

# Winnipeg booster loves our weather

## Australian found a home in the North

Two months ago, I moved to Winnipeg. No fanfare, no red carpet, no welcoming party, not a big deal. I had thought about coming to Canada for about 10 years, but then when the opportunity finally came, I panicked and almost changed my mind, despite the surprising number of people encouraging me to just go for it.

I knew it would be difficult leaving behind my family, most of my friends, a great job, my home, and one of the best countries in the world, but, in the end, I just packed up everything and did it. Kind of astonishing since I had hardly even heard of Winnipeg until this time last year and had been warned about even visiting here.

Anyway, I have learned not to pay any attention to other folks from most places across Canada when they talk about Winnipeg, Winterpeg, Windypeg or whatever else they call it. I like it here and, so far, everything is going great.

So, why Winnipeg? The distinct seasons, the festivals, summer thunderstorms, the prairies, autumn colours, falling leaves, outdoor ice-skating, skiing on golf courses, -40°C wind chill, northern lights in the city, Huron Carol, making angels in the snow, Christmas in the northern hemisphere with all the trimmings . . . and that's just for starters. Very different in Australia, where we golf year-round, spend much of Christmas at the beach, our prairies are mostly deserts, we rarely even hear of temperatures below zero, and would be lucky to have 20 ice rinks across the entire country.

Don't get me wrong. I love Australia, my home for 35 years. Still, Canada has always captivated me, and when I experienced Winnipeg

last winter, well, that was the clincher. I love going downtown, to the parks and especially the zoo this time of year, and it is so peaceful in the early morning when the snow is falling.

I traipse through the snow at every opportunity, walk or go by bus everywhere, and am the only one I know who actually asks to shovel the snow. Oh, maybe in a few years (or by late February) the novelty may start to wear off, but somehow I don't think so.

Yes, from my point of view, Winnipeg has tons to offer. The ballet and the symphony orchestra are highly acclaimed throughout the world; the Blue Bombers and the Jets have fans as far afield as Australia; and the Crash Test Dummies, Sarah McLachlan, Neil Young, Bryan Adams and many other Canadian musicians have a big following down under.

The theatre here is first-rate, and I'm looking forward to the New Music Festival and Festival du Voyageur over the next two months. Last summer I took in the Folk and Fringe Festivals, spent time at Lake of the Woods, and sunbaked on Grand Beach. Last winter I went to Calgary for the Grey Cup, saw some of southern Manitoba, skied and skated in almost absurd temperatures, and even saw some professional hockey at the Arena – a non-event these days.

I don't know much about the money those players make, the conflict over the new arena, or salary caps, but I love hockey and would love to see the Jets back on the ice. Either way, while the big guns are sorting themselves out, I'm just as happy watching the Bisons (U of M hockey) and the Lakers (IM AHL).

For me, the relative 'isolation' of Winnipeg is a bonus. Coming from a city as widespread and populated as Sydney, the compact size, smaller population and slower pace here is very refreshing. People are friendly and helpful, and most everyone seems interested and involved in whatever is going on. I considered buying a car, but I don't understand the wintry road conditions well enough yet and, in any case, the transit system is so reliable, it's easy to get around the city. If I need to go out of Winnipeg, I can always rent a car, and in really brutal weather I'll get a cab. The cost of living is low, compared to Sydney, but the standard of living has not been compromised. Houses, cars and travel are more affordable, and some things like food, clothing, services and fresh muffins are cheaper.

There is plenty to write home about, so it's just as well postage costs less, too.

Oh sure, Winnipeg is not perfect, but it seems to be doing okay. Winnipeg Harvest, Children's Wish Foundation, Goals for Kids, Big Brothers/Sisters, Ronald McDonald House, and other societies and foundations – it's reassuring to know they are out there.

Eventually I'd like to get out to Churchill, the northern extremes of Manitoba, and into the Arctic region. I want to see black bears, polar bears, beavers, elk, and especially moose in the wild. And I hope to find out about the native peoples of Canada and the French-Canadian culture. But for now, I'm happy just being here and experiencing everyday life as a Canadian.

Most things I am coping with – light switches reversed, steering wheels on the wrong side of the car, cars on the wrong side of the road, loonies, power sockets, traffic lights, dial tones, cantaloupe and peppers instead of rockmelon and capsicum, and some of the Canadian language – but I think it will take a bit of time to get used to both mosquitoes and taxes.

Mind you, it hasn't all been smooth sailing,

but nothing compared to the problems faced by Jo-anne Rowland (*Free Press*, Dec. 24). What a disaster for her! Fortunately, I have permanent resident status and am working with a trustworthy and reputable Winnipeg company. J.J.H. McLean & Co. Ltd. is long-standing in this city and not only offered me a job, but also promised to stay in business for at least another hundred years or so – good news for us all. (Sometimes, though, I wonder if it's the staff or the grand pianos I enjoy being with the most.) Also, I had a ton of support from good friends here before I even got started. I'm not sure I could have come this far without them. Anyway, after hearing of Jo-anne's experience, I feel very lucky.

On a more personal note, I believe that most things work out the way they are supposed to, but it has been almost too easy for me so I'm not taking anything for granted. There is a lot I want to do and work out while I am here, and Winnipeg is just perfect for that – my chance to get away from it all in a place where I feel at home.

If you've always lived here, that might not mean a whole lot. If you've chosen to come here, you will know exactly what I mean.

This response then is for the many people who asked me why, friends who wondered if I was doing this for the right reasons, and everyone who has helped me. It's also for my mum, Matthew (4), Samantha (2), Anna (9 weeks) and the rest of my family and friends who were very difficult to leave behind. Don't worry, I'm doing just fine.

I guess I don't really need to tell you why Winnipeg, just that it is Winnipeg. I know you can figure the rest out for yourselves.

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(*Winnipeg Free Press*, January 16, 1995)