

Sister Adua Zampese
Italian Immigrant and Pier
21 Volunteer
February 1959

CANADA'S IMMIGRATION MUSEUM PIER 21



MEMORIES OF PIER 21

On Sunday, August 22,
1999, as a member of Sisters of Service, I visited with the group of
sisters, the newly reopened Pier 21.



From the time I entered the building, when I saw the mural depicting immigrants tagged for the journey, I felt in touch with my own experience of my arrival at the pier, with my brother Sergio, in February 1957. We came from Italy to Canada to join our father in Saskatchewan, who had come to Canada six years before we did. My mother and two sisters followed us in 1959.

It would take pages to relate all of my feelings. I know that my experience is not unique. I

believe that my recount of that day conveys the feelings of all those immigrants who, like me, now re enter the gates of the Pier 21 for a rendezvous with the past.

There I was, forty-two years later, and in my heart, still holding the feelings of that long ago February day. I relived the dreams I had at my arrival, and the trepidations of my twenty-one year old heart, as I remembered standing there in that large space, waiting to go through customs.

As these waves of memories passed before me, I looked around and saw Pier 21 as it stands today. I was deeply touched at seeing the extent



to which Canada went in transforming the inside of the pier, making it a

living memory to the many immigrants who came to Canada through its gates.

Some years later I became a sister of service. When I stood before the huge poster with pictures of the sisters of service helping at the Pier, and when I saw SOS memorabilia and statements displayed in a case, I remembered when in 1968, as a novice in the community, I was sent to Halifax on my mission.

Sister Sally Liota was the sister of service welcoming the immigrants at the port, and I was assigned to work with her. The first group of immigrants I welcomed, disembarked from the Motonave Saturnia,



almost to the date, eleven years after my brother's and my arrival at the same place. The chaplain on board was Monsignor Noacco, the same Chaplain as when we come to Canada! Coincidence?

With the benefit of having lived eleven years in Canada by then, I understood much more the part the sisters of services played in the lives of the new comers. I made myself available to the immigrants, helping them in whatever way possible, as they stepped from the ship in to Pier 21, through

customs, interpreting for them, helping them to stop for the journey ahead (I smiled and understood their surprise when they purchased sliced bread!), placing phone calls to relatives in different parts of Canada, for me it was a going back in time to when my brother and I came.

As I stood there in august 1999, in amazement at the new look of Pier 21, involuntarily I checked my heart, and I was reminded that not all the dreams I held in 1957 were realized, but also the trepidations didn't last forever. In my transition period I found people who understood me, befriended and helped me. The kindness received by so many Canadians in my first years in this new land became significant again later, when I was deciding my call to religious life. I believed that if God was calling me to religious life I would be dedicating my life to helping others in the country that others had helped me.

And now, back to the present. I hope to return again to Pier 21 one day. I know that when I do return my experience will be different than in 1999. What would be unchangeable is my appreciation of this significant 'moment' that Pier 21 has become to Canadian immigrants.

Adua Zampese
Sister of Service



Sister Adua (m) with Sister Pat (l) and Sister Lita (r) at Pier 21's FESTA Fundraiser in Vaughn, Ontario, March 30, 2007

