

W.A.T. Van den
Byllaardt
Dutch Immigrant
Rijndam
April 21, 1957



Arrived in Halifax on April 21, 1957, with the SS Rijndam, HAL. During the trip we had one day, rough stormy weather in the North Atlantic and the dining room did not get the patrons it deserved. The services, entertainment, and personnel were sublime. We disembarked in the afternoon, it was slow going because another liner came in port about the same time as we did. That gave some congestion in the big gray reception hall. Going through Immigration and finding the luggage took awhile, during that time Volunteers welcomed us to Canada and presented us with a box of "ready to eat bowl" of Kellogg's Corn Flakes and a Bible.

The train was waiting and left the station in the late evening, bringing us to an uncertain future in a strange country. The steam locomotive driven train "The Colonist" was very uncomfortable with three hard benches, plugged toilets and no heat. Sleep that night was hard to get, the train made numerous stops and had long waits in nowhere. Every chance we had when the train stopped at a station, my travel companions, Walter and Edith Loff (lost track of them) picked up food for the long trip. Walter had lived in Canada for one year and had mastered the English language very well. Our first impression at sunrise was that we had seldom seen a house or farm, when we did see one it was a very run down shed with some barns around. Our thought was, how could anybody live under such conditions but looking a bit closer we noticed there was a big, shiny car in front of the sheds. In Montreal we were picked up by my sister, who had arrived 14 days earlier with the SS Maasdam and had rented a place there. We stayed at her place then we continued our trip west. We left for Edmonton, AB with the "Super Continental". The train had benches comfortable enough to get some sleep and the service was good on board. The meals were high priced but we managed to pick what we needed on the way. The landscape changed as the days passed on, when we entered those endless prairies, it sure made us feel very small.

A cousin of mine, who lived in Edmonton for some time, picked us up. We had a very nice welcome and a good meal. After that we all went looking for rooms to rent. We found accommodations that same day, a living room with stove (no water) and a fully furnished bedroom with a shared bathroom on the same floor. (\$50.00 a month) The next day I

went to pick up the luggage at the train station. On my way back to the newly rented rooms the taxi dropped me off at the address I had given him. It was not the place I had rented and I stood there in unfamiliar surroundings looking for some site I would recognize but it was to no avail. A car stopped to ask if I needed help, with my little bit of English I managed to explain the predicament I had gotten myself into. He told me that I had changed the street numbers with avenue numbers and after a short drive he did find the place. He made sure it was right before he left me. I am still thankful for the help this stranger gave me, it left a lasting impression. For the first 6 months I was working one small job after another as a carpenter, until the first snow flake fell in early November. The building trades came to a halt, many people were without work due to the sub zero temperatures. I did get a job for a Sheet Metal and Heating Shop. I was a helper to a countryman of mine who installed furnaces in new homes. I still have good contact with the old owner and his son (M. & K. Kreuningen).

After some time I was offered an apprenticeship by a bigger company. I had taken my schooling at S.A.I.T. in Calgary AB to get my tradesmen qualification, (2 months every year for 5 years). Edmonton didn't have a trade school at that time (N.A.I.T.) so I had to go 200 miles away to get that education. When I got my journeymen papers I left Edmonton and moved to Burnaby, BC where I was involved in many large provincial projects. I have been a sheet metal Forman for major companies in Vancouver, BC.

I retired in the Okanagan. My wife and I will be traveling across Canada some day, our plans are to visit Pier 21 in Halifax, NS. Surely it will bring back many memories of those first steps...