

Jane Helders  
Dutch Immigrant  
Waterman  
July 20, 1957

CANADA'S IMMIGRATION MUSEUM  
**PIER 21**



My story starts in the summer of 1951, when I

went on holidays with my family to a resort in Holland called "Het



Trefpunt", translated it means "Meeting Point".

There I met Gerald, my future husband, although at that time we had no idea that we would be married eventually. I lived in Leeuwarden, the capital city of Friesland. Gerald lived in

Amsterdam, in the province of North Holland. We went steady for one year and then I broke it off. In September 1953 Gerald immigrated to Canada. He sailed from England on the Empress of France and landed in Montreal. He found a job in Toronto as a messenger at the Imperial Bank of Canada.

Gerald visited Holland in 1955 and 1957. He looked me up and something clicked again. In 1957 I was invited to his sister's wedding and on my birthday March 28 (I turned 28), we became engaged. I promised to come to Canada as soon as possible. I did not consider myself an ordinary immigrant. I left a well paying job as branch manager of an insurance company, but I had to start all over again in Canada. It was also quite hard to organize my departure all by myself. I did not live with my parents any more. Information received from various sources turned out to be completely wrong, which caused delays. I had to travel to The Hague to have a check-up by the Health Department. I was so nervous that I got sick. Also, after my smallpox vaccination, I was very sick for several days. I received 2 scratches on my left hip. On my last Saturday in Holland my sister and I spent the afternoon in a canoe on a lake. The boat tipped and my left side got wet. The two spots became one big sore. On board of the Waterman I had to visit the ship's doctor every other day to replace my dressing.

I left Holland on July 12, 1957 from Rotterdam. My father, Gerald's parents, his sisters and grandfather saw me off. They had flowers delivered to my cabin and there were also several letters waiting for me from friends. I



was on board the Waterman for 8 days and found it very boring, nothing to do. I remember sitting in the lounge with a group of people discussing and placing bets each day on how many knots (nautical miles) the ship would travel. I made friends with a lady from Denmark with her 2 very blond daughters, who was on her way to meet her husband already in Canada. I moved in with them, as I had trouble in the cabin I shared with a mother and her very young baby, who would be asleep during the day. I remember the stormy weather.

Rotterdam, July 12, 1957  
S.S. Waterman



Lots of people missed the meals because of seasickness. It did not bother me at all. I was moving lengthways in my upper bunk bed and I actually liked the motion. I remember dancing and taking turns with the ship's officers. The tables were fastened to the floor and the ship's rocking movement made us bump into them. When I felt a little uneasy, I would just go up on deck to get some fresh air. I remember a large group of exchange students from France. They had a great time together. They also celebrated their national holiday on July 14th, Bastille day, I believe. My big "excitement" was to visit the handsome ship's doctor every other day, although his nurse took care of me. I also sat on deck a few times, in the sun and in stormy weather.

Close to the Canadian coast we spotted a few whales. I do not remember arriving in

Halifax. It was very early in the morning. We must have been asleep. After breakfast we had to go through health formalities, before leaving the ship. I don't remember getting off the ship. I do remember the customs officer in the receiving hall, giving me a hassle. He asked me why I came to Canada. I told him. He said: "Are you sure this guy is going to marry you?" That upset me very much. "Of course I am sure" and I stuck out my hand to show my engagement ring. Luckily, he let me enter the country!

I do not remember anything about Pier 21. I heard that name for the first time about a year ago, when the information about The Pier 21 Society became available. The only picture I have in my mind is of being on a road, with several other people, planning to walk to Halifax. We had asked where Halifax was, because we could not see the city. They pointed to the far distance. We started walking in a desolate and barren countryside, with no trees or shade. It was terribly hot, so we decided it would be too far and turned back. Now I keep asking myself: "Where were we?" Of course, it was 42 years ago and landscapes do change. I wish I had some pictures from that time. My husband and I visited Pier 21 and I cannot believe that I arrived there 42 years ago. I keep trying to remember anything else, but there is nothing.



The only pictures I have are from our departure. I am standing on the ships railing and my family is waving us off behind the windows of the departure hall. But I do remember the train from Halifax to Montreal. I could not believe my eyes when I saw this old steam train with wooden benches, on which we had to spend a night and a day, travelling ever so slowly, stopping ever so often, belching black smoke. We were getting so dirty. What kind of backward country did I come to? Why had Gerald never told me about these old-fashioned trains? In Holland we were used to first class trains. Luckily, the train to Toronto was more like it. Very comfortable cushioned seats. We were not allowed to bring food from the ship to shore. I do not remember how I got hold of Canadian money, but I bought a sandwich on the train. It was white bread, with salted butter

and cheddar cheese. I did not like it at all. But when I arrived in Toronto late in the evening of July 21st and Gerald was there waiting for me, it was all worth it.

Then my Canadian life started and I have never had any regrets coming here. I love Canada and I would never want to go back. The first year was a bit difficult, but I had Gerald to help me and guide me. I spoke and understood English (face to face). I had 4 years of high school English and just finished a business letter writing course in English. But I had trouble with movies, T.V. and the radio. I stayed with Dutch friends till I found a flat. With their help I found a job within 2 weeks.

Gerald and I got married on November 16, 1957. Gerald's parents and my father were able to attend our wedding. We are now the happy parents and grandparents of Gerald Jr., Marg and Frank, and their 3 children Blake, Kaitlyn and Keanna.

When I left Holland I thought I would never see my family again. We have been very fortunate to go back to Holland with our children on many occasions. In March 2000 we will travel to Holland again to celebrate Gerald's father's 95th birthday. Our parents and various relatives have visited us. The world became a lot smaller since the year 1957, the start of my great adventure, which turned into a very happy life for Gerald, our family and me.

We think Canada is the best country in the world.