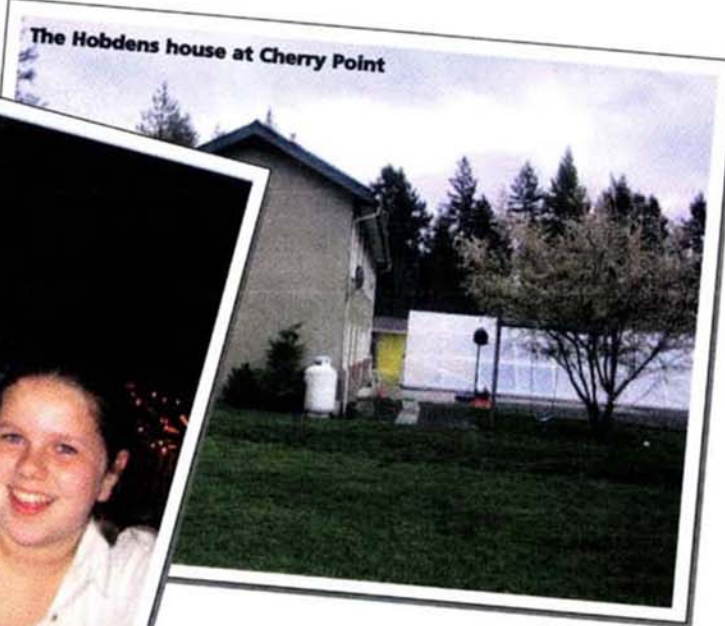


Darren and dance-mad Anja



The Hobdens house at Cherry Point

But Daniel didn't stop there. He went to Gonzaga College in Spokane, America, for a four-day basketball camp. Gonzaga is ranked in the top five for College Basketball in America and one of their players has just been signed up for the NBA. Daniel changed school in September because his new school Mount Prevost has an excellent basketball programme. He has made the Vancouver Island Regional Training Centre and the Cowichan High School grade 10 team even though he is a grade 9 at Mount Prevost.

The downside is that he now has training nearly every day and is finding it difficult fitting in the soccer. He is in the gold team and they want him training twice a week plus playing Saturdays and it is almost impossible to do this so the soccer may have to go.

Daniel still found time to win the Prevostathon, a once-a-year race from the school up Mount Prevost and back to the school, about 19 kilometres altogether. He will be running in a few cross country / road races for his school but he is okay with this as it is during school time and he gets time off!

Not that Anja has been left sitting on the sofa! She loves dancing and has done some competitions in Victoria and her dance group performed at the Cowichan Exhibition Show (a sort of smaller

version of the South of England Show) and at the Cowichan Theatre.

Anja is currently doing HipHop, Jazz and Lyrical and is enjoying all of them. She also did some dance competitions at the University of Victoria. Anja is also helping out teaching in one of the smaller kids dance classes. She has had her ears pierced and is looking forward to being a teenager next year.

Autumn – or 'Fall' as they say here – is now upon us. We enjoyed Thanksgiving, especially the turkey and pumpkin pie! The Fall colours are beginning to look beautiful with the leaves turning gold and red.

Looking back at this year, it's been a busy one. Mette has had a busy year selling houses and I've been mowing the Cowichan Valley like crazy!

But Christmas is coming up quickly, so we'll be able to have some more quality time with Daniel and Anja soon.

Christmas in Canada is quite traditional, family-orientated and community spirited. There are some similarities with Christmas in England, though.

We eat turkey for Christmas dinner with all the trimmings, but Canada has Egg Nog, the most wonderfully delicious (and fattening) drink. Here most people will decorate the outside of their

house in some way – from lining the gutters with lights to having major displays (and none are vandalised or stolen). Most Christmas trees are real trees but Christmas cards are not given as much here as in the UK.

The towns are decorated and have Christmas festivities happening and again, they feel safe, are well attended and the people are friendly and all enjoying the moment.

It is about family time and feels very warm and cosy. We play board games and cards and watch the usual Christmas films, but we have winter sports so there are ice skating rinks in most towns and, of course, the mountains for skiing and snowboarding.

One difference is that in BC Boxing day is not a statutory holiday. It may be given to you by an employer or you may take it off as holiday.

It just feels so different that people take the time to enjoy Christmas. It isn't just about getting the biggest and the best items for each other but about spending time with friends and family. The biggest gift of all is living in Cowichan Valley!

■ If anyone moving to BC would like to contact Mette with any real estate questions or for information, email: mettehobden@remax.net

Emigration diary: One month closer

This last month started out very quietly with no news of my husband Paul's Provincial Nominee Programme application but ended so differently as we received our medical requests, writes Edmonton-bound **Elli Looker**.

After weeks of stalking the postman and rushing at the sight of any A5 brown envelope on the doormat (I know I'm not the only one who does this!), our official little A5 envelope letter from the Canadian High Commission (CHC) arrived and my husband Paul and I were thrilled. It was a Saturday and so no clinics were open but first thing on the following Monday we made a call to a medical centre in Croydon and got appointments for all of us – me, Paul and our two children Megan, 6, and Joshua, 3 – two days later.

It's all starting to feel a little bit more real, especially when you're looking at the official medical forms with photos on. I must have checked the details six times just to be sure all was okay and apart from my very bad photo they were all fine. They also asked for the landing fee and so Paul set about ordering the cheque, and getting that sent up to CHC London.

Telling family that we had our medical requests received mixed emotions, from excitement and sadness to shock. As it has been quiet for about two months and our replies have been 'no news' for so long I believe family had resided themselves to the fact that we'd be here until Easter time.

The day of the medicals arrived and I was more excited than nervous, as it was a further step forward.

We had our chest x-rays, which were carried out at the local hospital, and these only took minutes. Everything was straightforward and we only waited around 30 minutes from start to finish.

Then we went to the medical centre and began the tests. The doctors and nurses were great, and had a really nice way with our children, which was fantastic as there was a bit to do.

The nurses carried out the preliminary tests – height, weight, blood pressure, and samples – and then it was straight in with the doctor.

He asked me to go through the children's red books and answer the medical questions before the examinations. I'd brought all the paperwork with me that's asked for so this part was quite painless.

We all had individual physical examinations and I have to admit I was a little worried, as I hadn't had a check up since having Josh three and a half years ago, but all was fine.

Obviously, the doctor couldn't tell us the results but reassured us that we'd hear from them if there were any problems and that they would send the results and paperwork to CHC as soon as possible.

If the medicals go well the next correspondence from CHC London will be to ask for our passports and as we've had our medicals quickly we're still looking positively towards an end of January/beginning of February move.

We're heading out to Edmonton in two weeks on a house-hunting trip, and will let you know all our news next month.