

APL hopes The Immigrant Story exhibition connects community



The Immigrant Story, an interactive exhibition using words and photographs to highlight the journeys of dozens of newcomers to Canada, opened at the Aurora Public Library on Saturday, but even before it was unveiled it was already achieving its goal: connecting community.

As the expansive displays went up last week, Aurora Public Library (APL) staff had plenty of patrons asking questions, learning, and thinking how their own families' experiences fit into the tapestry.

The Immigrant Experience is curated by Sholom Wargon, and was inspired by the journey of his late wife, who came to Canada at the age of 13.

From those beginnings, Wargon has curated words and experiences of scores of new Canadians representing journeys from nearly 30 different countries ? a list that just continues to grow.

Helping facilitate the installation was APL's Grace Armstrong, who, along with another APL colleague, was drawn to the strong visuals Wargon put together ? particularly a distinct photo of three women simply sitting on a bench.

?Having that diversity included in the exhibition is really impactful, but it's also fascinating that so many people are open to sharing their experiences and someone like Sholom is ready to capture them in such a respectful way as well,? says Armstrong. ?When I first learned about the exhibition, it really coincided with an experience I had thinking about my own family's history with immigration. My grandfather emigrated from Ireland to Ellis Island and later re-located to Canada. Right before I found out about the opportunity to have this exhibition here, I had to go on a family trip to his hometown and Ireland, reconnecting with a lot of his family that still lives there. There is a personal element to the exhibition and the idea of sharing and celebrating someone's story of emigration, thinking about all the different places from all around the world that we come from.

?I have always felt connected to my Irish heritage just through the stories my grandfather told me when I was growing up, which I think is also reflected in the exhibit: the idea of storytelling and the importance of storytelling to be able to pass on important information and experiences. For me, there is also a large element of place and feeling connected to a country and a town I have never been to before in my life, and them showing up and having a sense of history and roots there ? largely due to having that connection through the storytelling.?

Armstrong shares that as the installation proceeded apace last week, people who stopped by APL to return or check out a book,

commented on the sheer diversity represented on the panels.

'I think they're all looking for, 'Is the country my family's from going to feature in here?', 'Is their country of origin being featured?' The range of origin countries that are being represented is something I think the community will both really connect with on a personal level but uses an opportunity to continue to learn about themselves, their own history, and other people that may be living in the community with them,' says Armstrong.

'APL has always been a place for learning ' of course, because there are books there, but there are more than just books; you can learn and connect with your community through a variety of different mediums and this exhibition is just another opportunity for people to continue to do so in our space.'

By Brock Weir