

Gerard Veldhoven
Dutch Immigrant
Zuiderkruis
September 24, 1954

CANADA'S IMMIGRATION MUSEUM
PIER 21



Mom - Johanna Pieterella (Van Kuyk) Veldhoven
Dad - Johannes Henrikus Veldhoven
Boys: Aart
Gerard
Johannes
Nicolaas

The Netherlands was quite ravaged during the Second World War, and by the early 1950s was in the process of trying to rebuild a nation, shattered by German occupation. It would be a long and arduous process and the economics were such that many people contemplated moving to another country. The oldest son, Aart, had decided he would like to go to Australia, New Zealand or even South Africa. Our parents decided however, to take their four sons to Canada as they realized it would take a substantial amount of time before the Netherlands would be stable again. The decision would be difficult, of course, as we had to leave behind many relatives and friends. Father's upholstery business suffered, as did many businesses as a result of the war, so that made the decision to relocate much easier, I would suspect. In due course, the

application and required papers were in order, and we prepared to leave the Netherlands, to a country we really knew very little about. Our parents were informed that we would be met in Halifax, Nova Scotia by a man named Rev. Lam who apparently was to see to it that we properly settled in this new country.

It was September 1954 and many relatives gathered in Rotterdam to see us off, realizing the possibility, that a lot of them we would never see again. There were, of course, the usual shedding of tears, hugs and handshakes before we boarded our ship, the *Zuiderkruis*. It was really a bitter-sweet moment, especially as the ship started to push away from the dock, realizing that now we were actually on our way into the unknown. We waved to the crowd of teary eyed relatives on the dock and soon we were out in the North Sea beyond Hoek van Holland.

The journey had the usual problems of people being seasick, and one has to wonder how many people on this ship had last minute thoughts as to the decisions they had made, and realize that now they were at the point



of no return. This was the finality, and whatever our destiny is to be was now in progress. Perhaps we were more prepared than we first thought, as it is quite difficult to remember fifty years later, especially since we were teenagers when we left. It is possible that we were coming to terms with our future endeavours, during the nine day crossing. The fall weather brings hurricanes and we were informed that the ship had to take an alternate course, extending the trip, which already seemed to take an eternity. Needless to say, it was a rough crossing, also because

the Zuiderkruis was a small ship, and then the inevitable seasickness. Except for our father, we were all affected by it, especially mother and Gerard had a difficult time of it. One afternoon, thinking he was over it, Gerard walked towards the dining room for dinner, and the aroma from the kitchen turned out to be too much. As the ship entered the St. Lawrence River, most of us went on deck, and got our first glimpse of the beauty of the country which was to become our home. The hills alongside the river, the extensive wooded areas, church steeples peeking through the trees, villages along the shore line, were wonderful to observe.

The journey through the St. Lawrence took about a day and we finally arrived in Quebec City on September 24, 1954. We didn't have an opportunity to see the city as we had to board a train headed for Nova Scotia. We went by ferry to Levis and as we approached the train mother somehow tripped and fell to the ground. She was not hurt but it was occasionally mentioned in a joking manner.

The train trip was an experience not to be forgotten. Coming from a small



country we soon noticed how extensive Canada is, and soon we came to the conclusion that we would be in awe of its beauty for the rest of our lives. It was late September and the display of fall colors was spectacular as viewed from the train. Even now, after fifty years, it is still something to behold. We had our first experience on board the train with the large serving of meat with our meal. In the Netherlands we were not used to that as meat was used sparingly. The trip was long and tiring, but finally we arrived in Halifax.

We were under the impression that Rev Lam was supposed to meet us there, but the man was nowhere to be seen or heard of again. Exactly what happened remains a mystery to this

day, except to say, it caused a great deal of concern and uncertainty. What to do next, in a new country, knowing no one and financially strapped. It was decided, after all the paperwork was completed that we could have temporary living accommodations at Pier 21.

This experience was not pleasant and certainly had a profound feeling of loneliness, all the while realizing there was no other way to cope. It must

be said, that the staff at the time were extremely helpful and above all, very kind. We were also fortunate to have met Harold and Margaret Travis of Halifax. Harold was employed as a porter at the railway station and befriended us immediately. It was at their home we had our very first turkey dinner, which was quite an experience, as Christmas celebrations are very different in the Netherlands. Our brother Aart, was only at Pier 21 for a night or two, as he was able to find a job where he could also board. We do have some memories of Pier 21 while living there. Our brother John developed pneumonia and was cared for by Sister Kelly, who was extremely kind to him. He always had a soft spot for her. She died a few years ago and was well into her nineties. Another rather strange happening occurred when Nick and Gerard went to see a movie at the Capital Theatre. Neither of us spoke or understood English and the staff became a bit concerned why two school age boys were there in the middle of the afternoon. We were not yet enrolled in a school and soon an officer came and escorted us back to Pier 21. Another strange site were the bars one had to look through to see the harbour.

It must be mentioned that mother was not happy with the circumstances and would have gladly returned to the Netherlands. Halifax, at that time was not very attractive around the waterfront areas and the downtown. It was late September, going into October, rainy and foggy and very depressing. Combined with no knowledge about our future, it really is not something one cares to remember. Years later Halifax turned into a beautiful city. As time went on, father found a job as a night watchman and janitor and eventually, after a two months stay at Pier 21, we moved into other living quarters in the city.



Later in October we were enrolled in school and then, of course, it became apparent we should learn English and as time went on we became efficient in the use of our

new language. Mother had decided to take English lessons at Queen Elizabeth High School night classes. She insisted that she learned the proper pronunciations from a new reader named Edmond Morris, who spoke very distinctly. We all settled into Canadian life quite well while never forgetting our roots. Father started his upholstery business and eventually three of us followed in his footsteps with our own businesses in the same field. Canada is a great country and we are happy and content here, especially with our Canadian born partners and our own children. The Netherlands is our country of birth and always will be our homeland but now we are Canadian.

We will be forever grateful to the staff and all who were, and are now, associated with Pier 21 for without them being there for us, we don't know what the alternative would have been. I recently visited there and was very impressed and moved with the result of the work that Dr Ruth Goldbloom and her staff have accomplished.

Thank You Canada

Gerard Veldhoven, on behalf of the Veldhoven family