

Hilda Lowe nee van
der Werf by
Grandson Kyle
Turner
Dutch War Bride
Empire Brent

CANADA'S IMMIGRATION MUSEUM
PIER 21



Steaming into Halifax harbour aboard the Empire Brent on October 1946 is an experience Hilje van der Werf will never forget. At the tender age of twenty, this warbride left Arnhem, Holland in a search for new roots in Canada.

The air was crisp on that October day with a sense of anxiety and excitement floating around. This warbride remembers those memories vividly. The ship had finally finished its voyage and docked at Pier 21. This terminal welcomed nearly fifty- thousand British and European women, whose lives were shaped by war, poverty, despair and the introduction to Canadian servicemen.

Hilje van der Werf was one of those women, and began to assume her Canadian identity as Hilda Lowe; mother, wife, and immigrant. Her first born named Marie was only 1 and a half at the time. She was fathered by Lowe's loving husband, Lawrence. The



two of them had married prior to the voyage in Holland. Hilda was just a young Dutch girl when swept off her feet by a handsome Canadian serviceman.

Pier 21 and the rest of the warehouses on the dock were busy with the commotion of new arrivals. The tremendous amount of immigrants, and



the organizations that were there to aid in the arrival was a bit intimidating for Lowe. Perhaps if I had not had my baby, I might have been reluctant to make such an adventure.

The trek from overseas was mentally and physically exhausting for this Dutch descendent. There was always the worry of making a safe crossing on the North Atlantic during the month of October. Many times through the voyage Lowe feared for the safety of herself and her infant. During these anxious times passengers aboard the Empire Brent kept occupied with card games and a Dutch game called Sjoelbak, which was similar to shuffleboard.

However she was sure to state that the journey was worthwhile when she sighted Pier 21. Lowe came face to face with that once vacant Pier that

was now the source of excitement and opportunity. She had some mixed feelings when the ship was docking, mainly feelings of pride, though some were nervous feelings; nervous because the voyage had finally been completed. The pier was organized in a way that it had to feel welcoming on a certain level, and it would definitely have to accommodate you.

Pier 21 was the port that greeted people that came to Canada. They did not know what to expect. There was just so much new opportunity and new things to be experienced out there. Lowe felt some good vibes when on the pier, she just couldn't wait to plant her roots; in Canadian soil, start a farm and to care for a husband. She was excited to leave the pier to start a family and live a new life. She simply had to adapt. It was not hard for Lowe to adapt because she was fluent in several languages including English, Portuguese and German.

After completing the exhausting voyage on the Empire Brent, battling line-ups and frustrated customs agents Lowe and her baby were getting restless. Finally, they walked down the creaky planks of Pier 21, searching for her husband and his mother. They were near the front of

the entryway of the Pier. After covering every inch of the pier and having several lonely moments, Lowe with her suitcase in one hand and baby in the other, had finally spotted them. This was a sure sign of relief. To be able to be in Canada with my husband and I; family was a treat. I had felt that my life was becoming more complete even though I missed my own family very much.

Lowe had crossed the last obstacles of her journey at Pier 21, and would now live her life as a Canadian citizen, contributing greatly to her family and country. I have heard so many unfortunate stories about other war brides who were not so lucky, but never have I had any regrets. Stories of lost luggage and family members can deter Lowe. After becoming a Canadian citizen in 1947, her life on the farm in Bridgetown Nova Scotia was feeling more like a life; without the everyday threat of war. Hilda Lowe has since moved from the farm after raising three children; Marie, Robert and Nancy. Lowe, husband Lawrence died in 1994, but is still remembered through her beautiful children and their foreign roots.

Hilda and Kyle



Holidays in the Netherlands

