

## **From Calgary To Kamsack** *A City Slicker's Story of Culture Shock*

By Shannon Buckle

You know, it's always been my dream to live the small town life. I'll tell you why.

My husband, son, dog and I moved here from Calgary in September, 2007. Did you have any problems getting here? you ask. Well yes, yes we did. But now's not the time to open that can of worms.

Calgary is a city of over one million people. For those of you who have never been in a city that size, let me put it into perspective: imagine the entire population of Manitoba in a smaller area, driving the exact same roads together, working in the same city core, taking the same public transportation, oh you get the idea. Ok, now imagine moving away from your home town, in this case Kamsack, and moving to a town in Manitoba the size of the KCI. Shocking! I always wanted to live in a small town, where everyone knew everyone else, smiles were running free, and people look out for each other. For the most part, Kamsackians are very nice, friendly, and do smile a lot. There are however, always exceptions to the rule.

We lived in Calgary for over twenty years, and we were used to basic anonymity. You didn't talk to strangers, but knew your neighbours by name. You waited for the flashing lights to go on and cars to stop before you crossed the street at the crosswalks. You kept your head down and didn't make eye contact with others while on public transit. Seeing the police in your neighbourhood was a reason to keep your head down and leave quickly, as it could easily turn into a gunfight.

As much as my husband and I loved

Calgary, with our friends and family all close by, there were just too many reasons to leave.

It's common knowledge that Alberta's booming, or at the very least, was. People from all over Canada were heading to Alberta to cash in on the "black gold rush". Due to this reason, the law of supply and demand kicked in. More people plus fewer places to live equals bidding war on houses for sale and price gouging on rentals. When we left, you could rent a one-bedroom basement suite for \$1150 per month. Ouch. Our rent was increased, and not accordingly. We realized our dream of owning a house of our own was not going to happen anytime soon in Alberta.

Daycare workers were leaving their jobs to find higher-paying jobs in sectors that had nothing to do with children. Our son suffered for this, he lost two daycare centers in under a year.

The nurse/doctor to patient ratio did not increase with the population. Ambulance services were starting to suffer due to more population and populated areas, no new EMTs.

Jobs were abundant, but pay did not increase well, as there were so many people willing to take a smaller pay rate just to have your job. When a company did hire workers, they were of little experience, or just plain lazy, knowing that they didn't need the job because they could have a new one by the end of the day. As my husband and I worked hard for the same company for over a year, we saw so many new hires, we stopped bothering to learn their names.

Crime was on the rise. Once, shortly before we left, there was a shooting at a movie theatre. Nobody got hurt, but it happened right when a movie let out.

Turned out it was gang-related, and a lot of cars were shot up. Sad state of affairs when you're too afraid to go out into public for fear of dying on the street in cross-fire. Safety issues being a factor, they were only one reason to leave.

Since our rent increased, our son no longer had a daycare, and our raises did not reflect our cost of living, we looked elsewhere. Our search was urgent due to a new baby on the way.

Of course we started by looking in southern Alberta, eventually expanding our search to the entire province. Alas, the boom hit everywhere. My husband got the bright idea to move to Saskatchewan. Weeks we were online, investigating the cities, towns, and even villages in this province. We came across Theodore, a small town, which looked good, but wasn't for us.

We then found a website for a town called Kamsack. We were impressed. So we arranged to take our vacation, and when we arrived last July, we were in love. Kamsack is a beautiful little town, not too small to know everything about each other, yet small enough to feel like a neighbourhood. And all the amenities of big city life was less than an hour away. We found our home.

We arrived in Kamsack in September, a month later than planned. The first people I met were Nicole and Nancy at the library, where I continue to go at least once a week. My husband found a job at Field's, where the staff treated him well and the pay was well enough for us to survive in the local economy. He eventually found another job at Weber's and is treated very well there too. I am a stay-at-home mom with my two kids and the dog, and I enjoy the local scenery, friendliness and economic situation.

How wonderful it was to realize that everything in town is in walking distance. My husband walks to work every morning, I can get all my errands done in very little time, and the people I've met are very nice and friendly.

I go to the post office, and people smile and hold the door open for me to get my stroller in! If you look someone in the eye, they smile and say hello! People are helpful and polite. They say excuse me, please and thank you. Cars stop for pedestrians. Crime is nowhere near Calgary standards. You can walk down the main street and see people saying hi and having conversations with each other. Gossip seems to be a lot less rampant than I thought it would be. The schools, "city center", and the mall is nearby. Going to town hall to pay a bill is seen by my son and I as a quick jaunt out, not as a long trip on a bus, with two transfers. Living in Kamsack seems to be like living in the suburbs, where everyone is comfortable and the city is near enough to be considered convenient.

We did realize our dream of owning a house, which was purchased from the Town. We also purchased a new vehicle. Our lives are better, we are stress-free, and the kids are thriving.

When my husband's family asks us when we're coming home, which they ask every conversation we have, the answer is always the same:

Why would we go back when our quality of life is so great here? Go back to Calgary? No, thanks.