

Herold Wagner
German Immigrant
Anna Salen
June 25, 1952



I was 20 years of age, from Saxony, East Germany, living now in West Germany under difficult after war conditions, when I decided to immigrate to Canada.

My application for immigration took almost 9 months before I was called in to the Canadian Consulate in Karlsruhe. I almost gave up that dream to immigrate because of such a long waiting time.

I was applying as a farm help, because this was a wanted job at this time. Since I was not directly a city boy, I thought I would qualify for such a job.

I had to go through a lot of formalities and medical check-ups before I was interviewed by an official. I had to answer very difficult questions about farming. For example describing various seeds, duration of horse and cow pregnancies, etc. I didn't want to become a veterinarian nor a biologist. I just wanted a job as a farm help. I was very disappointed receiving the news that I did not qualify.

My fiancé applied for a job as a house maid in Canada sitting next to me, already possessing the visa to immigrate, felt sorry for me. We were engaged and looked hopefully into the future and she began to cry. The officer probably felt sorry for us and finally accepted me. I received the visa, dated June 3rd 1952 and we both were very happy. We had to be in Bremerhaven within the next few days. Then again, we had to undergo more formalities. Finally we left Germany on June 16 1952 on board the Anna Salén. It was an unforgettable voyage. We cruised around the northern part of England, passing the Shetland Islands. Females and males were separated. Men were crowded into cabins, sleeping on bunk beds. We had to queue for our meals. The food was almost like a dream come true. For years, I was used to very small rations.

The Atlantic crossing was very smooth; I do not recall anyone being sea sick on board. After 10 days we finally sighted the coast of Nova Scotia. It was a strange feeling, not knowing what to expect. I knew only a little about Canada. The only thing I knew about Canada were things I learned at school, like Niagara Falls, the wilderness up north and Indians. I also heard about the vastness of this country, the bears, and the harsh

winter climate. We arrived in Halifax, a city I have only heard of from stories during the war. As I checked through immigration, I was asked by an official, which Province I would prefer. I just told him Niagara Falls and he stamped my passport LANDED IMMGRANT, Halifax , June 25 1952, a warrant number, which was my identification throughout my immigration process. After immigrating I boarded the train passing Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Quebec stopping over in Montreal. Some women had to leave the train and stayed in this city. My fiancé was among one of these women. We were shocked, since none of us were informed, that we were going to be separated. Our discussion did not help very much and I had to continue the trip without my fiancé. After travelling for 3 days on the train, we reached Toronto Union Station. I remembered enjoying a tasteful American breakfast, before having to board another train to Stratford, Ontario. Getting closer to our final destination I became very anxious about my future home and job.

After 3 days of travelling we reached our final destination, Stratford. All farm helpers left the train. The farmers were awaiting us at the platform. As the train stopped the farmers came up and inspected us asking if we would work for them. Among them, were dairy and vegetable farmers. I ended up joining a mink farmer. I have never heard of a mink before. The farmer's wife explained me everything I should know about this animal. Due to my lack of understanding English, I had no idea of what she was talking about. I can still recall my first day driving from the station through rich farmland. It was a nice warm summer day. Finally the farmer couple pointed to a house and barn on top of a hill. This was to be my new home in Canada. The house was new and huge. The farmer's wife showed me my room. A beautiful room with a walk-in closet, a bathroom with a shower (which I have never seen before). It was unbelievable.

Meanwhile it was afternoon and I was very tired. Since Halifax I had little or no sleep, but I didn't want to show any sign of weakness. When wanting to change clothes to start working, I found out that I had my fiancé's suitcase. We mixed them up in Montreal. They looked alike.

I recall a big grin on the farmer's face. I found only woman's clothes in the suitcase. Since it was warm I didn't need very much to wear. Since the farmer had my size, he gave me some of his. After dressing up he showed me around the farm. I recall a terrible smell coming out of the barn. I sighted many cages. In each cage there was one animal which looked like a squirrel. They were called minks. From the fur of these animals collars, hats and coats were made. The fur had shiny silver colour and is very expensive. There were approx. 3000 of these minks had to be fed with meat twice daily. Now I finally knew how a mink looked like. I started off stacking hay. He also had cattle, which grazed on his

land during summer. The next day the farmer took me to town to buy some clothes. After my 'shopping spree' I had to feed the animals. I was lucky to have such a job. Nevertheless a little accident happened. I injured my leg, while working and the doctor told me to stay in bed. My farmer surely wasn't amused. After all, he needed a help, not a sick patient. My wage wasn't very much. Only \$30 and a month later I received a wage increase of \$5. I started paying off my boat fare (\$150) from Germany starting off at \$5 and later \$10 per month. A few months later an official from the department of labour came to the farm. I noticed, that a big discussion between the farmer and the official began. They called me over to them and I was told, that my fiancé could join me, if we would marry. In August of 1952 we finally reunited and got married.

The Department of Labour did find another place to work for both of us in Stratford. My wife received a job opportunity in home for the elderly nearby and I stayed at the farm. We both did not earn very much and we had to look into the future. One day my wife found a job opening in a car body manufacturer in Ingersoll promising good pay. I applied and got the job. Since I was on a government contract for one year I had to be released from it in order to work for this company. I was released, but had to make monthly payments for my passage, which amounted to \$365. It did take some time for me to pay off this debt.

In March of 1953 a baby boy was born. Shortly thereafter I was laid off at the company. With little hope of finding another job in the little town of Ingersoll, I searched for another job elsewhere. Since I was experienced to work on cars I found an opportunity at a manufacturer in Windsor, Ontario. A big lay off also began there and we moved to Toronto finding an employment at Ford in Oakville and later at Volkswagen of Canada. My wife gave birth to a girl in 1955 in Toronto. In the summer of 1958 I visited a former school friend in Chicago, USA. Still looking for a way to improve myself. Knowing that wages were higher in the United States I looked around and found a VW dealer that would hire me. We immigrated to the US. A few years later we moved to Maryland, where I opened my own body shop.

In 1968 we went back to Germany.

After 54 years my wife and I came back to Halifax in September of 2006 visiting Halifax and touring the Atlantic Provinces and Pier 21. Memories came back. Our whole family, now living in the reunified Germany haven't forgotten Canada. We still have friends in this beautiful country, which we have visited many times since we left.

We are proud having children that still have the Canadian citizenship and their children as well.

Health permitting we will surely visit Halifax and its Pier 21 again.

Herold Wagner
Germany