

## SPIRITual JOURNEY

*By Elmira Galiyeva, SOS Local Immigration Partnership*



It was in the stars... On a warm summer evening in Stuttgart, after helping his father with wood chopping, a 12-year-old Jorg told his parents that he would become a lumberjack in Canada. He kept his promise, and his axe.

A few years later, Jorg met Anette, and they went backpacking in British Columbia. Although they really enjoyed their trip, they did not find a place they wanted to call home. Four years later, when they were already married and had two children, they came back to the region and met with their acquaintances in Victoria, who suggested checking out the South Okanagan region. They came to Penticton and knew that this would be their new home. In 2001 they moved to Penticton and stayed for good.

Jorg was a master cabinetmaker. Not exactly a lumberjack, but still working with wood. His cabinet shop, creating beautiful German-style furniture, was a hit. Jorg taught a number of apprentices and brought a few more master cabinetmakers from Germany to share their knowledge.

Anette was taking care of their three children. She remembers how she was impressed with the way the local schools welcomed their children and offered special ESL programs to help them learn English and integrate. "Happy children- happy mom. Happy wife- happy

life”, shared Anette with a chuckle. Anette worked with the South Okanagan Immigrant and Community Services (SOICS) for some time, and has been a friend and supporter of newcomer services ever since.

Life was good but there was a challenge that Anette and Jorg were trying to tackle. They saw so much fruit wasted in the orchards and knew they had to do something about it. In Germany people bring their fruit to distilleries, so the Engels started looking for a distillery in the region but couldn't find one. “Aha, here is a business opportunity”, they thought.

The Engels are the pioneers in the distillery business in British Columbia. They were one of the first 2 license-holders, and the regulatory body created a special process for them to import the equipment from Germany.

Following Jorg's family tradition and learning from the rich experience of the German distillery business (there are around 10, 000 distilleries in Germany), Jorg and Anette opened **Maple Leaf Spirits** tasting room in 2006 in Penticton.

The distillery offers 10-12 kinds of unique spirits – liqueurs, wine brandy, and fruit brandies and grape spirits- created using fresh Okanagan fruit. Several products gained international recognition, including awards at the International Spirits Competition "Destillata" in Austria, Best of the Northwest Spirit Competition in Seattle, Canadian Artisan Spirit Competitions and Green Tourism Canada.

The Spirits is more than tasty, warm and aromatic beverages – it is a place where you feel at home. You can have a candid conversation with Anette and Jorg, enjoy the beautiful view, observe their ornamental pheasants, and breath in the magnificent South Okanagan life. It was in the stars...