



Canadian Museum of
Immigration at Pier 21
Musée canadien de
l'immigration du Quai 21

PASSAGES SUMMER 2026

COUNTLESS JOURNEYS. ONE CANADA.



George Zwaagstra, in 2016, in the *Pier 21 Story* exhibition.

THANK YOU, GEORGE: A VOLUNTEER PROFILE

By Annette Carter, Volunteer Services Manager.

On April 27, 2026, **after eighteen years, long-time volunteer George Zwaagstra hung up his uniform.** It was the day of the 75th anniversary of his arrival to Canada through Pier 21.

George (Sjouke) Zwaagstra was born in 1933 in Tjerkwerd, Netherlands, the second of three sons. The family survived the German occupation of the Netherlands during the Second World War, during which time George's father was involved with the Dutch resistance. Following the war, George and his

parents and younger brother immigrated to Canada. They arrived in 1951 on board the *Georgic*. His older brother had immigrated previously, in 1950. In 1957, George married fellow Dutch immigrant Geraldine Jansma and together they raised a family.

Following retirement, George began volunteering at the Museum. He assisted with the translation of Dutch documents and shared his experience of coming to Canada as a tour guide. From 2015 to 2019 alone, George provided tours to more than 13,000 visitors. In addition to sharing his talents, George also donated his story and artifacts to the

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Museum Collection. Some of these are on display in the Treasures from Home section of the *Pier 21 Story* exhibition. George and his wife Geraldine decided to memorialize themselves and their loved ones through a purchase of plaques on the *Sobey Wall of Honour*.

In 2022, the Consulate General of the Kingdom of the Netherlands published a graphic novel called *Destination: Canada*, telling the story of ten Dutch immigrants, illustrated by ten Dutch comic book artists. The Museum adapted two of these stories for a special exhibit, one of which was the story of George Zwaagstra.

George continues to be a wonderful ambassador for the Museum, often sharing his experiences as an immigrant and volunteer at the Pier with people he meets and with the media.

Thank you, George, for all you have given.

You and all of our volunteers enrich the work of the Museum.

The Volunteer Engagement Program is supported by the Macdonald Stewart Foundation and Scotiabank.

MESSAGE FROM FIONA



Our story goes on. That's what I think of when I read the articles in this issue of *Passages*.

When parents pass on their values to their kids, their story goes on.

When our history is shared, complete with the lessons it has to offer, that story goes on.

When we leave things better than we find them, our story goes on.

In this issue of *Passages*, our twice-annual newsletter for current and prospective donors, you'll find stories about the inspiration generated by two *Fascinating Canadian Luncheon* events; the lasting impact of a man who volunteered at the Museum for the last 18 years; a staff member for whom the Museum

means so much, she has included a donation in her will; an artistic installation that adds Indigenous history and perspectives to one of our core exhibitions; a partnership that brings our podcast to passengers onboard Air Canada flights; and the ways that two cultures are present in a single household

These articles show that stories resonate over time. Sometimes for years, sometimes for millennia.

I also want to let you know that our story, here at the Museum, goes on. As I write this, we are kicking off a strategic planning process to determine our direction and priorities for the next five years.

So much of what we do is made possible by your support. Thank you. Your impact is deeply felt.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "F. Valverde".

Fiona Valverde
Vice-President, Revenue Generation



WHY THIS STAFF MEMBER IS NAMING THE MUSEUM IN HER WILL

By Cecile Kung. *Cecile is a Heritage Interpreter with the Museum. She immigrated to Canada from Hong Kong in 2022.*

Few places around the world celebrate immigration and immigrants. Canada is acclaimed as being friendly and receptive to immigrants. **The Museum is a beacon of that reputation.**

It's uniquely Canadian to dedicate a national museum to the contributions and hardships of immigrants and to share the bright and dark chapters of immigration history.

Few countries have Canada's courage, candour and humility when dealing with past wrongdoings.

I was deeply impressed when I visited the Museum, within weeks of my arrival at Halifax. I told myself: This is where I want to work.

And my wish came true. The Museum offered me my first Canadian job but also a second career.

I hope my future gift will support education programs that prompt people to learn from the past, reflect on the significance of immigration to Canada, appreciate the contributions of immigrants (regardless of their countries of origin or backgrounds), and keep up the reputation of Canada as a friendly, safe and welcoming destination for immigrants.

Pier 21 was an important arrival point for immigrants from Europe, but immigrants to Canada are not only Europeans. As an Asian immigrant, I would like to support events and programs that encourage immigrants outside Europe to share their stories and experiences at the Museum. I really appreciate the Museum's recent efforts to include non-European content.

At the same time, I hope Canadians of European descent will learn about the experiences of immigrants from other parts of the world. Despite differences in culture, language and religion, immigrants leave their homeland for similar reasons, but their experiences can be as diverse as their backgrounds. This understanding through a comparative and empathetic lens is essential to keep us on course in rough waters.

To learn more about making a planned gift, call Sukanksha (Su) Khatri, Director of Annual and Planned Giving, at 902-402-3839.



Ellen and her husband, Nick. Courtesy of Ellen Sikorski.

MEET ELLEN

By Ellen Sikorski. *Ellen joined the Museum in January 2026 as Special Events and Pier 21 Club Manager. Here, she reflects on the richness that comes with being married to an immigrant.*

My partner was born on the other side of the world; he's a Kiwi and I'm originally from Ontario. We met in graduate school in Winnipeg. Our life blends pieces of every place we've called home. Now, we're putting down roots in Nova Scotia, drawn by the ocean. It reminds him a little of New Zealand and has always felt grounding to both of us.

Our home is full of the small cultural collisions that come with loving someone from another country. My family, somehow, has fully embraced Vegemite sandwiches, while I can't stand them. I still don't entirely understand cricket; he's horrified when I compare it to baseball. Still, at some point I started saying the common Kiwi phrase "sweet as" unironically, cheering for the NZ national rugby teams, and developed a deep love for cheese rolls and Peanut Slabs.

Our kids move seamlessly between Canadian and Kiwi influences, and I joke that one day they will either play for the New Zealand ice hockey team or Team

Canada rugby. That's the beauty of dual citizenship; our kids will have a home on both sides of the world.

This past year, I helped my husband study for his Canadian citizenship test, which he passed on Christmas Eve. When he officially became a Canadian citizen, it felt like more than just paperwork. While New Zealand will always be home for him, Canada has become a close second. It's especially meaningful to be able to vote in elections and help shape the country where we're raising our family.

Immigration means so much to me because Canada welcomed my husband first on a student visa; our life together was made possible by that opportunity. Now, eleven years later, with two kids, a dog and a cat, we are laying down roots on the East Coast in a home built from two very different corners of the world.



Rosalie Abella in Halifax (left) and Mirko Bibic in Toronto (right).

FASCINATING CANADIANS INSPIRE WITH PERSONAL STORIES

By Ellen Sikorski, *Special Events and Pier 21 Club Manager*

In my first week at the Museum in January, I attended the *Luncheon with a Fascinating Canadian* event with keynote speaker former Supreme Court Justice Rosalie Silberman Abella. I knew the event was the Museum's signature fundraiser and featured notable Canadians discussing their own connections to immigration.

I didn't know I would end the lunch in tears.

Justice Abella shared her experience as a refugee, including how her father was denied the opportunity to practice law in Canada. She explained how that inspired her own journey, eventually becoming the first Jewish woman and refugee appointed to the Supreme Court of Canada.

At the end of the speech, everyone was on their feet and there wasn't a dry eye in the room. We were all inspired by Rosie, her hard work and most of all her love for her family and for her country.

Fast forward four months. Now I was leading the *Luncheon with a Fascinating Canadian* in Toronto. This time I had the privilege of hearing from Mirko Bibic, President and CEO of BCE Inc. & Bell Canada.

Mirko is an engaging speaker – charming, funny, and deeply thoughtful. He shared what it was like growing up in an immigrant household, with a mother born in France and a father who was an ethnic Serb born in Velusic, Yugoslavia (now Croatia). He spoke about how immigration has shaped him personally and professionally, emphasizing that immigration remains one of the ways talent can enter the workforce, develop, and grow into leadership roles.

Rosie and Mirko told powerful stories. But it wasn't just the speakers who left an impression on me; just as resonant was the collective energy of the audience. At both events, the crowd was made up of people from a wide variety of backgrounds, **all brought together by the same belief: that these immigration stories matter.** They deserve to be told, and they need to be heard.

My picture is on the opposite page. If you recognize me at a future event, please don't be a stranger. I look forward to meeting you at our next event in the fall in Halifax or next spring in Toronto.



Melinda Robertson, left, and Shannon Monk, right, finished the installation in December 2025.

WELCOME TO TURTLE ISLAND

By Carrie-Ann Smith, Vice-President, Visitor Experience

In December of 2023, the Museum launched its Indigenous Artist Intervention Program. The program showcases the original work of Indigenous artists on the glass wall map of Canada in the *Canadian Immigration Story* exhibition. Every two years, for a two-year period, a different artist's work is exhibited. This initiative is part of the Museum's ongoing conversation about and commitment to Truth and Reconciliation.

This program launched with an original piece from Métis installation artist and member of the Métis Nation of Ontario, Tracey-Mae Chambers' *#hopeandhealingcanada* project.

In December of 2025, Tribal Fusion Arts hung their stunning installation *Welcome to Turtle Island*. Tribal Fusion Art is a collaboration between two talented local artists, Melinda Robertson (Anishinaabe – Lake Manitoba First Nation) and Shannon Monk (Anisininew – St. Theresa Point First Nation / Mi'kmaq – Lennox Island First Nation / Celtic – Nova Scotia).

They explain, "As fused glass artists, we wanted to showcase a small sample of the cultural vibrancy

and diversity of the people of Turtle Island, primarily prior to contact. With this installation, we celebrate the knowledge, artistry, and technologies that have always shaped Turtle Island. Although we have taken an artistic approach with each piece created, and could not include every individual nation's story, the installation is grounded in research and authentic representation based on tribal linguistic family groups. It includes references to language, cultural practice, innovation, and spirituality. **We hope this installation inspires excitement to learn more about the rich culture of the original peoples of these lands."**

The artists' original plan was to create 50 original glass pieces. In the end, they created 71, along with an illustrated glossary that explains the meaning of each piece.

We can't wait to watch people discover the stunning glass artworks they have created and learn about what they represent.

In partnership with the Museum, Tribal Fusion offers group glass art workshops. See Pier21.ca for details.

Countless Journeys 7



THE MUSEUM'S PODCAST IS FLYING HIGH WITH AIR CANADA

By Jennifer Sutherland, Vice-President, External Relations

For six seasons, the Museum's *Countless Journeys* podcast has shared original content in English and French. Each season has explored a new perspective on what it means to be a newcomer in Canada. And the audience has been growing right alongside it—last year alone, the podcast surpassed 76,000 downloads, our highest number yet.

Listeners have heard about the high-stakes defection of Bulgarian artists Luben Boykov and Elena Popova with their infant daughter at the Gander Airport in the 1970's...

"We knew we were not in Havana, but we had no idea where we were. And when it touched down and as it was taxiing on the runway, we noticed in the distance, the terminal building with the Canadian flag."

...and Chef Devan Rajkumar reminiscing about lessons learned in his Indo-Guyanese Grandmother's kitchen...

"I would sit on the floor of my grandmother's apartment as a kid and, and she would grate toasted coconut on a brick with another brick called a lorha and sil."

The podcast continues to reach new heights.

This season, *Countless Journeys* is presented by Air Canada—Canada's airline for welcoming newcomers home. It's a natural partnership, reflecting how the journeys that once led to Pier 21 now pass through airports across the country.

Even more exciting, **travelers can now listen to the podcast as part of Air Canada's inflight entertainment.** It's a powerful new way to share these stories—reaching listeners as they travel, connect and reflect on their own journeys.

Season 7 explores how sports can help newcomers build community and find a sense of belonging—while highlighting the lasting impact immigrants have had on Canadian athletics. From NHL tough guy Georges Laraque to Manitoba's All-Nations Cup soccer tournament, to a Montreal program introducing newcomers to skiing, these stories show how sport can be a gamechanger. New episodes are available now on Apple, Spotify, or wherever you get your podcasts.

OUR IMPACT

2025-26 in numbers



96%

visitor satisfaction



89,088

overall visitors
onsite



\$3,615,120

self generated
revenue



37,876

genealogy related
inquiries



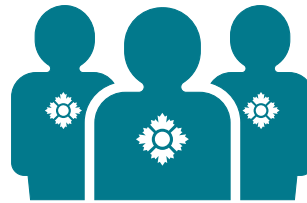
76,333

podcast downloads



4,677

students took part
in class trips and
virtual field trips



76

active volunteers



18

venues hosted
our travelling
exhibitions

LUNCHEON WITH FASCINATING CANADIAN, HALIFAX

The *Fascinating Canadian Speaker Series* is the Museum's signature fundraiser and features a notable Canadian recognized as an expert in their field. Most have a direct link to the immigration experience and share their own family's journey, as well as their thoughts on the important role immigration plays in our economy, culture and way of life.

This year's Halifax event features two fascinating Canadians: power couple Andrew Molson and Helen Antoniou.

Join us on:

Wednesday, November 25, 2026, 11:30 am

at the

Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21

To reserve your seats, please contact:

Ellen Sikorski

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Helen Antoniou



Andrew Molson