## The Book Corner

## The immigrants: what it was like

By ALLAN GOULD For nearly 15 years, Barry Broadfoot has been known as this

country's greatest oral historian.

His is an honorable and respected field - the personal stories of apparently insignificant people are often far more insightful and more moving than the diaries and records of generals, politicians and dictators. We may, for example, learn a lot more about the Second World War, and human nature, from a soldier's letters home than from a brass hat's battle plans.

That is why one turns with legitimate anticipation to Broadfoot's latest work, The Immigrant Years: From Europe to Canada 1945-1967 (Douglas and McIntyre; 255 pages; \$22.95).

And although this reader dld not find it as satisfying as such previous volumes of Broadfoot's as Ten Lost Years, it is still an important document.

DRAWBRIDGE UP As the author notes, Canadians were "smug and affluent" after the Second World War, with 61 per cent not wanting even the British to come here.

It is as if we fought that war to make the world safe for democracy, but not necessarily to let any part of that world on to our

particular shores. The titles of Broadfoot's chapters tell what one can expect here: Freedom and a New Life, We Were War Brides (46,000 British women came over after the war). Nobody Told Us What It Would Be Like, Another Land, Another Language, Got to Get a Job, Exploitation and Discrimination, We Never Had It So Good, and Becoming Canadians.

PUTTING IT BEHIND Some chapters are far more affecting than others. It is important to read such statements as that by the Dutchman who mocks the diche that many came to Canada "because it was the Land of Promise.

No, he says, "we came to Canada to forget what we had done to each other in th war... Everyone else in the country, the city, the village was their enemy, because they were all fighting to get one thing, food. First, food, any food, food you wouldn't feed your worst dog today, food no government would allow to be sold or even fed to the

Statements like that help explain the earlier cry from a Czechoslovakian who weeps, "Canada, all you people in it, excuse my bad English, but my wife and babics and me, we thank you. We thank you so much.'

LONELY DAYS Not that it was al thanks, of course. "The worst thing in the first days was the loneliness,"

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recalls one immigrant, "You had nobody to talk to ... I'd sit on this little bed and listen to the radio I had, and when a song reminded me of some other time, I would cry. I cried a lot."

If it was often a living hell to come to Canada from England already fluent in at least one of this country's languages - then how much more agonizing, for those from Eastern and Central Europe. "I used the (Eaton) catalogue as a textbook," says one immigrant.
"There were pictures and the descriptions...this is a sweater. This is a frying pan. This is a bed. And so on. You see how easy If

But often even the brightest immigrant could not get around our grotesque rules for immigrants. As one government official remembers, "these were men who had been doctors, lawyers, accountants, engineers, men of quality any country would have been happy to have. Men who had a purpose in life, a sense of achievement, a large measue of pride and would

have contributed a great deal to Canada, but they were being shut

DOWN-GRADING He goes on to describe how these talented immigrants had been told overseas that they were to "downgrade their education, their skills, their accomplishments, in order to fit into certain slots the Canadian government had set up. 1 mean laborers. That really was what it was all about."

There is some ugilness in the book as well, and it kdoesn't come from the immigrants, either, who numbered nearly three million, in the first two decades after the war: Slurs of "Bohunk"; jealousy from native-born Canadians; fear of the

As the author puts it, "newcorners thought that Canadians did not work hard enough...They did not think that Canadians loved their country enough, either, and said they loved it more."

UNIQUE LOVE And they probably do love this country more, in the way that im-

migrants kwho have gone through war, famine and heartbreak must

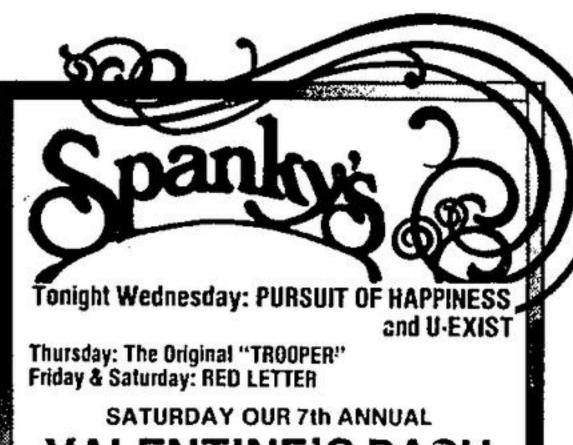
I would have liked more information on the people interviewed by Broadfoot - their ages, countries of origin, how well they did here, what their children do. But the handful of kwonderful photos of immigrants almost makes up for

The Immigrant Years is an important record, and one from which native-born Canadians could learn a lot.

The new-comers interviewed in the book? They know it all, only too well, and often from very bitter experience.

Allan Gould's latest books are Letters I've Been Meaning to Write, and The New Entrepreneurs: 80 Canadian Success

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