

THE FREE PRESS FOCUS

Page A9

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 15, 1994

PHONE 564-0005

Proud to be Canadian

From all over the world, people come to Canada seeking freedom. And they find it.

By DAVID HEYMAN

Prince George Free Press

It was the dream of a lifetime for many - to become a Canadian citizen. Sixty-two people from 21 countries, took the oath of citizenship on December 8 in the council chambers at Prince George city hall, and all had a story to tell. Most of them are happy stories, but some are tinged with sadness.

There's the story of Laura Sutton and her daughter Maria. Mrs. Sutton travelled from her native Costa Rica to visit her cousin in Alberta in 1983. "I really did like this country. Then I met my husband there, and so I got married. We were there for a few years, and we just moved to Vanderhoof about three years ago."

Twelve-year-old Maria Sutton is happy to be a Canadian. "It's great to be a Canadian with everyone else, so I can be a part of all my friends."

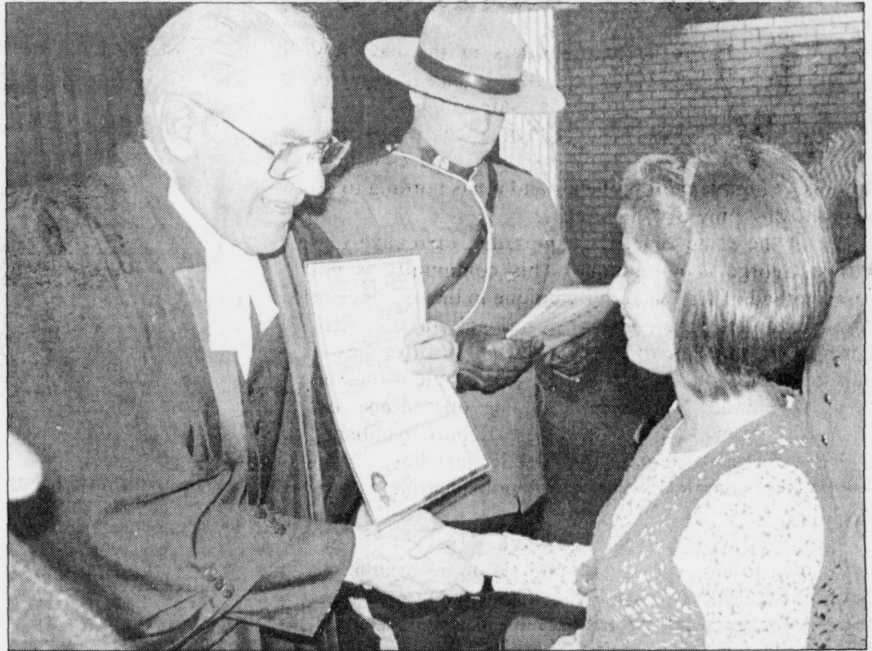
Though she's spent most of her young life in Canada, she says she won't lose touch with her Costa Rican roots. "It was nice there. I just went back in March. I went to school. I learned Spanish."

Laura and her husband are taking Maria back to Costa Rica for Christmas.

Then there's the story of Kuldip Sall. He says he came to Canada from India in December of 1990 for freedom. "It's nice over here. It's a better place. A lot of my relatives are here. I got married here."

Thirty-five-year-old Kiri Shanmugaveloo came to Canada from Malaysia in 1989, and he now lives in Mackenzie. "I came to pursue my education." His family is back in Malaysia and he says he has no idea if they'll become Canadians, too. Whether they do or not, Mr. Shanmugaveloo says he knows what he wants to do. "I want to become an RCMP officer. I want to join the RCMP. I work with them now as an on-call guard."

Sixty-two-year-old Da Huang Zhu, with his 61-year-old wife Qing Chem, says he fled persecution in China, and he says in broken English with a full smile, "Canada is very beautiful country. Air is very clean. People are very friendly. Full of freedom. Equality." He says it was very difficult for them in China especially during the cultural revolution several years ago, and



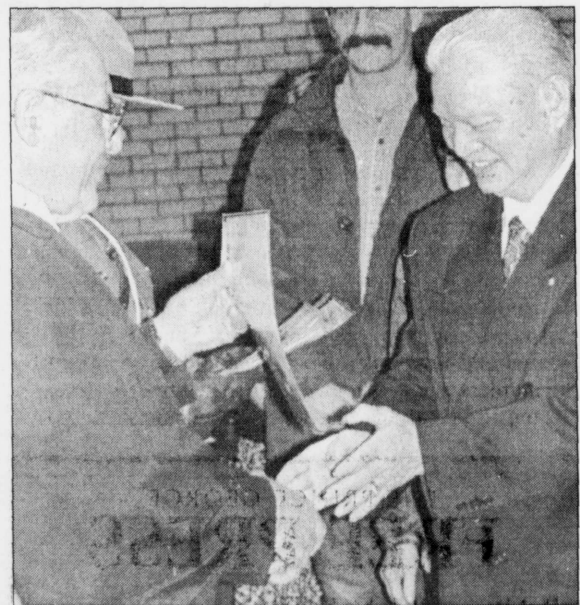
It's official: Judge William Lesick welcomes Maria Sutton to Canada. DAVID HEYMAN/FREE PRESS

although he says it's better there now, he's says he's happy he'll be able to live the last few years of his life in peace.

But with all the happy endings, there is a sad one. Neila Harris fell in love with a Canadian man, got married in her native Philippines in 1990, and arrived in Canada a few months later to start a family. Tragically, however, her husband died of cancer just six weeks before the citizenship ceremony. She now lives with her six-month-old son in Mackenzie.

Despite the loss, Mrs. Harris says she's happy she is here. "It feels really wonderful because I want to be a citizen so it will be easy for me to go to other places. And I love the country. I really like the place where I live (Mackenzie). It's quiet and peaceful. The people are very good." She says she's even willing to put up with the long winters. "Yes, it's cold. Lots of snow, (but) I get used to it."

Still, she says she can't forget the man she married. Mrs. Harris became pen-pals with her future husband when he worked at a pulp mill in Mackenzie, and they wrote to each other steadily for eight



No more persecution: Da Huang Zhu likes the equality he and his wife have found since arriving in Canada.

months. He then flew to the Philippines to meet for the first time and it was love at first sight; they married in the Philippines two weeks later. Her husband then flew back and had to wait another eight months

for his to get permission to enter Canada. She arrived in at Vancouver International Airport in 1990, stepping on Canadian soil for the first time. Two days later they moved to Mackenzie to start their life together.

And after the ceremony, while most of the other new Canadians stood with other family members hugging and kissing, Mrs. Harris stood off to the side, comforted by a Canadian friend. She was smiling, but she had tears in her eyes. "This is the day he was waiting for."

The Oath of Allegiance

"I swear that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second, Queen of Canada, her heirs and successors, according to law and that I will faithfully observe the laws of Canada and fulfill my duties as a Canadian citizen."



From England: Richard Long and his family were among the 62 people sworn in on Thursday afternoon.