

Title:

Our Canadian Immigration Story

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Summary:

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Article Body:

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I'd served 16 years in the Royal Air Force (RAF), so saying goodbye to a "safe" job seemed surreal. The final Christmas and New Year, the emotional family farewell, even the one way flight - it all seemed totally unreal! We found it hard to believe that over 2 years of planning had actually come to fruition and we were starting our new life near Calgary. Well, it was true. I was starting my new job the next day and the temperature was a cool - 25°C !

We had discussed living in Canada in great length after my wife's sister had moved to Edmonton with her Canadian husband and were enjoying a lifestyle we could only dream of. We tried a few DIY assessments to see if we would qualify but found ourselves 1 point short of the "pass mark" which was 70 at that time.

We decided that we'd have to hire an immigration professional. When we opened up the Immigration Newspaper "Canada News", the first advert we saw was Access Migration Services who offered a free assessment. We spoke to Kerry Martin and discussed our thoughts. We received the assessment in the post, filled it in and returned it the next day. Kerry decided that we had a good chance of qualifying and so offered us a no visa no fee contract and so the process began.

We were inundated with forms and questionnaires and set to researching thoroughly what it all entailed. I assembled my qualifications and sent them to IQAS in Edmonton for a Canadian equivalency. Then I contacted Transport Canada to see if my aircraft maintenance licenses were valid. They weren't, but I would be able to sit some exams, provide my full career history and work for a minimum of 6 months in Canadian Aviation. It didn't seem too bad considering I was hoping to move continents! We had to send off for police checks from Germany, the UK police and the RAF police to prove we had no criminal records, once they were back we could submit our application.

It was announced that the Canadian Immigration visa system was changing; no-one knew what would happen or when it would come into effect. Kerry kept us informed and was very reassuring during a troublesome time. I had to put in my 18 months notice to leave as the Immigration authorities required an exit date from the RAF - 17th Feb 2003 was the date we chose.

We watched the horror of September 11th unfold; the aviation world collapsed and with the rest of the RAF, I became involved in the Afghan War and the unstable world climate that followed.

We managed to spend two weeks at Andie's sisters in Calgary during October 2001, fitting in quad biking, hiking, trips to Banff, and also viewing show homes. We were getting a feel for southern Alberta and its opportunities. On our way home the airline (Canada 3000) went bankrupt as we flew into Gatwick on it - another bad sign for my future employment.

With the police checks complete, we sent the application off to Kerry, who returned professionally presented paperwork with supporting documents for us to sign and return with the High Commission fees. The new Canadian Immigration system was finally announced with stricter point scoring that was back dated to all applications received after December 18th 2001. Ours had arrived there on 19th December!!!! We wouldn't qualify under the new rules; Kerry reassured us that as the new system hadn't been ratified by parliament it wasn't set in stone.

The authorities backed down after threats of legal action by several Canadian Immigration Lawyers, the cutoff date was set as June 1st 2002. All applications processed before then would be under the old rules - we were back in with a chance. In Feb. 2002 our file number arrived - we were being processed; we waited to see if we were to be called for an interview, accepted or declined. The wait was crazy - Kerry kept us busy with regular information mailings on Canada, the reassuring voice on the end of the phone was worth the fee in

itself. Andie's sister was also busy in Calgary phoning around to establish points of contact for me. I had started to look at other employment and began some project management courses. As with my aircraft maintenance licenses I soon realized that UK qualifications wouldn't readily move to the Canadian system. I contacted the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT) and found they had an impressive curriculum of courses including several Project Management offerings and some great technical pre-employment courses that had a good history of the candidates finding employment in the field of choice.

The call came out of the blue: we had been accepted subject to Medicals and were not being called for an interview! The nearest approved clinic was in Oxford, Andie phoned immediately, the first appointment was eight weeks. We put the house on the market - we needed to know it was sold before we could plan on moving. If we failed the medicals we decided I would still leave the RAF and we would move away from the area. Andie's parents would let us stay with them if we sold the house.

We put the house on the market at the end of June 2002 - and had a buyer in 3 days. The date of sale was set for the 31st August and we would move out on the 29th. We couldn't believe our luck, but it wasn't to be all plain sailing! The clinic phoned first, they had double booked us and we'd have to wait an extra two months. Andie had "a bit of a chat" with them and they finally agreed to squeeze us in as an extra appointment after a heated debate!

All 4 of us had to have medicals - the kids didn't have x-rays or blood tests but we each had 40 minutes with the doctor, hearing and blood pressure tests. Even though there were no health issues as far as we knew I managed to stress about the whole deal and ended up failing the blood pressure test. Apart from the embarrassment, I had to have a cardiograph to make sure I was ok. This delayed the medicals being sent back by a week as the cardiograph had to be analyzed by a cardiologist. I didn't feel too clever!

We checked out the different shipping agencies. Kerry recommended PSS shipping - a family run business with a good reputation and a good quote. When we called to book we had almost left it too late. They managed to fit us in as we only had a relatively small load to ship. We agreed on a shared container for the shipping on a door to door service. They would arrive to pack everything on the 28th August. We just hoped the Medicals were OK!

While I was deployed away with the Air force, the house sale had stalled due to an argument between the lawyers! We couldn't sack them as then the whole process would have to start again and there would be no chance of us making a deadline for a currency transfer we had booked. There were large penalties for missing

the date. We couldn't cancel the removals at such short notice either, as it too would incur large penalties. So we were facing moving out to Andie's parents and leaving the house empty whilst still paying the mortgage, taxes and bills. On top of that the insurance was only valid for 30 days once it was empty and we were booked on flights to Calgary to go house hunting!

Eventually, Kerry phoned with the news that we were accepted and just had to sign some documents and send in our passports and photo's to claim our visas. At last the relief of knowing took away the house nightmare for a day or two. The date was set - January 11th 2003. There is only a 3 month window where the forms were valid so we decided to send the paperwork off once we had returned from Canada as the house drama was starting to become serious. We were about to set off to Canada for a month with the house sale still in limbo. We managed to gain assurances that things were moving behind the scenes and that all would be completed in time for our money transfer, all we could do was board the plane and hope for the best!

In Canada, we were recommended a local realtor (Estate Agent). He helped us find a plot of land and reputable builder to build the house of our dreams. We arranged a mortgage (with 35% down you don't need to have a job for approval) and agreed on the deal - all that was missing was the cash! Eventually, the house sale went through, the money arrived into our Canadian bank in 72 hours. I was astonished (and thankful) at how the transfer went like clockwork. It was time to spend!!!! We went in to sign the house deal with the realtor and wrote out the house purchase agreement. The realtor handled all the negotiations on our behalf but always made sure we agreed to everything. We put down the 10% deposit needed to secure the deal (the rest is paid at possession) and put the house building process into gear.

The day after we returned, we gathered up our documents and photo's and sent them recorded delivery to the High Commission in London. It would take approximately 3 weeks to process and then we'd be on our way.

We researched and chose the shipping company for our Golden Retriever which would cost us more to ship than our one way tickets! These one way flights were booked for the 11th January 2003 and it seemed strange paying more to ship a dog than a family of four! The rest they say, is history!

We've been here 18 months now and can honestly say it has worked out better than we had ever imagined. The first 8 months or so had more stress than I have ever had before and times were extremely hard but now we are settled it's hard to imagine being back in the UK. The air is clean, scenery amazing and there is so much to do there's no spare time! The beer isn't too clever but you can't have

everything!

I hope this will give you an insight into Canadian Immigration and inspire rather than disturb!! If you decide to give it a go - good luck!