

Monica Forberger

My Hungarian father and German mother and I arrived on what we later referred to as "that floating walnut shell," after a miserable crossing from Naples, Italy. The ship had more than 300 people crammed into every nook and cranny; men and women were separated and although we were "immigrants" as my maternal grandfather had paid for our passage, we were sharing with hundreds of displaced persons, most of whom had stories of disaster and deprivation.

The ship ran out of fresh water and I recall having to drink cocoa made with salt water. There were only three people on board who weren't seasick — my mother, the pastor and one of the crewmembers. Even the captain took ill on this horrendous voyage.

When we arrived in Halifax we were greeted by the immense generosity of Canadians. I had no shoes, as my last pair of good German leather shoes had been stolen from our train coach, as we were about to leave Naples. I was presented by a pair of (what I thought) elegant white sandals. They were a couple of sizes too large for me, but I loved them! My first Canadian shoes.

I recall much frenzied activity around the Pier, as my parents got papers ready and organized the family for a cross-country train trip to Taber, Alberta! My father, an agronomist by profession, was to start work to help harvest wheat for a Hungarian/Canadian farmer.

During the organization my parents left me to look after our one and only trunk of worldly possessions. It stood in the middle of the aisle in the train and I recall everyone had to fight their way around the trunk and me. One Canadian soldier, returning home from his tour of duty gave me one of the best gifts up to that point — a package of Pauline's Chocolate Celenos. I think I was more than halfway through eating the entire box of chocolate-coated coconut goodies before my parents returned, papers in hand, and stopped me from making myself violently ill.

On the four-day train trip I became quite ill with a fever of 104 degrees F. A doctor was summoned in Montreal, but when he came on board another mother with a sickly child pre-empted the good doctor's services. Somehow my mother and father — with the help of the train's porter — managed to get me through the medical crisis and we arrived in Medicine Hat united and happy.

My father went on to Taber to work, while my mother and I found accommodation with a Canadian war widow. But it was a short-lived stay, as my father's job lasted only a week, as the farmer soon realized that my father was totally unfit for any physical labor. Through the auspices of the Hungarian Catholic Church, my parents were offered jobs with the family of a leading neurologist at Calgary General Hospital. It was here that we became integrated with a real Canadian family (who were actually English) — five children who became friends and mentors and a doctor and his wife who made me as much a part of their family as their own children.

Stephen Csibor

Saxonia. When we came out of Hungary we had to leave everything behind and the money we had was worthless outside the country. The clothing we wore was ill fitting (we got those used shoes and clothing in Austria, since ours were ruined during our escape). Our only wealth was the \$15.00 (\$5.00 each) that we received when we arrived in Halifax; and we knew only two English words: "yes" and "no".

We stayed in Halifax in a government building for about six weeks. During this time I borrowed a Hungarian-English dictionary and grammar book that I studied at night. The owner of the books studied them in the daytime. I created my own grammar book and learned words, which I felt, were essential for basic communication. In the middle of March we went to Montreal and lived in a convent. By then my English was good enough to be able to look for and find a job by myself. At the end of March I started working as a draftsman in the engineering office of imperial Oil Ltd. In May we rented an apartment. At last we had a place which we could call home!

I took evening courses and studied English at McGill University. The following years, utilizing my past experience as an engineer, I continuously improved my engineering skills and progressively increased my professional position and responsibilities. Eventually I became the Department Head and Chief Civil Engineer, and for 15 years I managed a department overseeing 60 engineers and technical staff for Ebasco/Ebastec Lavalin Inc. My wife had no opportunity to attend school and study English since she had a daytime job and took care of all the household work as well. She picked-up the language by talking to people. For the last 17 years of her working career she was employed as an office clerk in a responsible position at the head office of the Prudential Assurance Company in Toronto. Our son Tom became a computer program designer. We now enjoy our retirement and look back with nostalgia to that day when we first saw Pier 21 and Canada, the land of promise for so many people like ourselves.

Yolanda Varga

I was sick for 11 days, saw icebergs, we were stopped for 2 days- constant foghorn. Aluminum roofs looked like sugar glaze. We had arrived in Fairyland!