

View from the Valley

The Hobden family, from Eastbourne, were one of the six families who starred in the *Emigrate Challenge* DVD. We caught up with **Darren Hobden** to ask about his memories of the emigration process and the highlights of the family's second full year in Canada

We are the Hobden family, Me (38), Mette (39), Daniel (14) and Anja (12). We now live in the beautiful Cowichan Valley on Vancouver Island, British Columbia – the best place on earth!

We decided to emigrate for a number of reasons, among them a more relaxed lifestyle, more opportunities for our children, cheaper living, a lower crime rate and the 'super-nature'.

But long before we took the decision to emigrate, I had been interested in Canada. It was watching the 'Beachcombers' TV series as a boy that started this interest in Canada and its beautiful scenery.

Nearly 30 years later, in July 2002, we applied under the Skilled Worker category. We received our Acknowledgement of Receipt about six weeks later. In October 2003 we went for our medicals. We received our visas just before Christmas 2003.

Looking back at that time, even though it was quite a quick application process by today's standard, one of the biggest challenges for us was the waiting, with no real information about the progress of our application.

But then you go from having too much time on your hands to not enough, as organising everything once

you have your visa isn't easy, either. Trying to organise selling our house, moving our possessions, handing in notices at work, and booking the flights – all trying to get the dates to tie in – was certainly not easy.

Employment may also be a big challenge for some, depending on your qualifications and attitude to changing career. My attitude in this respect has always been open. Up to 1998 I was a landscape gardener, but then I went back to college and got my counselling diploma and worked in the drug/alcohol field until we emigrated. On arrival in Canada I was flexible about what employment I got – emigrating was the important thing. As it turns out, I did get employment very quickly in a similar field, but shortly afterwards I decided I wanted a break and a chance to work outside again and started up my own landscaping business. I have been doing this for the last 18 months.

Mette, my wife, was a payroll manager but wanted to have a year off. She did this and in this time trained as a realtor (estate agent), which she still does and enjoys.

We were both flexible in the sense that if we couldn't get a job in our present profession then we would do something else, but it can certainly be difficult in smaller towns finding suitable employment, and also getting

your British credentials recognised so you can work in Canada in the same job and at the same level as you did in the UK.

We said right from the outset that we didn't just want to lift our life up from England and drop it in Canada, otherwise we might just as well have stayed in England. As a result we are now enjoying the flexibility of self-employment.

We weren't quite so flexible about our intended destination, though. We knew that Vancouver Island was our destination of choice and on arrival we rented a lakefront house to relax and have a bit of a holiday while job and house hunting. When we found our first house, from putting in the offer to moving in took three weeks.

In May this year we moved to a more rural area (about a five-minute drive from our old house). It has three and a half acres of land and a swimming pool. We know that we could never afford anything like this in England.

We are thoroughly enjoying our new house at Cherry Point. Daniel and Anja go swimming in the pool most days and always have friends over. I can almost keep an eye on them if I'm strimming and weeding our land. At the end of a hot day's work, nothing beats diving into the pool!

With all this exercise, it is

unsurprising that I feel a lot healthier and fitter – and so does Mette, too, as our weight loss is about 26 pounds each!

It was around the time we moved into our new house that we realised we are becoming 'Canadianised'. By this I mean we are learning to play as well as work, all with that upbeat attitude Canadians possess.

We also really started to get the most out of the outstanding natural environment. It's certainly different to what we are used to. After all, you don't see raccoons, bears, cougars, and humming birds to often in the UK, do you?!

In May, a neighbour told us a black bear had been in the area. In July we looked out of the window into our field and saw a cougar casually strolling down across the field and into the wood at the bottom. In late summer we had a BBQ and when it started to get dark we lit the fire pit. A neighbour went home to get a coat and came back and said a Black Bear had just been seen about 100 yards down the road, at which point everyone stocked up with beer, walked down to the fire pit in the field and sat there talking and drinking until 11.00pm!

It was a very hot summer, with

temperatures in the 40s and lots of sunshine. We have had quite a few visitors over this year: friends and family from England, Denmark and Canada visited us on this wondrous island we call home.

We also did some visiting of our own in the summer. We went to a friend's Lake House for a day and had fun zooming around Lake Cowichan on their speedboat. We also went kayaking from Cowichan Bay to Genoa Bay with some friends from Denmark, which was good fun.

At the end of August we went across to the Sunshine Coast for a week's break. We went to Gibsons, where the 'Beachcombers' TV series was filmed – if anyone remembers it? – and ate lunch in Molly's Reach.

Anja and Daniel certainly enjoyed their ten-week summer holiday. They went to some different day camps and also made some jam and were allowed to sell it across the road at the Cherry Point Vineyard.

Daniel has done really well at his sports this year. His soccer (football) team won the South Island League and then went up Island to Comox and won the Island Championship. On the basketball court he made the Cowichan team, then the Mid Island team. He even went to Seattle to play in a tournament representing a Vancouver Island select side.



Mette and sports-mad Daniel

