



Canadian Museum of
Immigration at Pier 21

Musée canadien de
l'immigration du Quai 21

PASSAGES SUMMER 2022

COUNTLESS JOURNEYS. ONE CANADA. TELL YOUR STORY. BUILD OUR COUNTRY.



The Sood family sit in the garden behind their home in Kampala in 1968, the year before they fled Uganda. Courtesy of the Sood family

NEXT DOOR NEIGHBOURS TO A BRUTAL DICTATOR

Idi Amin earned the nickname “The Butcher of Uganda” for atrocities committed under his presidency, including the killing of as many as 500,000 people.

In 1969, three years before seizing power in a coup d'état, Amin was commander of the country's armed forces.

Usha and Manmohan Sood lived in Kampala, Uganda, next door to Amin's compound, in housing provided by Manmohan's employer, East India Railways.

The Soods, who were part of Uganda's significant South Asian population, frequently saw Amin's motorcade whipping down the boulevard, forcing other vehicles off the road. When **Manmohan's car was hit by the motorcade**, he reported the incident to the police. They refused to sign his report. If they did, they said, he would probably be shot by the military. And likely, so would the reporting officer. That's when the Soods, both born and raised in Africa, decided to leave. They arrived in Canada in the spring of 1969.

Three years later, just 18 months into his presidency, Idi Amin issued an edict to expel Asians from Uganda. The policy was an extreme manifestation of a movement to reject colonial structures and transfer power in Africa to African hands - the British had originally brought South Asians to Uganda in 1895 to build railroads, and the population had subsequently established itself in the country's business sector and bureaucracy.

Beginning in September of 1972, nearly 8,000 Asian Ugandan refugees arrived in Canada. This fall marks the 50th anniversary of the arrival of this wave of newcomers. It was our country's first resettlement of non-European refugees on such a scale.

In Canada, the Sood family settled in New Glasgow, Nova Scotia, where Manmohan (who was known in New Glasgow as “Mike”) found a job with railway manufacturer TrentonWorks (then known as Hawker Siddeley). Other family members arriving in Canada, fleeing Africa, often



Welcome

Bienvenue

MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

Just as we've all felt excluded at some point in our lives, **we've all felt what a true welcome is like.** The theme of this issue of Passages is "Welcome." The Museum exists to explore the theme of immigration, the vital role of immigrants in building Canada, and the contributions made by immigrants to different areas of life in Canada. We also explore the ways immigrants have (or haven't) been welcomed.

Passages is for those who donate to the Museum and those who we hope might. Why should you donate? One reason is that giving to the Museum helps make Canada more welcoming. **Your support helps us collect and share the stories of newcomers.** When a community or an individual sees that their story is told

- is valued - in the Museum, they recognize a simple truth: that they are a vital part of the evolving, messy, striving, beautiful project called Canada. The support that donors provide allows us to create the programs and exhibitions that make the Museum an essential and welcoming experience.

I hope to see you at the Museum soon. We're doing everything we can to ensure your visit is as welcoming as possible.

Marie Chapman
Marie Chapman,
Chief Executive Officer

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stayed with the Soods for a few weeks. Their home was within walking distance of a department store where the new families would be fitted out with winter coats, boots, and mitts. The Sood children, Vivek and Deepa, settled into New Glasgow and, later, Stellarton. Among their friends were children from the Sobeys family, owners of the national grocery chain whose head offices are still rooted in Pictou county. Both Vivek and Deepa work for the company and have for years- Deepa is Assistant Category Manager, and Vivek is Executive Vice President, Related Businesses.

The Soods sensed what was coming in Uganda and left before things got bad. In Nova Scotia, they made

life-long friends with new neighbours while their former neighbour seized power and ruled his country as a dictator from 1971 to 1979. Usha and Manmohan have now lived in Canada longer than they lived in Africa. If you ask them, they will say how proud and fortunate they feel to be Canadian.

- Anthony Black, *Senior Writer*



Postcard from SS *Maasdam*, March 1967 [R2013.959.1]

A CANADIAN DREAM: THE PASSENGERS OF THE SS MAASDAM, JULY 6, 1968

When Iris Tasseron, a young Dutch girl, stepped aboard the SS *Maasdam* with her family, she knew she was about to begin a new life in Canada. She did not foresee that her family would return to the Netherlands only two years later. Iris' Canadian immigration story is short and incomplete. Questions linger for her about her family's reasons for leaving.

Decades later, **Iris began to search for answers** about her family's return to the Netherlands. As a photo and video journalist interested in people, she turned to other passengers on board the SS *Maasdam* to find out what happened to them. Did the other Dutch families on the ship share similar experiences after arriving in Canada? Did they feel welcomed? What struggles and challenges did they encounter, and how did they overcome them? To better understand the circumstances for Dutch newcomers to Canada at the time, Iris Tasseron documented the experiences of five families, including her own, through photography and interviews. The Museum is pleased to present her work in a culminating exhibition in our Mirella and Lino Saputo Hall from May 12 to August 21, 2022.

Visitors will discover a diverse compilation of experiences that reflect the challenges and rewards of immigrating to Canada. Several families, like the

Lamboos and the Tasserons, came to Canada in the spirit of adventure. Others came with the promise of employment and stability. Despite the well-known, long-standing positive connection between the Netherlands and Canada, every family experienced challenges. For some, it was the struggle to find support systems. In the case of Iris' family, it was the difficulty of securing lasting employment during one of Canada's cyclical economic downturns in the seventies. Each family connected with Dutch and Canadian culture in various hybrid ways.

Iris herself, despite still living in the Netherlands and having been very young during the family's years in Canada, still feels a strong connection to the country. The exhibition, *A Canadian Dream: The passengers of the SS Maasdam, July 6, 1968*, shows that while every immigration story is different, it is never a straight path, and there exist universal themes that resonate throughout Canada's history of immigration.

- Sara England, *Exhibitions Coordinator*



Fred and Elizabeth Fountain pose with the portrait of Winston Churchill that established Karsh's career. The exhibition is presented at the Museum until October 16.

A SURPRISING BUT MEMORABLE WELCOME TO CANADA

On April 21, the Museum held an opening for *The World of Yousuf Karsh: A Private Essence*, an exhibition of over 100 portraits of leading figures of the twentieth century. The temporary exhibition is organized by the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts in collaboration with the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21, and supported by Fred and Elizabeth Fountain.

The remarkable photographer, Karsh, had a surprising and memorable welcome to Canada. He was Armenian, and **his family had fled the mass killings of the Armenian Genocide** in what is now Turkey. In 1923 the family, who had escaped to Aleppo, Syria, had just enough money to send one person to Canada. They chose 15-year-old Yousuf.

He began a long journey through three ports and two seas to arrive at Halifax's old Pier 2 on New Year's Day 1924 aboard the SS Canada. Travelling alone, not speaking English and down to 15 dollars, he was detained by immigration authorities, who at that time were barring most Armenian refugees from Canada.

Luckily for Karsh, he had an uncle, George Nakash from Sherbrooke, Quebec, who was sponsoring him. His uncle travelled to Halifax to vouch for and welcome his young nephew.

In that era, sleighs were often used in Halifax as supplemental winter taxis. To the astonishment of a boy who had escaped genocide and marches through the desert, it was a horse-drawn sleigh that took him and his uncle from Pier 2 to the Halifax railway station. The sleigh bells and the brightly lit shops, still decorated for Christmas, transformed a challenging arrival into an auspicious welcome that seemed to put fears of persecution and death far behind him. Karsh never forgot the snowy ride from Pier 2 to the train station for his journey to Sherbrooke and his new life.

In Sherbrooke, Karsh began a photographic career that would make him famous and allow him to welcome the rest of his family to safety in Canada. His arrival in Halifax, in a new year for a new life, remained a cherished story to Karsh for many years. This made the city a special choice for the Karsh family and the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts as the location of this exhibition.

- Dan Conlin, *Curator*



Participants of the 2022 Welcome Home to Canada program.

THE RETURN OF WELCOME HOME TO CANADA

There used to be a sign on the harbour side of Pier 21 that greeted immigrants as they arrived by ship. In large letters, it said, "Welcome Home to Canada."

In 2004, those words were adopted as the name of a new employment program at the Museum.

Over 200 newcomers have gained valuable work experience and skills by participating in this unique six-month paid employment program. The impact of the Welcome Home to Canada (WHTC) program is far-reaching for the participants and their families, the Museum's staff, volunteers and visitors, and our community.

Immigrants and refugees can face several barriers to employment, settlement and integration. For many participants, this is their first job in a Canadian work environment and can be a big confidence booster on the journey toward success in their new country. Participants build their networks and hone skills. Some benefit by improving their language capabilities; for many, English is not their first language. For some, it is their third or fourth. Many participants go on to find permanent employment or leverage what they've learned to move forward with their education.

In May, we saw the return of our WHTC Program with ten eager participants working in different areas across the Museum. Immigrants bring a diversity of thought, background, and experience. When WHTC participants interact with Museum visitors, they bring the immigration story to life. The personal stories and reflections they share are authentic and often powerful.

"The Museum felt like a big family, my coworkers contributed to that. I am very happy to have been part of the program... Before the program, I did not speak anything of English and now my English has improved, thanks to my coworkers. We are a great team and that helped me a lot and made me feel confident."

~ Yasmila, WHTC Program Participant

When newcomers are welcomed into the fabric of our community, barriers are broken, and families and communities are made stronger. If you have the opportunity to visit us from May to October, please be sure and say hello and continue our tradition of welcome. Bienvenue. Pjila'si.

- Daphne Carter, *Development Manager*



The Chinese Culture & Art Club of Nova Scotia performs at the launch of Asian Heritage Month at the Museum. Asian Heritage Month programming at the Museum is supported by TD Bank Group. Photo courtesy of Lumi Studios.

THE MEANING OF ASIAN HERITAGE MONTH

May is Asian Heritage Month, a time to **celebrate the resilience and rich cultural diversity of Asian countries** and to stand against discrimination.

I asked some of the Museum's partners, with roots in all areas of the continent, to answer the question: "What does Asian Heritage Month mean to you?"

Two members of the Halifax Asian Heritage Month Planning Committee spoke to the spirit of diversity and inclusion underpinning the committee's work.

Ariane Savi (Halifax Local Immigration Partnership) wrote that Asian Heritage Month is "being recognized, remembered and celebrated and an opportunity for education and inclusion." Darshini Shah (ViBeat Dance Studio) had a similar sentiment: "The celebration of Asian Heritage Month is feeling proud of the heritage and cultural diversity Asia has carried for centuries."

Aquil Virani, the Museum's 2021-22 Artist in Residence, wrote of his identity within the larger context of Asian Heritage Month: "I identify more as Ismaili (Muslim) than Indian, which leaves me confused in relation to being 'Asian.' Like the shy kid in the corner at the

birthday party, being summoned to join the group photo with the cool kids. 'Aquil, get in here!' 'Me? Okay. Sure.'"

For others, Asian Heritage Month is an opportunity to find their community's place within the larger Asian diaspora. Like Zenaida Forbes, President of the Filipino Cultural Society of Nova Scotia, who wrote, "The Philippines, as one of the Asian countries in the Far East, brings in our faith, hard work, family life, hospitality, cooperation, and generosity, the love for food, music and dance, sports, science and technology to the Nova Scotia and Asian community at large."

- Rebecca MacKenzie-Hopkins,
*Public Programs and
Community Engagement Manager*



Above: Rose and Giuditta Vespa's 1952 passport photo [DI2013.1909.1] Right: Rose and Giuditta in 2010 [DI2013.1909.4]

REMEMBERING NONNA VESPA

This August marks one year since the passing of a dear friend of the Museum, Giuditta Vespa. Like many immigrants seeking a brighter future, Giuditta left her native Italy to join her husband Antonio and build a new life in Canada. She was 25 years old, with her young daughter Rosa in tow, when she arrived at Pier 21 in Halifax on May 11, 1953. She immediately boarded a train bound for Toronto and settled in Etobicoke, her new home. She would live there for over 68 years.

Nonna G, as she was adoringly known by her family and friends, was a kind, affectionate and caring mother, grandmother and a friend to many.

For years, **Nonna G was an anchor** at the Museum's Festa fundraiser in Toronto. She taught me and other members of the Museum's staff how to peel a cantaloupe in one go, how to pry open the lid of a jar of San Marzano tomatoes, and how rubbing your hands on stainless steel gets rid of the smell of garlic! The many Festa events over the years engaged a community of supporters that played a big role in having Pier 21 designated as the Canadian Museum of Immigration.

Daughters Mary and Rose recall how emotional Nonna G was when she first returned to visit Pier 21. Mary remembers, "She was amazed how the Museum captured the replica of the ship's dining room, the immigration hall, and of course leaving the Pier and immediately having the train track where she boarded the train." She visited again with Rose, her son-in-law Ralph, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. She was happy to detail her entire experience: leaving Italy as a young mother, her dreadful seasickness, and finally arriving in Canada.

She loved her new country and took great pride in her family's contributions to Canada. We will remember her fondly.

- Fiona Valverde,
Vice-President, Revenue Generation

Fascinating Canadian Speaker Series - To reserve, contact dcarter@pier21.ca



Halifax Breakfast

Oct 7, 2022. 7:30 a.m. to 9:00 a.m.
Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21

Victor Dodig,
President and CEO, CIBC



Toronto Luncheon

Nov 7, 2022. 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

Fairmont Royal York
Calin Rovinescu, C.M.,
former President and CEO, Air Canada

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VOYAGES**



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