took on every new challenge that came her way. She learned how to cook Canadian meals and often had to feed large groups of men when they came to help on the farm. There was only an outhouse for a toilet and the laundry had to be done by hand and hung to dry. She did love experiencing nature, though. One time she called me to see a bird's nest she had found in the hedge. She

always loved birds and was so excited to be able to see a nest so close up.

It was hard to be away from family and friends, especially the first Christmas and birthdays and holidays. We wrote letters a lot but we couldn't phone home until about 6 months after we arrived. Once we could phone, it was very expensive so we couldn't do it often. In September of that first year we got a terrible hailstorm and all of the apples were ruined. The farmer decided to go out west to work and get back some of the income that he lost with his ruined crop. He left us for 3 months to run the farm by ourselves.

It was difficult being out in the country without a car. We couldn't get to church or town without asking for a ride. The farmer and the neighbors helped, but we decided to save for our own car. It took 10 months of saving but we finally bought a car-- a 1943 Ford. We felt so much more independent after that.

Once our one year obligation was fulfilled, we decided to leave the farm. Johanna got pregnant in August and we decided to leave in February 1951. We rented a house one road over on the 7th concession. I got a job



at Kernaghan Lumber in London for a year. Then I worked in a box factory for a short time and then started at the University of Western Ontario (Physical Plant) in the Spring of 55. I worked there until 1987 when I retired. Johanna worked at St. Joseph's Hospital for 23 years, first in the Blood Bank and then in Cytology. She studied to become a cytologist and received her certificate in 1967. She worked there until 1983 when she retired.

We had three children in total, one in 1951, another in 1952 and then our last one in 1964. Over the years we have been able to go back to The Netherlands to see family many times, and they have come to visit us here as well. Even Johanna's parents came to visit. Once they saw how we had made

our life here, they knew we had made the right decision.

Johanna and I had said we might go back and visit Pier 21 someday, but unfortunately she passed away in 2003 before we could do it. But in the

Spring of 2006 two of my children accompanied me to Pier 21. The staff there was so supportive and interested in our story and we were very impressed with the history being preserved there. It's my pleasure to contribute my story.

Feike Prins, London, Ontario, August, 2006

