

Today at Pier 21 (below) a volunteer gives students an educational tour (right) to help them understand the immigrant experience.

into practice on his own in Canada until he qualified here. The family moved to Montreal, where Ann scrubbed floors for eight months until Henry secured work as a dentist in a hospital clinic. The Kazimirs eventually moved to Ste. Agathe, Que., where they lived until Henry died in 1976.

At Pier 21 today, visitors can hear immigrants tell their own stories. A mock train takes people on a typical immigrant journey – landscape whizzes by windows, the floor vibrates, and in the sleeping compartments, video recollections recall the journeys people made to get to and across this country.

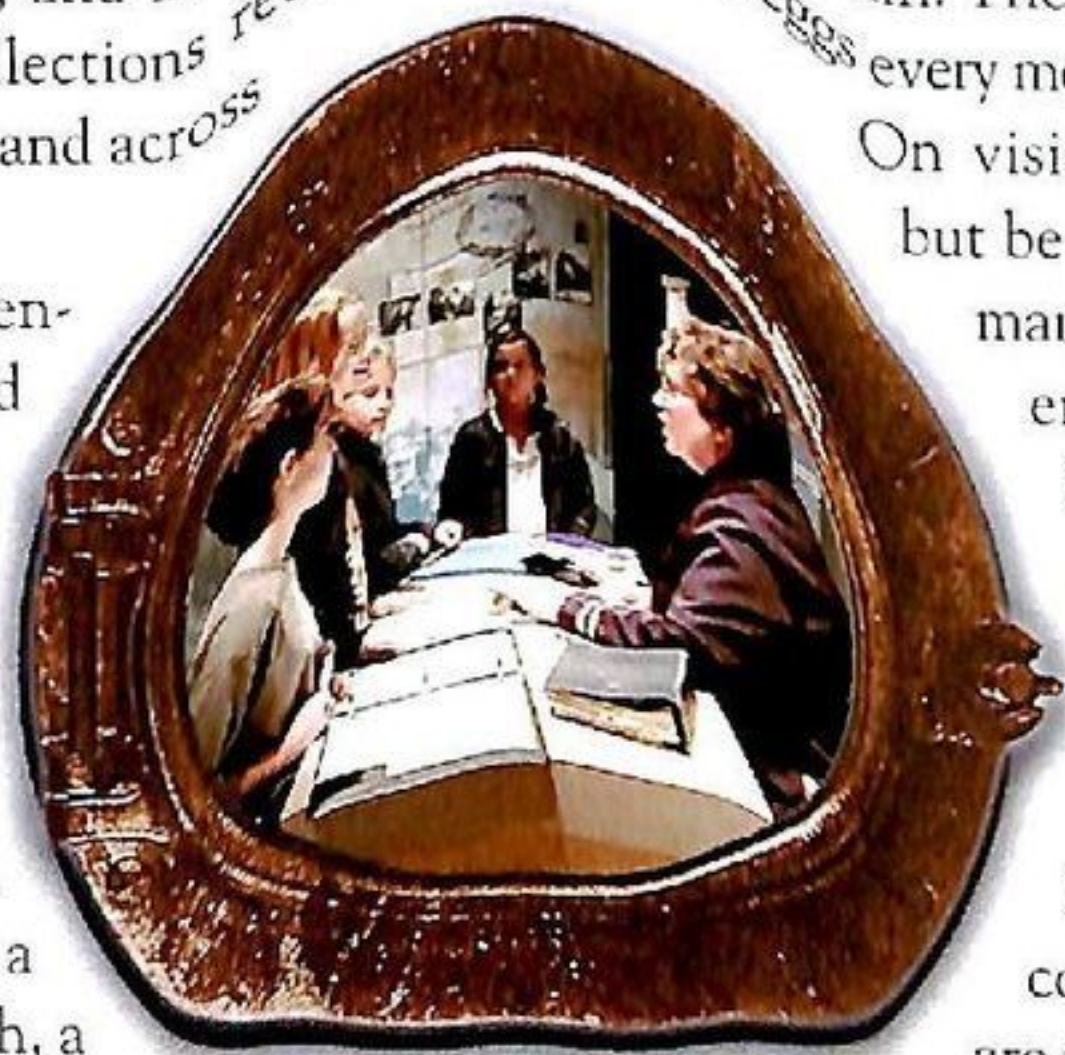
The facility also has an extensive data base on immigrants and all the ships that carried them to Halifax.

One of the most poignant displays is a small suitcase and pile of belongings: three books, a pair of blue jeans, a doll, some silverware, a candlestick, a silver plate, a framed photograph, a wooden jewellery box and some bedding. Visitors are invited to pack the suitcase. Even these few objects take up more space than the suitcase offers, and a choice must be made.

MAISIE LUGAR (NÉE GOAT) OF BEDFORD, N.S., was 11 years old in July 1940 when she was among the first boatload of child evacuees from Britain. Maisie and her brothers, Stanley, 12, and Ronald, seven, each carried one small suitcase, a little knapsack and a gas mask for a trip that was to last five years. "Your parents were given a list of what you could take – two pairs of underwear, two pairs of socks, etc. – it was ridiculous really."

Three thousand children were evacuated from Britain to Canada during the Second World War. Maisie and her brothers were among the fortunate ones. Another ship of evacuees was torpedoed and destroyed.

Ruby Gray of Sussex, N.B., arrived as a war bride on June 18, 1945. Although she knew nothing about



the land to which she was coming, she was neither homesick nor fearful. "No, no, I was in love," she laughs. "Who thinks about the future that much when they're in love – you just know that you want to spend it together."

To Gray, Canada seemed like the land of plenty after years of rationing. "There was so much food. I gained 10 pounds the first month I was here. There had been a bit of rationing here, but very little compared with in Britain. There'd been very few eggs at home, so I had eggs every morning for my breakfast, and fruit."

On visiting Pier 21, one cannot help but be impressed with the fortitude of many immigrant families, who often endured considerable hardship here before finding success. In 1953, Poul Sander employed 10 men at a garage he owned in a suburb of Copenhagen. He and his wife, Edith, and their 13-year-old son, Finn, were living comfortably, but fed by "the streets are paved with gold" stories by Poul's

brother, Erik, who had moved to Canada in 1952, the family decided to move here also. Finn, who is now the administrative officer of the biology department at Halifax's Dalhousie University, says his uncle's glowing letters turned out to be full of empty promises. "The bubble burst the moment we arrived and my uncle asked to borrow \$50 from my dad," says Finn. "We ended up in a small rooming house overlooking a miserable, dirty back alley on the wrong side of the tracks in Montreal."

Times were so tough that Finn spent three summers working as a farm hand, contributing his \$10 weekly pay to the family pool.

One woman who knows both sides of the immigrant story is Marianne Ferguson (née Echt). She arrived at age 13 from Danzig (now Gdansk, Poland) in 1939 with her mother, father, grandmother and two sisters, escaping Hitler's persecution of Jews. Originally, Marianne and her family had planned to live in Montreal, but they were so impressed by the kindness of people at Pier 21 and in Halifax in general that they bought a farm in Milford Station, N.S., not far from the city. "Everyone was welcoming," says Ferguson. "The United Church minister's wife even asked my mother to join the church's ladies auxiliary."

In turn, Marianne and her mother volunteered their services as translators at Pier 21 and helped to provide comfort to new arrivals. "A lot of people were very depressed, apprehensive and worried when they arrived. Many came from concentration camps, and someone just had to call their name and they would think that somebody wanted to put them in some kind of a jail."



Now a volunteer in the Pier 21 offices, Ferguson says the place makes her feel proud to have been an immigrant. "When you first arrive, people sometimes look a little down on you. Now, with all this fuss about Pier 21, if you were an immigrant, they look up to you."

Pier 21 has always relied on volunteers to aid immigrants and make them feel welcome. Sister Salvatrice Liota of the Sisters of Service, who worked there from 1955 to 1969, interpreting and helping new arrivals get through the immigration process, also attended the Canada Day opening. She typically used to work 10 to 12 hours a day at Pier 21, but sometimes as many as 22, sleeping between ship arrivals on boxes in a storage room. "On the day Pier 21 reopened, I went to the old baggage room and was overcome with emotion," she says. "In my mind, I could see all the baggage, the seagulls flying around. In the winter we froze because the doors would be open to bring the baggage in and the wind would blast off the ocean."

Sister Liota particularly recalls the Hungarian

refugees of the 1950s. "The Hungarians came wearing army castoffs – even the women wore cast-off army jackets and coats. Very few had a suitcase. So all the church organizations had a big meeting and decided which was going to give what. The Salvation Army gave them food, for example, and we gave each child a new toy. Others gave toilet articles and clothes."

However, not all of Sister Liota's memories are sad. She chuckles at the recollection of teaching Hungarian refugees to play bingo and of dances her order hosted in the nearby mother house. The sisters would unplug the record player at midnight, she laughs, and the Hungarians would plug it back in.

FOR MORE THAN 40 YEARS, PIER 21 WELCOMED newcomers to Canada, people from a multitude of countries and all walks of life. Today, the facility tells their story, the story of immigration, which is an act of faith and bravery. It stands as a thank you to the many immigrants who helped build this country. □

The Van Helverts arrived in Canada on May 14, 1950. They were among the many Dutch farming families to immigrate to Canada in the 1950s.

