

Bill Rawlinson
English Immigrant
1966

CANADA'S IMMIGRATION MUSEUM
PIER 21



In the twilight years of Pier 21, I came to Canada in February 1966 on my own from Yorkshire England; I was seeking some adventure without being too daring plus a lot bigger country. By 1966 coming by air was an alternative to sea so I flew from Prestwick Scotland directly into Halifax by Air Canada on a regular (unstretched DC8); there was a special immigrant fare of 50 pounds (\$150) which was in economy class of course but did allow for a first class baggage allowance of 66lb.

The plane arrived at the airport in late afternoon and everything seemed quite official. After clearing the relatively simple paper work I was asked if I had anywhere in particular to go; I hadn't anywhere so they suggested I wait until they were through with their work. The immigration officers were closing up that section of the airport and heading into the city and offered myself and the one more immigrant (Heather Bingley was her name I think) a drive into the city with them; they had a place we could stay until we found somewhere else. So we were given a drive to Pier 21, the officers seemed quite friendly. We arrived a bit late for supper but there was still food left.

The place seemed a bit like a jail with bars on the windows and guards on the doors but the staff were friendly, it was clean, we were told we could come and go as we pleased and the price was right free). The male dormitory was crowded with Cuban sailors who did not speak English, they were not immigrants and I did not know how they came to be there. There were only two (ie. one more) in the female dormitory and she was a Hungarian nurse who had not reboarded a plane at Gander and was claiming refugee status. There was a young English boy in there too, only about 17 I think, he had failed to return to his fishing vessel and had been living in native communities for several days before the RCMP caught up with him, he was waiting for deportation papers and confined to the building.

I was in the Pier 21 hostel from Thursday to Monday. The immigration officers were friendly and one (Phil - I think his name was) was quite hospitable and showed us round the city and over the bridge to Dartmouth. I was found work and left on the train for Truro on the Monday. I did return with Heather Bingley to see Phil once or twice and we were shown over an immigration ship on one visit. Heather stayed in

Halifax for a few months then went to Montreal; I lost touch with both of them after that.