



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

# PASSAGES WINTER 2026

## COUNTLESS JOURNEYS. ONE CANADA.



Giovanna Covone (left) and Olga Bergola (right) arrived at Pier 21 from Italy in 1960 as children with their mother and sister.  
Photo courtesy of Francine Romano.

### "I SAW MYSELF REFLECTED"

**By Francine Romano.** *Francine visited the Museum in November 2025 with her mother, Olga, and her Aunt Giovanna.*

Visiting Pier 21, where my mother and our family first landed on Canadian soil, **stirred an emotion I've never felt before.** It felt like the missing link I didn't even realize I was searching for—the beginning of our Canadian history.

I saw myself reflected through the exhibits and artifacts. Even though I have never met any of the

individuals in the photos, I felt as though I knew them. They are our *paesans*. They are the men and women who bravely came to a new country, not knowing the language, to work and begin again. They are the individuals who helped house and sponsor the next waves of immigrants.

As a child, I never considered that my experience as a first-generation Canadian—hearing my Italian grandparents speak a dialect influenced by Canadian French and English—would someday disappear.

**I just assumed that it would last forever.** How lucky

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we are to have you all working as a team to provide a home for our stories to live forever. The Museum serves a profound purpose: it gives meaning to my family's story.

Photographing my mother, Olga, and her sister, my Aunt Giovanna, in front of the doors they walked through as children, I felt proud of them. I am honoured to have experienced all of this with them and feel lucky to have them as powerful, successful women whom I aspire to be. My story would be very different if my mother's hadn't begun through those doors at Pier 21.

It takes a lot to surprise my mother and bring her to tears, but Pier 21, your hard work and kindness truly paid off. Growing up, she often felt different; **this day made her feel recognized, accepted, and at home in Canada.** She said to me, "I didn't expect us to be honoured in such a special way."

Thank you for making this experience so memorable.

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## MESSAGE FROM FIONA



In the winter, when I look out at the Halifax harbour, I imagine people disembarking from ships in the cold into an unfamiliar land. I imagine my father arriving in Edmonton from Spain in March of 1964 and encountering the shock of winter air. I also think of the many stories we hear of new Canadians being seen and welcomed during the winter.

The theme of this edition of *Passages* is **recognition**, whether it's recognizing yourself in one of our exhibitions, or having your accomplishments recognized, or the simple fact of having your fears and anxieties recognized and quelled by a word of welcome.

In this issue you'll read about a recipe book compiled by a prisoner in a German concentration

camp, a Kenyan Asian man who built a business selling fire logs to Canadians, a Jewish Hungarian boy who chose Canada as his land of opportunity, a woman's surprisingly moving visit to the Museum with her mother and aunt, and a former employee from Ukraine whose *rushnyk* made its way into our special exhibition. You will also meet someone I hope you get to know well: our new Director of Annual and Planned Giving, Sukanksha Khatri. In this *Passages*, Su shares her own story of being seen and welcomed, and what it was like to leave her home in India and create a new one here.

We hope to see you at the Museum soon! And more than that, we hope you see something here that reminds you of yourself.

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

Fiona Valverde

Vice-President, Revenue Generation





Leslie Dan in July 1947, and today, with his wife, Anna Dan.

## FROM SURVIVOR TO BUILDER: LESLIE DAN'S HOPE-FILLED JOURNEY

**By Fiona Valverde**, Vice-President, Revenue Generation.

When Leslie Dan arrived in Halifax on a cold November morning in 1947, he carried just a few dollars in his pocket, but an abundance of hope. "I remember seeing a young boy selling newspapers on the dock," he recalled. "That never happened in Europe. I said to myself, This is an enterprising country. **I like this country. It has opportunities.**"

Those opportunities were hard-earned. As a young Jewish boy in Hungary during the Second World War, Leslie managed to avoid concentration camps by obtaining "Gentile papers", false documents that identified him as a non-Jew. When Budapest was liberated in 1945, he dreamt of a new life. Canada, he believed, offered both safety and possibility. "I thought a younger country would have more opportunities," he said. "I was full of hope."

Hope and hard work became the foundation of his success. After finishing high school while working as a busboy, he studied pharmacy. He went on to build Canada's largest generic drug manufacturer, Novopharm, making medicines more affordable across

Canada and beyond. But for Leslie, true success was never measured by business growth alone.

"To me, success means not what you give to yourself but how much you can give to others," he said. That belief has guided his decades of philanthropy, including his support for the Museum. "Immigrants and entrepreneurs have helped build this country," he reflected. "They come with determination, imagination and the will to work hard. Canada is one of the best countries, and I hope it will continue to be."

Today, both the University of Toronto's Pharmacy faculty and the building that houses it have been named for him. Surrounded by a growing family that now includes eleven great-grandchildren, Leslie takes pride in what his journey represents: the resilience of newcomers, the promise of opportunity, and the importance of giving back. Along with Anna, his wife of nearly 30 years, who shares his commitment to helping others, he continues to support the causes that strengthen the country he once chose. Together, **their generosity reminds us why celebrating the contributions of newcomers matters so deeply.**





Olena Yanchuk's *rushnyk*, a traditional hand-embroidered Ukrainian cloth, is part of the exhibition *eat make share: a taste of immigration*.

## FOOD FOR THE JOURNEY

**By Olena Yanchuk.** Olena worked at the Museum for nine months as part of Welcome Home to Canada, an employment program for newcomers to Canada supported by The R. Howard Webster Foundation, RBC Foundation, and the Rossy Foundation.

We had our first Canadian meal, a panini, at Toronto Pearson Airport, waiting for our connecting flight to Halifax. One of our kids asked, "Is Canadian food all like that?"

When we landed in Halifax late that night, we were warmly greeted by a friend whose wife brought us two bags of groceries to get us through the weekend. "Is everyone in Canada this welcoming?" the kids asked again.

At our host family's house, our host father not only opened the door to his home and offered us shelter in a time of deep uncertainty, but also opened his heart to us. He joined us at the table each day with genuine curiosity and joy, savouring every dish we prepared. It became a quiet ritual of mutual respect and care. It was a reminder that food has the power to build trust and family where neither existed before.

Seeing my *rushnyk*—a hand-embroidered Ukrainian table runner—chosen for the exhibition *eat make share*:

a taste of immigration felt deeply personal. The *rushnyk* represents a life journey, woven with two colours of threads: red symbolizes love and black stands for sadness. It is woven with the essence of our journey, carrying the traditions, memories, and paths we have travelled.

During my job interview at the Museum, I was asked, "What will you tell people about the Museum?" I had no accurate answer. Yet as I began working here, I felt deeply that **this museum wasn't just a collection of artifacts or narratives, it was about me**. It was about all of us in Canada, telling the stories of relationships, the impact on Indigenous peoples, and every single generation that arrived or was born here. It is a truly unique space, a reflection of so many journeys, including my own.





Meet Su: Sukanksha Khatri joined the Museum team in October of 2025.

## A WARM WELCOME FOR SU

**By Sukanksha Khatri**, *Director of Annual and Planned Giving.*

Growing up, home was where my family was—a physical space associated with childhood memories, joy, sadness and much more. However, once I left home, once I was out in the world, that **home ceased to exist**. It was no longer that physical space. Something changed.

The night before leaving my home in New Delhi, India, I packed the final few items. I thought, How do I pack all these feelings and memories into two bags?

As I said my goodbyes to my family, I was bursting with excitement, hope and fear for what lay ahead.

After a 30-something-hour journey, including two flights, I reached Montreal. I needed to be processed by Canadian Immigration before making my connection to Halifax. Tired, anxious and confused, I got in the line. I had all the paperwork, but there was still a knot in my stomach.

With less than an hour to take off and six people ahead of me in line, I assumed I would be missing my flight. I anxiously texted my brother waiting for me in Halifax who tried to reassure me.

Finally, the officer at the counter called my name. I walked to her and gave her all my papers. She asked me to take a seat and said she would call for me in a bit. Those 10 minutes felt like hours. As I looked around at fellow newcomers, all we could do was give each other reassuring smiles.

My eyes were glued to my watch, with occasional glances at the counter. She finally called for me. Handed my papers back. I will never forget what she said next.

She looked at me, smiled and said, "Welcome Home."

A world of stress floated away and was replaced by joy.

At a certain point in life, home is where you are. It's the life you build. More than three years later, I am grateful every day to be building my home with my partner here in Halifax.

I look forward to getting to know you, the Museum's community of donors and supporters, over the coming months and years.





Rebecca Teitelbaum's recipe book contains 110 pages of recipes collected at Ravensbrück concentration camp. The artifact is on loan from the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre Collection, 99.008.001b.

## A RECIPE BOOK WITH A STORY TO TELL

**By Anthony Black**, Senior Writer

A special artifact in our exhibition *eat make share: a taste of immigration* stood out: a handwritten recipe book, its pages yellowed with age and covered with cursive handwriting. Its creation was an act of defiance. Rebecca Teitelbaum, a Jewish Belgian woman imprisoned in the Ravensbrück concentration camp during the Second World War, stole the paper and a pencil from the office of the munitions factory where she and thousands of others were forced to work. Stealing these materials was a huge risk. The recipes were collected from fellow prisoners. In a camp where everyone had been torn from their homes and thousands died of starvation, collecting familiar recipes would have conjured and preserved memories of the past and nourished hope for the future.

**The recipe book was almost lost to history.** In April of 1945, as the Allies advanced towards Ravensbrück, Rebecca was part of a group of prisoners evacuated on buses by the Red Cross, destined for Sweden. As they passed through active battlefields, Rebecca's convoy was bombed, and she was taken to a Danish hospital. Her bag, containing her correspondence and the recipe book, was left behind. Two years later, a man who'd

found it on the wrecked bus tracked her down and returned the possessions.

Rebecca moved to Canada in 1951, arriving at Pier 21 and settling in Montreal. Her Orange Cake was a Sunday family ritual. She became a Canadian citizen in 1957.

A replica of the recipe book, open to the page with Rebecca's Orange Cake recipe, is part of the travelling version of *eat make share: a taste of immigration*, presented by BMO. The exhibition ended its run at the Museum in January and will visit locations across Canada for the next five years.





Navin Chandaria, whose grandchildren adorned him with costume jewellery, and Annette Verschuren listen to a speech at the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of Navin and his wife Sarla's arrival in Canada. Photo by Dave Reyno.

## VISION, HARD WORK, AND A SPECIAL 50<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY

**By Annette Verschuren.** *Annette is a friend and supporter of the Museum and Co-chair of the Museum's annual Luncheon with a Fascinating Canadian event in Toronto.*

This summer, I had the deep honour and privilege to attend the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Navin Chandaria's arrival in Canada. The family chose to celebrate this occasion at the Museum and marked it with a transformational gift and the unveiling of the Chandaria Family Gallery in Canadian Immigration Hall.

Navin's journey to Canada was inspired by his father, Velji, who left his native homeland in Gujarat, India, at the age of 14 to build a successful career as an industrialist and entrepreneur in Kenya. Navin worked for the family business in Kenya. With Idi Amin in power in neighbouring Uganda, political unrest was growing in East Africa. Navin made the bold decision to start anew. He could have gone anywhere but chose Canada. In 1975, he and his wife, Sarla, arrived here with just one suitcase but lots of hope.

Navin was always looking for opportunities. Early on, he zeroed in on fire logs. He liked to say, "What else would a guy from Kenya living in Canada sell?!" So, he built a fire log business. I was CEO for Home Depot at

the time and was among the first companies to help him enter the marketplace. Boy, did we sell a lot of fire logs!

During this period, I got to know the children, Sunir, Sheena and Shernee, well. I still remember them running up and down the aisles of the store! They were like family to me. They got involved in the business early on. All three were hard-working and adopted the same fearlessness and high moral and ethical standards as their father. Through innovation, determination, and the unwavering support of his entire family, **Navin, together with his brothers, built a business that became an international success story.**

The Museum aspires to share how immigrants have contributed to Canada's culture, economy and way of life. If ever there was a family that did all three, it would be the Chandaria family. They are a great example of how vision and hard work have made this a better country and continue to shape Canada's future.



## LUNCHEON WITH FASCINATING CANADIAN, TORONTO

The *Fascinating Canadian Speaker Series* is the Museum's signature fundraiser, held annually in Toronto and Halifax. Each event 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 keynote speaker in Toronto will be **Mirko Bibic**, President and CEO of BCE Inc. & Bell Canada.

Join us on:

**Friday, May 8, 2026, 11:30 am**

**Fairmont Royal York**

**100 Front St. W. Toronto, ON**

To reserve your seats, please contact:

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**Mirko Bibic**

President and CEO of BCE Inc.  
& Bell Canada

A journey begins...

# eat make share: a taste of immigration

Our newest travelling exhibition starts its multi-year cross-Canada trek with stops at:

**Joseph Brant Museum Burlington, Ontario,**  
April 18 to September 18, 2026

**Resurgo Place, Moncton, New Brunswick,**  
September 19, 2026 to January 31, 2027

