

COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS STORIES



**SOUTH OKANAGAN
IMMIGRANT AND
COMMUNITY SERVICES**



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Introduction

“Community Champions” is a media campaign led by the South Okanagan-Similkameen Local Immigration Partnership (SOSLIP) and supported by the South Okanagan Immigrant and Community Services (SOICS). We share stories that raise awareness about the contributions that immigrants make to the community while introducing the small businesses of new Canadians.

We are very grateful to the media that published these stories and continue to support us: Castanet, Skaha Matters and Start Here Okanagan. And we thank our story tellers for sharing their journeys with us. We hope you enjoy these stories and establish new connections with your neighbours featured here.

“My Dream is to build a Successful Business in my Community”



From left to right: Nesreen Nehme, Eklas Alzoubi, Walida Jamil

Immigration is not easy. If you have experienced it, you know what I mean. If not, imagine moving to a country where you don't know anyone, you don't speak the local language, you don't have a home, and you don't have a job. How would that go?

Studies show that it may take up to 15 years for a newcomer to integrate into a community in Canada. Daunting, isn't it? There is something each of us can do to change that, though. From welcoming policies at the government level and supportive practices at the organizational level, to a caring attitude of a neighbor or a colleague who doesn't just tolerate you but is genuinely interested in and values you.

Let me introduce you to two wonderful women on their settlement journey.

Meet Walida Jamlil. Walida, her husband Ahmed and their three children moved to Canada thanks to a group of residents at St Saviour's Church that sponsored them in 2016. Originally from Syria, they lived

in Lebanon before coming to Penticton. Ahmed was a construction worker and Walinda was a stay-at-home mom. Walinda admits that language learning plays the most important role on the way to integration. Both Walida and Ahmed, are learning English at the South Okanagan Immigrant and Community Services (SOICS). Ahmed works at a store and Walida has started home-based businesses – Walida's Mending & Alteration Services and Walida's Catering Services. Ahmed is very supportive of Walida's entrepreneurship.

"I really like it here", says Walinda, "I enjoy the English lessons... people are very nice...the church group has been very kind and supportive...children are happy – they love their school and have made friends..."

"What is your dream, Walida?" I ask. She smiles, "My dream is to build a successful business in my community".

Meet my next champion- Eklas Alzoubi. Eklas and her family (husband Mohammad and three children at that time) also arrived in 2016 thanks to the sponsorship of the local group of residents – Summerland Refugee Sponsorship Group. Now the Alzoubi family has five children. They live in Summerland.

Mohammad, who used to be a chef in Syria, works at the Lakeside Resort at the reception. The kids like learning languages and enjoy their school a lot. Eklas studies English at SOICS and runs her home-based catering business. She got her driver's license and is able to commute to Penticton every day. She admits with excitement in her eyes, "I can go anywhere I want".

"I love cooking, especially when I see how much people enjoy the food I make. I sell my food at the local community markets and do catering as well. My dream is to open a restaurant and run it together with my husband and children. Right now we can't afford the loans but someday, I hope, our dream will come true."

“Farah” Means Happiness



If you’ve been following the Community Champions stories, you may recall a story about the Alzoubi family in Summerland. Their journey led them to starting their own business in Kelowna.

Eklas, her husband Mohammad and their children are originally from Syria. They arrived in the South Okanagan in 2016 thanks to the sponsorship of the local group of residents – Summerland Refugee Sponsorship Group. They started their settlement journey in Summerland.

Mohammad, who used to be a chef in Syria, worked at the Lakeside Resort. Eklas has been studying English at the South Okanagan Immigrant and Community Services (SOICS), taking care of the children, and running a small home-based catering business.

“I love cooking, especially when I see how much people enjoy the food I make”, said Eklas proudly. She used to sell her food at the local community markets and at the OneWorld multicultural festival held annually by SOICS in February.

A few months ago Eklas shared: “My dream is to open a restaurant and run it together with my husband and children. Right now we can’t afford the loans but someday, I hope, our dream will come true.”

Recently, the Alzoubi family opened their own business in Kelowna (104-330 Hwy 33 W) – “Farah Middle Eastern Food”, named after their baby daughter. “Farah” means happiness.

Although it is not their dream restaurant, it is very close to their goal. It is a store full of halal groceries from the Middle East. The business is family run, however, they were able to also create a job opportunity for Mahmoud who immigrated to Okanagan from Egypt.

Mahmoud shares some insights while giving me a tour of the store: “The Middle Eastern and Arabic communities are growing in the region and we want to satisfy the demand for traditional food. Now they don’t need to drive all the way to Vancouver to get the things they love. Also, many of our customers are Canadian-born. They love the spices, coffee, tea, and some unique products, such as fig jam and sweets that you can’t find in regular grocery stores.”

“We are business owners now,” says Eklas with a big smile on her face, “We contribute to the community. We are very happy here.”

“Annapurna - Goddess of the Harvests”



Did you know that the South Okanagan is becoming a destination for foodies? Well, now you do. Ever tried the Nepali-Indian fusion cuisine? We've got that!

Meet Keshab Sapkota and Ram Bhandari - amazing chefs from Nepal that made Penticton their home. Both came to the valley a few years ago and started off by cooking at various restaurants. They have been nursing a dream of creating their own, unique restaurant where they can use their culinary skills learned in their mothers' kitchens and through years of training. When they moved to Penticton, they made a connection with the South Okanagan Immigrant and Community Services (SOICS) to upgrade their language skills and participate in community events. Now SOICS is one of their devoted clients.

Annapurna Restaurant opened just over a year ago on Penticton's Main Street and, since then, people who tried the amazing food keep coming back.

Besides being the name of the famous mountainous range in the Himalayas boasting a peak of over 8,000 meters, in Hindu Annapurna means "the universal and timeless kitchen-goddess", the mother who feeds everyone and protects us from starvation.

The restaurant offers a delicious fusion of Nepali and Indian cuisines inspired by the blend of Tibetan, Indian and Chinese cultures present in Nepal. These complex and flavourful dishes will satisfy both vegetarians and meat lovers. Moreover, since each dish is prepared from scratch using fresh ingredients, the Annapurna team can make your meal without gluten, lactose or nuts.

Here are some Nepali dishes you have to try: Momo dumplings (steamed or pan-fried dumplings), Sekuwa (grilled chicken or lamb with Himalayan spices) and Sherpa soup made with Himalayan bean flour, herbs and garlic. Or how about Nepali style chow mein? Feel like good old butter chicken or lamb saag? Annapurna has it all.

There is a small community of four or five Nepalese families in the valley that get together for the holidays to share food and have a good time. Two of Ram's sisters own their own restaurants – one in West Kelowna called "Everest" and the other in Vernon named "The Curry Pot", both well loved by the locals.

"There are a lot of things we truly value about our life in Canada but if we had to pick one it would be the protection of human rights allowing you to be who you want to be", revealed Ram and Keshab.

"We used to be job seekers but now we are job creators", shares Keshab with a smile. Two friends now employ up to five staff (depending on the season) and are proud of being able to contribute to the local economy. "Mother who feeds everyone" has two great sons that will not let you leave hungry.

From a Swimming Champion to a Successful Entrepreneur



Hamza was a swimming champion and a coach in his hometown, Tiznit, a beautiful town in the south of Morocco. Tiznit is known for its silver handicraft, active and civically engaged community, magnificent historic sites and a number of public facilities, including an Olympic Swimming Pool where Hamza spent a lot of time practicing. Outside of his swimming career, Hamza was an auto mechanic. He was passionate about both but wanted to explore a new path - life in Canada. His destination was Osoyoos.

Soon after he arrived, he started working in the housekeeping department at one of the best resorts in Osoyoos. That's where he met his friend and business partner Magali.

Magali grew up in Uruguay, in a small resort town - Punta del Este. When her father passed away, all the children- two boys and two girls- began to help their mother run a complex family business- a bakery, a pasta factory and a rotisserie. "I always wanted to be independent – travel the world and work in the hospitality field. My mother brought me some information about the 'work and travel' program, and I ended up in the US", shares Magali. Before making Osoyoos her home, she studied hospitality and worked at a prestigious hotel in Florida, then in Whistler and Vancouver.

Hamza was looking for opportunities to get back into his field and decided to seek help from the South Okanagan Immigrant and Community Services (SOICS) that offer free services to all immigrants. "I am so grateful to Martina, the Employment Facilitator with SOICS, who helped me find a job in my field; it wasn't easy", says Hamza. He was very happy at the new workplace, Penticton General Motors, but kept working on his business idea that was becoming more and more real day after day. His dream was to bring a piece of his home to Canada – argan oil.

"Argan trees only grow in the south of Morocco - my home, and I thought it would be great to share the purest argan oil with my new community", Hamza shares. He did marketing research and together with his friend opened a manufacturing site in Morocco that started to produce pure organic argan oil. SOICS helped him access small start-up funding to kick-start his business, and Magali was his first client.

Hamza's dream came true. He is now the owner and CEO of the Alia Collection Inc. "Alia" means "precious". He named the company after his mom. Hamza's online business is doing great. He is exploring international markets, and is looking into opening a store in the South Okanagan. Magali is by his side – supporting him and encouraging him to follow his heart.

“Walking on Water”: A story of a successful Japanese chef who calls South Okanagan Home



Tatsuo Kan was a very successful Catering Company owner in Tokyo. Kan's clients were well-known people in Japan, including celebrities and government officials. His business served at least five large parties a day with the biggest one of 8,000 people lucky to try Kan's creations. Business was thriving but Kan had to spend more and more time away from his family – wife, Kanako, and two small children at the time. Kanako was not happy about it. He knew that to avoid “karoshi” (life-threatening burnout) he had to change this lifestyle.

Kan met his life partner in Arizona and ever since that time they both wanted to go back to North America. So, when the time for change arrived, they started looking into moving to Sun Valley, Idaho and opening a restaurant. Kan made an arrangement with his old friend to meet and discuss the business plan.

Photo by Bill Blare

Just before he had to leave for the airport, Kan and Kanako sat on the couch and talked about how risky it would be to invest thousands of dollars in the business just to apply for work visas, without any guarantee of permanent residency. Kan still went to see his friend and they had a great time, but they did not discuss business.

A few months later Kan took a trip to Saskatoon to explore immigration options through the provincial program. On the way home, Kan stopped in Vancouver. At a high-end sushi restaurant he had a chat with the chef who suggested that Kan and his family move to Vancouver instead. He gave Kan the phone number of an immigration lawyer. When Kan called the lawyer he answered: "Kan, you wouldn't believe it, but I was just chatting with your wife." Kan was surprised and relieved – his wife and him were on the same page. In June 2014 the Kan family arrived in Vancouver.

Kan worked as a manager of two restaurants and trained the teams of three restaurants. The Kan family welcomed a new child into their lives. Life was good but they wanted a quiet life in a small community where they could bring up children and have more time to enjoy what life has to offer. On a plane over Penticton they looked at each other and smiled: "That's it! This will be our home".

Kan started off by taking the English classes at the South Okanagan Immigrant and Community Services (SOICS). Once they settled, they planned to open a small take-out sushi place and spend as much time as possible with their children. By chance, Kan found a venue for rent with all the equipment for a very good price. It was a much bigger venue than what he had in mind for a take-out place. In addition, it was late fall and there were not many people passing by. Kan was nervous about the outcome but decided to go for it and see what happens. On

February 14th, 2017 Sushi Kojo opened its doors, and ran out of all supplies that very day... It was a tremendous success.

Kan and his team are very active in the community – they are a part of the school meal program, they support community events, and, of course, they indulge our taste buds by creating amazing food. Every time.

To accommodate the growing demand, Kan hired more staff, including a few chefs from Japan. Today he employs 28 people whom he highly values, and passes on his knowledge to. When he tried to downsize a bit, he asked the staff if anyone wanted to quit but no one did. Instead, they suggested opening one more restaurant and helping him manage it. Now there is a Kojo in West Kelowna.

Kojo has a lot of meanings but in Kan's words it is "walking on water – faith in God and trusting that nature and people will support you".

SPIRITual JOURNEY



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 cabinet makers 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 are 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 breathe in the magnificent South Okanagan life. It was in the stars...

“Eskala - Go Climb!”



Claudia was on a backpacking trip in British Columbia, far away from her home country- Mexico. It was 2003.

“I really want to learn English”, she shares, “I wanted to find someone who could help me with that, and I did”. She met Margaret, a lady from Germany, who owned an organic farm in Oliver. “I will teach you English if you teach me how to cook Mexican dishes”, offered Margaret. Given very basic English language skills that Claudia had at the time, it was not surprising that she said “yes” although she had no idea how to cook. Margaret ended up teaching Claudia to cook. This is how her journey in the valley began...

Let’s fast-forward a few years... On a sunny afternoon Claudia Reyes Nunez met Richard Rodrigues (a.k.a. Ricky) from Osoyoos. Richard’s father is Portuguese and his mother was originally from Quebec. They went to Mexico but soon realized that it was harder for Ricky to settle there than for Claudia in Canada. They moved back to the valley and got married in 2010.

It was not an easy immigration journey. Contrary to popular belief that all immigrants are leaving behind hardships, Claudia’s story is different.

Before she left Mexico, she received her Industrial Engineering degree and was ready to start a professional career in this highly respected field. She explored options for getting her engineering license in Canada but realized that it would require too much time and, most likely, she would have to move to a big city to find a job. She was in love with the Okanagan valley, so that was not a good option. So she decided to stay. For a few years she worked at a fruit packing facility in Osoyoos. She was a manager but, because of the existing work culture, was paid less than a forklift operator. She knew that this was not the right place for her. On top of it, she lost her mother and was feeling very sad and vulnerable. Change was long overdue...

Claudia and Richard moved to Penticton. Claudia reached out to the South Okanagan Immigrant and Community Services (SOICS) to connect with the community. She worked at a few stores before "True Outdoors", where she became a manager and found her true passion. She loved her work, met fellow climbers and made friends. But one day the store owner informed Claudia that the store will be closing down very soon. A golf-clothing boutique where she worked on the weekends was closing as well. Claudia was in despair.

The owner of the boutique asked Claudia: "Why don't you open your own outdoors store? You obviously know a lot about this business and love it. Nothing stops you from following your passion." Claudia agreed. The hardest part was to convince Ricky but he came around and supported his beloved wife.

In September 2019 "Eskala Mountain Sports" opened its doors on Front Street in Penticton, and has been doing very well since then. Claudia's store offers Canadian and European brands of high quality outdoors products at affordable prices. "Eskala" came from the Spanish "escalar", which means "go climb!" For me, it creates an image of Claudia full of determination and readiness to pursue her dream. "Go climb!" she told herself. And she did.

A Piece of Poland in South Okanagan: Immigrant entrepreneurs create a successful business in the valley



Vlodik Hryniewicz lived in Gdansk – a colourful port city on the Baltic coast of Poland. He has been a member of the National Kayak and Canoe Team of Poland for over ten years. He participated in University Games and World Championships. Vlodik enjoyed his sports career for a while but, at a certain point, while his country was still under the communist regime, he decided to leave Poland.

After spending a year and a half in Germany, he came to Canada. His journey in Canada started in Ontario. He lived in Thunder Bay, explored London and Toronto where he worked in the food industry for seven years. Life was busy and exciting. At some point he “adopted” his new name – Walter, since his original one was difficult to pronounce for many people.

One day Walter received a call from his relatives in Thunder Bay – there was a tragedy in the family and Walter went to support his relatives. His wife, Alicja, joined him later. They decided to stay in Thunder Bay and got involved in running a large restaurant. Once they realized that this

partnership was not working well, they committed to starting their own business – a restaurant offering classic Polish cuisine. In 2013 “Polish Bistro” opened its doors on a busy street and welcomed local foodies.

After a few thriving years, Walter and Alicja were on the road again. They were looking for a milder climate and South Okanagan was a natural choice. They came to the region three times to check the options for opening a restaurant before the final move to Penticton.

They found a good spot downtown. Alicja put her heart into making it cozy and truly authentic. “Poland is a beautiful country, rich in history, arts and culture. We are Polish, so we try to showcase our country and culinary traditions”, explains Walter. On July 11th, 2018 the food lovers of the South Okanagan received a new treat – “Polish Bistro”.

The Bistro at 65 Nanaimo Street offers a number of hearty, home style dishes – six types of pierogies (my favourite is made with spinach, tomato and feta), cabbage rolls, meatballs, Polish sausages, chicken breast wrapped in bacon and schnitzel, and, of course, the king of soups – Borsch!

The South Okanagan Immigrant and Community Services (SOICS) team often have lunch at the Bistro and, recently, ordered some pierogies for the Business After Business event, which were very highly rated by the local business community. You are probably already on your way to the Bistro.... Smaczego! Enjoy your meal!

The Green Cab is Growing



On a snowy November day of 2003 Balraj (a.k.a. Raj) Gill arrived from India to Penticton to join his beautiful wife Harjinder. Today they are a family of four – they have a 16-year-old son and a six-year-old daughter.

“There were two things that shocked me when I arrived – weather and culture”, admits Raj. “Time passed...the snow melted and I embraced the local culture”, he adds with a smile.

As many newcomers, Raj started learning English at the South Okanagan Immigrant and Community Services (SOICS). Now SOICS is one of the customers.

Raj has always loved to drive. He felt that driving around the area would help him learn more about the land and the people, and driving with other people would help him improve his English. With all these reasons in mind he decided to become a taxi driver. Notwithstanding his rich driving experience in India, he had to go through the licensing process from the very beginning. It took him three years to get a driver's license for the class that he needed. Once he did, he started working as a cab driver. After ten years of hard work and continuous business planning his dream came true. On December 25th, 2017 Raj opened the doors of Eco Taxi.

Why “eco”? All the vehicles in the fleet are hybrid Toyota Prius – ecological and economical. It was important to Raj to make sure his business is environmentally friendly, and to build a reliable team. “I have a great crew”, Raj proudly states, “they are hard working and friendly, and I can always count on them”.

The bright green cabs are well recognized in Penticton and soon could be flagged in other areas of the region. Recently Eco Taxi opened an operation in Kelowna and plans to offer services in Oliver in spring of 2020.

The company has a mobile app “Penticton Eco Taxi” that you can download for free from your favorite app store. It allows you to pick a vehicle type, see your journey map and when your cab is coming, and even schedule your trip in advance.

“Penticton is home for me. My family is here. My mom lives with us. My brother lives a few hours away. And Eco Taxi cars are driving around, making me happy”, says Raj.

Agri-Pak Packaging Ltd.: The Dhaliwal Family's Story



When it comes to nutrition, Canada's Food Guide now suggests at least half your plate be fruits & vegetables. With an ever-growing need for more produce, the Dhaliwal family's South Okanagan operations help to satisfy both market and grocer's seasonal produce needs by packing, shipping and marketing almost any fruit you can grow in the Okanagan.

To help meet the need, the family businesses practice innovation by expanding their own facilities in a number of ways. Dhaliwal Farms utilizes high density planting - a highly efficient method to encourage greater production across its 180 acres, Agri-pak Packaging Ltd. was purchased in 2014 and with a new state of the art facility it has doubled in size to house new apple, cherry, and soft fruit lines, Sunny Valley Fruit continues to pack and market Okanagan fruit, and they have partnered with Cawston Cold Storage to pack organics.

Large-scale agricultural businesses can be difficult to establish initially and can take growers years to refine their skills and processes for maximum production. Luckily for Dhaliwal's, intergenerational learning, mentorship and the support of the community has kept their farms growing - in all ways - while promoting success.

Forty years ago, when the Banta 'Ganta' Singh Dhaliwal (Sunny's grandpa) and his wife Punjab Kaur immigrated to Canada with their sons, seeking better opportunities and to be reunited with their family, they started Dhaliwal Farms. Beginning as a small 10-acre Oliver farm, they utilized their agricultural knowledge from Northern India and began their orchard business.

Although a cultural adjustment, the Dhaliwal's worked with six to seven other families settling in the area to support each other and integrate. Ganta, having been previously very involved in his village in India, worked to overcome the language barrier to increase his ability to get involved with the local community as it grew and more social events were held.

When asked what Ganta missed the most about India, "My grandpa used to be a professional wrestler in India, and he missed that because [at that time] there wasn't much in the Okanagan for wrestling." Sunny said. Ganta missed wrestling and the community in India, but was able to make yearly visits until his passing in 2000.

Honoring Ganta's legacy, the Dhaliwal's continue to be community minded and always open to helping other growers. "We're integrated, we're helping other growers in the area" Sunny shared. "We help any grower that wants to come in [and] we welcome them in, see what kind of opportunity we have and if we can help, we get them onto the grower list and we pack, ship, and market for them."

By maintaining a supply of quality fresh fruit and by creating seasonal opportunities at their facilities, the Dhaliwal family and their businesses

have been complementing the strong agricultural industry the South Okanagan is famous for.

Agri-pak Packaging Ltd, in particular, is a sizable operation creating 16 seasonal full time job opportunities during peak season with the possibility of adding another 20-25 jobs (and if it's a really good year they can add another 30-40 positions).

Looking to the future, the Dhaliwal's prepare for the next generation of agriculture. Sunny shares his plans to double the Agri-Pak packaging Ltd. facility by increasing the structure's size, to include a controlled environment allowing for year-round marketing and distribution. In the orchard, they limit burning and practice mulching to return organic ingredients to the earth while continuing to investigate green packaging alternatives which rival the industry-wise plastic.

A Craftsman's Challenging Journey in Setting up His Business



Dan became a luthier apprentice when he was a teenager. At 16 he was able to register his own guitar craftsmanship business in his hometown – Southend-on-Sea in England. With time, MacPherson Guitars became a recognized high-end brand and Dan's business was growing. Besides custom-made exquisite guitars, Dan mastered his craftsmanship in other elite woodwork such as VIP jet, Yacht and vehicle interiors.

"...he's a time-served luthier with the highest reputation as a skilled craftsman", said Lars Mullen, a well known music journalist, about Dan.

To grow his business internationally through accessing the U.S. and Canadian markets, Dan MacPherson decided to relocate to Canada through a federal entrepreneurship program active at the time. In 2009 his application was approved and he was informed that he needed to prepare to move in 12 to 18 months.

And so he did. He sold his house, organized his business equipment for the move, and waited.

He waited for five years...

Because of the world financial crisis of 2007-2008 he sold his house at a deflated market price and lived in his shop, a motorhome or couch surfed while he kept waiting. Finally, in mid 2015, he got the paperwork for immigration to Canada and finally became a landed immigrant in May 2016. He knew he wanted to come to the Okanagan, so he came to visit a few towns in the area. "All the government staff that I met throughout the valley told me that their town is the best. But I picked Penticton. There were a lot of offers of help in the beginning but not when I finally moved here", shared Dan.

Dan moved to Penticton in 2016. Due to a lot of conflicting and contradictory information, delays for permits and arguments over code compliance definitions, re-starting this business was a very lengthy problematic and costly process. Dan was receiving mixed and conflicting information about what he needed to comply with in order to open his business. He studied all the regulations but this led to more questions that no one wanted to or was able to answer. It took him two years to finally open his business. By that time, the funds he brought with him were long gone.

"Now, all these years since I made a decision to bring my business here, I am still trying to make ends meet. I still don't have many friends here and no family as I moved here on my own. I live in a rental room as I'm unable to obtain a mortgage or pay the high levels of rent in town – this is what I sold my house for. Not exactly a success story", adds Dan with a sad smile.

To learn more about Dan's business please visit:

www.macphersonguitars.com and www.macphersonwoodcrafts.com

PS. Dan's story is not unique. Canada's immigration system targets the best of the best when it comes to professional and business immigration programs. In most cases (62%), these professionals are unable to find employment commensurate with their education and experiences. It may take up to 15 years for an immigrant to settle.

Dental Artists



We are sitting in the quiet lunchroom. All three of us are wearing masks but, ironically, none of us is doing or getting a dental exam. It is just the new normal.

Dr. Shammi and Dr. Geetika Saini had a long journey to the South Okanagan.

Geetika grew up in a small town of Karnal in Northern India with her two sisters and a brother. "My father always strived to give us the best education, and all the opportunities to make sure we excel in whatever we all do", shared Geetika. Inspired by her parents who have always been actively giving back to the community, Geetika has always been passionate about helping people, which made her choose to become a dentist. In 2000 she joined the Himachal Dental College in the beautiful Himalayas where she met her future husband – Shammi.

Shammi has been fascinated by dentistry since he was a child. The family moved a lot as his father had served as a dentist in the Indian Army Dental Corps for 33 years, and little Shammi used to watch him working. Nobody in the family was surprised when Shammi chose a career as a dentist, just like his father.

After getting married in 2005 both settled in Jalandhar, Punjab where they practiced together at their own dental clinic for seven years. In 2012 they decided to immigrate to Canada. Before moving to Toronto, Shammi and Geetika researched the process to acquire the credentials to practice as dentists in Canada. It turned out that they needed to go to college. Again.

To do so, they needed to take a couple of exams, so they started preparing for that right away. While studying for the exams, Shammi worked at Tim Horton's and Geetika at a doctor's office reception. "We had our two sons by that time – Aadvik, which means "unique", and Anikait, "ruler of the world". So, there was a lot to handle", chuckles Shammi. Geetika adds that the undeterred support of her in-laws made a huge difference to their struggle.

Due to some technical difficulties of getting their degrees evaluated, they could not take the exams in Canada, but were able to get into US schools. They were accepted into two dental schools and decided to go to Boston. Both completed their DMD degrees at Henry M. Goldman School of Dental Medicine at Boston University. Finally, in 2017 the Saini family moved to the beautiful Okanagan, and Shammi and Geetika opened their practices in Penticton. Now they have three practices in B.C.

Geetika, Shammi and the boys love spending quality time together – travelling, going for walks, playing golf, volunteering at the Hindu Temple. "We hope to give the best to our kids as our parents did".

The doctors' passion for giving people beautiful smiles flourishes in their new hometown - Penticton.

Edsa – Community Connector



There is a little store, named Edsa, at the intersection of Wade and Martin streets in Penticton. Edsa is a 24-kilometer long avenue that connects many communities in the Philippines. Similar to its namesake, the store connects residents and helps the local kababayan (compatriots) support their loved ones in the Philippines by sending gifts and money. The store offers a wide variety of Filipino food appreciated by the whole community.

“I am so happy when my son brings his schoolmates to the store, so they could try some unusual snacks. They are curious about Filipino food and seem to really enjoy it”, comments Michelle.

Michelle Saygo Golifardo became a new owner of the store in January 2021. She moved to Osoyoos from the Philippines in 2017, and took a role of a supervisor at the local Tim Horton's. Her nine years of experience as a restaurant manager in the Philippines made this move a natural fit.

"Later I took on a couple of additional jobs – as an associate clerk at the Pharmasave and as a cleaner at a few wineries...I guess I love to work", shares Michelle with the smiling eyes as she picks up her eight-month old daughter, Galadriel, from her stroller. Since she is wearing a mask, I can't see her smile but I know it is there.

"My husband, Elgene, and my son Light, who was five years old at that time, joined me in 2018. Elgene used to work at the Mitsubishi plant in the Philippines. He went to Japan to learn new assembling tools and methods, and was training employees at the plant on how to use these new techniques. Upon arrival, he joined my team at Tim Horton's but now he works at the Unit Electrical Engineering in Okanagan Falls and is very happy with his job", continues Michelle. Elgene took the First Aid training organized by the South Okanagan Immigrant and Community Services (SOICS) to add to his impressive list of credentials.

Michelle is originally from Pasig City, a large district with skyscrapers, hip restaurants and weekend markets. "My parents and one of the brothers live there and my other brother is in Dubai. I hope to bring my whole family here. To be honest, we bought the store for my parents, so they would have something meaningful to do and feel as part of the community."

"A lot of customers are asking me if I have plans to sell home style Filipino dishes. My dream is to create a little café serving Pilipino cuisine as part of the store. My older brother is a great cook, so he could be our chef. Can't wait for it to happen. I want the South Okanagan community to taste delicious authentic Filipino food", concludes Michelle.

“My Secret Ingredient is Love” - Proudly Baked in Okanagan



Audrey was born and raised in Poitiers in west of France. When she met her husband, Jean Marc, both were happy living in the beautiful Bordeaux close to the family estate winery. When Jean Marc's mother sold the estate, the young couple was open to adventures, so Jean Marc started looking for a job around the globe. And their wish was granted – Jean Marc was invited to work as a wine maker in South Okanagan.

“No, no, no...we can't go. Our son is too young...you are expecting our second child...it's so far from France...Can we really?” – exclaimed Jean Marc.

But they understood that they needed to take this chance.

And this is how their Okanagan journey began.

The Enixon family arrived in Oliver in 2016 with one toddler, one big belly and six suitcases.

"We decided to settle in Oliver because it is a family town. What is especially great is that it has a growing artisan community. It was a very cold winter when we moved here. My husband worked a lot and I was at home taking care of our baby girl. Since we moved I have been craving good bread. I used to make bread at home in France", shares Audrey.

"Once I was watching a cooking show called "Cooked" where they were talking about creating your own sourdough starter. As a microbiologist (that was my first diploma) I was fascinated by the process and decided to try it myself. And this is how "Jojo", my sourdough bread starter, was born. I named it after my grandfather", adds Audrey with an affectionate smile.

At first, Audrey was baking bread for her family. One day her friend was over for dinner and kept complimenting Audrey's bread and finally convinced her to start baking for other people as well. Audrey used to supervise three school cafeterias in France, so she was very familiar with the food industry.

"Thanks to SOICS [South Okanagan Immigrant and Community Services] I got my food safe certificate. I researched a lot about baking at home on the Interior Health website and found out that with certain restrictions it was absolutely possible", says Audrey.

Audrey started baking small batches of bread and selling them at the Osoyoos farmers' market. After four years of being a vendor, she has become a part of the Board of the market. When the market is closed and all year round Audrey's Road 9 home based micro bakery offers monthly subscriptions for sourdough bread and individual orders for free delivery in Oliver or pick up. Besides various naturally leavened breads (loaves, batard, French baguettes, focaccia, buns, etc.), Audrey makes old-fashioned almond macaroons (inspired by her grandma's

recipe). She even makes her own flour from the organic grains, and hopes to make her baking 100% organic in the future. When COVID-19 pushed a lot of community members into isolation, Audrey shared Jojo and sourdough bread recipes, and offered advice on baking.

“My goal is to make local, earthy, high quality bread. I put my heart into it. I give my love through my bread and get it back from the community.” – concludes Audrey.

Road 9 - Audrey's Breads was voted #1 in Best Bakeries of South Okanagan 2020.

Maison Mulnati



When David and Celine immigrated to Canada with their family four years ago their resumes looked very different. Celine, who was previously a psychologist for the hospital, and David, who operated his own physiotherapy clinic, traded in their white coats for chef's jackets when they became chocolatiers.

"When we arrived here we couldn't find chocolate that we really loved ... so we started first to make chocolate for ourselves and finally we made people try it." Celine said. "They were amazed because they didn't know this taste ... it was so flavourful and in Canada they are used to sweeter chocolate. So, when people tried our chocolate they said we had to open a store and it snowballed, and that's what we did." She added.

Since September 2018, David Mullner and Celine Nativel have been creating low sugar, vegan chocolates under their business named 'Maison Mulnati' - 'Maison' meaning house/home (or "homemade") and 'Mulnati' by cleverly blending the couple's last names.

However, this year Maison Mulnati has been working on moving to a new home, right in the heart of downtown Penticton, at 221 Main St. next to Castanet's Penticton office.

When we spoke previously, the couple shared the business' challenges associated with their old location off Eckhardt and Highway 97 - the space allowed for a newly equipped commercial kitchen, necessary to produce and preserve their chocolate confections, but lacked the walk-in traffic necessary for this style of business.

"We thought that we would be busy and work like crazy when we opened but... that was not the case." said Celine. "People always support [businesses] in the beginning because it's exciting to be a part of this flow and to do things but once you are open it is really difficult - especially a location with not a lot of walk-in traffic."

Faced with pandemic precautions and a complete halt in walk-in business, Celine and David developed a temporary Saturday 'Breakfast Delivery' program consisting of vegan pastries and chocolate. Your order (\$20/GST minimum) allowed you to enjoy a mixed selection of pastries every Saturday, ready for pick-up between 8:45 AM and 9:45 AM or delivered from 10:00 AM.

To accommodate the change in location, the successful breakfast program was halted this January and delivery will not be offered for this program moving forward. However, a selection of pastries and chocolate will be available to curate your own selection of breakfast items any day of the week.

Faced with renovating a new space, the business was also noticeably absent from this year's '8th Annual OneWorld Multicultural Festival' - an event hosted by SOICS, which helped Maison Mulnati get its start.

I think it was an ad in a newspaper talking about free English courses and David really needed those courses" chuckled Celine, "So we went to SOICS and we discovered the other services ... we met different people and [eventually] they asked us [to participate in] the OneWorld Festival."

The SOICS staff who were familiar with French cuisine knew that French dishes and pastries were popular in Canada so they presented the idea to participate in the annual event.

“When they asked us if we could cook we thought ‘why not? let’s give it a try’ and we made our chocolate for the OneWorld Festival and that was the kick I think to make us open this store because the people who tried it... were asking where the store is.”

Although originally from France, Celine shares that Maison Mulnati’s chocolate recipes and techniques were created in Canada. The recipes reflect the couple’s passion for chocolate - a passion that is highlighted by the use of local, organic, quality ingredients, including Okanagan fruits and nuts when available.

From Hockey Player to Business Owner



"When I was a six-year-old boy we had a hockey coach visiting our gym class one day. I didn't know who that man was but I tried extremely hard to impress him. After the class, the coach - Yevgenij Linkevitch, came up to me and asked if I played hockey. I responded "yes, of course!" although I didn't know much about the sport at that time", remembers Sergej Sinicin, our local REALTOR, with a reminiscent smile.

"Yevgenij is a brilliant coach and a great role model for young men. I grew up without a father since I was 6, so he filled that role for me and other boys on our team. He was adamant that we focused on both academic and sports achievements. He was the team's coach from when we were 6 and until our graduation. So was our extraordinary classroom teacher – Natalia Sergejevna, whom I will never forget", shares Sergej.

"I left my home country, Latvia, when I was 16, chasing a dream of becoming a professional hockey player", continues Sergej.

Sergej had an arrangement with the junior B team in Las Vegas but soon realized that he needed a higher level of competition. That is how he

came to Saskatchewan, then got traded to Montana and then returned to play in Canada.

"I am forever grateful to my billet families that welcomed me to their homes while I was playing hockey – David and Cathy Covert in Montana's Great Falls, Greg and Linda Anderson in Sault St. Marie. They showed me how to give without expecting anything in return."

In 2000 he was offered a scholarship to Div. I NCAA.

"I declined the scholarship and made my best "off ice move" ever – I married a Prairies girl Laura Weber" – continues Sergej.

In Saskatchewan together they built a few businesses – a fitness centre, a metal fabricating shop and an advertising/marketing firm. In 2012 they sold the business and decided to move to Vancouver Island. But destiny had something else planned for them. When visiting Laura's son, who was offered a job in Penticton, the couple fell in love with the South Okanagan and was set on making it their new home. Sergej who knows construction and Laura with her passion for design built their own house in Kaleden.

When the house was finished, Sergej's original plan to retire didn't sound too inspiring – he needed a new challenge, so he became a real estate agent. Today he leads a neuHouzz Real Estate Group team with a new office downtown Penticton.

"It was extremely important to me to create a culture of high standards, transparency and shared vision with my partners. Our team uses most current creative marketing tools and focuses on collaboration. We tell our clients what they need to hear, not what they want to hear. But what really unites us is that we generously and without expecting anything back in return, give everyone and our clients the most precious commodity – our time to guide them through their journey", shares Sergej.

Sergej has three stepsons and now Laura and him are proud grandparents. When they have time, they like to go snowshoeing in the winter. Laura has also been working on giving new life to used furniture through her Shabby Chic by Moi business venture.

Wild Ginger in Penticton – A Story of Passion and Success



“Asian food is my passion. I like to use quality ingredients. Presentation is very important to me as well”, shares Christine, the owner of the new Asian fusion restaurant in Penticton - “Wild Ginger”. “When I was 22 I didn’t know what I wanted. Now I feel happy with my choice.”

Qiao Ying Zhang (Christine) grew up in Kaiping, Guangdong Province - a city in the Southern China in the Pearl River Delta. It is known for fortified towers spread around the area.

Christine’s cousin introduced her to Darcy Wong and, for a while, they had a long-distance relationship with all its excitement and challenges. In 2003 she married Darcy, who has been living in South Okanagan for a long time. In 2004 Christine moved to Penticton. Darcy’s family owned a Chinese restaurant at the time, and Christine joined the family business. With the birth of two children – Allyson and Sophia, the couple decided to sell the restaurant to spend more time with their daughters. They took part-time jobs to support the family. With time,

Christine was able to sponsor her parents to move to Canada, which took almost five years.

"The most difficult thing for me was learning the English language. When I moved here we already had a restaurant, so I didn't go to school. I just worked at the restaurant, so my English was very limited. Sometimes, even now, it is very difficult for me to say what I want to people, so I ask my husband to help me."

Christine had no experience with the restaurant business until she moved to Canada. She learned about it from her husband and his parents. "I was just following them and doing what they were doing. It is different with our new restaurant. This is what I want to do and I want it even more than my husband", says Christine with a wide smile.

During the first few years of living in Canada Christine missed her home country very much and wanted to go back, but now she feels that Canada is her country. She misses her older brother and her friends in China but it is hard to visit them all the time. Last time she was able to see them was six years ago.

"Owning a restaurant means long hours of work. Often 14-15 hours a day. But we enjoy what we are doing. My mom and dad help us a lot with the restaurant and taking care of the children. My mom helps with cooking. My dad washes dishes. They like the environment and people here."

Christine and Darcy planned to open the restaurant over a year ago but with the COVID-19 pandemic they had to delay it. "People tell us that they've been waiting for us to open for a long time. It is so nice to hear. I am very happy", concludes Christine.

Story of Joy



Jung Shil (Sylvia) Hwang and her family moved to Canada from South Korea about eight years ago. First, her husband, Sang Deok (Tony) Park, got a job in Alberta and moved there on his own. Sylvia and their son, Jun, joined him in a few months.

“My life was very different before we came to Canada. I was a ballerina and taught children at a dance academy. My husband was a chef at Tony Roma’s, a chain restaurant specializing in ribs, and he wanted to immigrate to Canada because in my country people retire early and he did not want to retire”, shares Sylvia.

“Our plan was for my husband to move to Canada and for my son and me to stay in Korea but family together is better, so we just followed him here.”

When Sylvia moved to Alberta she spent a lot of time with their son. “In Korea, I was very busy and our son was in a daycare and he was just always waiting for me. So, in Alberta I spent all my time with our son and was so happy.”

After a year and a half, they moved to Penticton. "My daughter, Hannah, was born at the Penticton Hospital, so Penticton is her home town", adds Sylvia with a big smile.

It took the family over four years to finally get their immigration documents. For Sylvia, the most challenging thing was to learn the language. She took the free English language classes at the South Okanagan Immigrant and Community Services (SOICS). She also found it hard to navigate the Canadian education system as it is very different from the one in Korea. "But wherever we go, people are very helpful."

In 2018 they opened Joy Buffet at the Cannery in Penticton. It was a buffet-style restaurant serving amazing ribs and a number of Asian dishes. With the COVID-19 pandemic, the family had to change the setting and get rid of the buffet. They changed the name to "JJ Joy" not to confuse customers about the buffet availability, and switched to a la carte. "Our specialty are ribs – they are very soft and melt in your mouth", chuckles Sylvia. "Our customers also like our other dishes, such as Chow Mein and Pad Thai. We have Korean dishes as well, such as Bulgogi and sweet and spicy BBQ chicken."

"My advice to other immigrants coming to Canada is to try and learn some English before you come. Also, you need a positive mind. It is very helpful in settlement. Now that we are settled a little bit I feel very grateful", concludes Sylvia.

“With a Twist”



Harold Cruz moved to Penticton from Vancouver Island. He was born on another island though. In the Philippines. Boracay is known for its magnificent beaches and surfing. “I really like the ocean. It gives me a warm feeling. Vancouver Island was a good fit for me. I would go surfing any day in a heartbeat”, he says and shares a wide smile. In Penticton, Harold picked up a new hobby – snowboarding.

Together with two of his siblings, Harold came to live with their father in Canada almost 30 years ago. He was 16 at the time. When the circumstances allowed, his mother and younger sister were able to join the rest of the family. Most of them live in Nanaimo now.

“Life in the Philippines is very tough, so one of the main goals of the Filipinos is to move overseas for a better life, and to be able to support their families... When immigrating you get your struggles – different culture, different language... but faith is a big part of our culture and it helps. I am a big believer”, continues Harold.

The way he ended up at the culinary school of Malaspina College (currently Vancouver Island University) was a twist of fortune. His original

plan was to apply for a computer science program but, since it had a six-month waiting list, Harold joined the culinary arts program instead. "Now I am here. I own the "Twisted Chopsticks" restaurant and a food truck. It's funny how things work out in life sometimes", reflects Harold.

COVID-19 pandemic had a severe negative impact on the Island's tourism industry and Harold's work slowed down. His friend from Penticton encouraged him to move here, as life was still close to normal in South Okanagan.

"In a way, COVID gave me a push to start my own business. I've been working in the restaurant business for the last 15 years and that experience gave me confidence. I learned from various chefs specializing in certain cuisines – Thai, Japanese, Chinese. Thus, the idea of an Asian fusion food, where East meets West, made sense to me. I like the diversity – I think it's great when people can try different types of food at one place."

Harrold loves Filipino dishes but admits that preparing them is very time consuming, which is challenging in a fast-paced eatery. He reserved cooking Filipino food for his friends and family for now. He is thinking of offering some pre-made Filipino dishes to his customers in the future – something you could bring home, reheat and enjoy with your family.

When Harold was getting his first COVID vaccine, he observed how busy the nurses and doctors were and he knows how stressful this kind of work is from his sister, who is a Registered Nurse. He spoke to the head nurse and arranged to deliver free lunches to all the medical personnel at the vaccination clinic as a way to thank them for holding the frontline.

Harrold's business is going well. Sometimes it is hard to keep up with the orders as he is the only cook. He has been trying to find staff but knows that it is hard for many businesses in the hospitality sector. He would like to hire newcomers to the region and share his knowledge and love for cooking. "One of the traits of immigrants is being hardworking. This is very true for many immigrants from the Philippines – they are very hardworking and committed employees with the great work ethics", shares Harold.

"If you have any ideas for your future, keep them in mind, they may come to fruition one day. And never give up... just strive for the best. With a little bit of luck, a little bit of help, and pray to God above... things will work out".

The Right Turn: Darya's Story



Darya Shalev lived in a beautiful town Zichron Yaakov in Israel. It is one of the first modern settlements located on Mount Carmel with amazing views over the Coastal Plain and the Mediterranean Sea. In Israel she managed an after-school program for children and loved her job. Having a creative personality, Darya enjoyed dancing and teaching others, painting and doing crafts.

She came to Canada in 2013. Her main reason for moving to Canada was the political and economic situation in Israel. She also wanted to change her personal situation – open a business, further develop her skills. It was hard for her to do so in Israel being divorced with two children to raise.

"It took me about three years to have my application processed. I also had to spend a lot of money because I didn't know the process at the time. So, it was tough for me." - shares Darya.

As a child educator with over 20 years of experience she received a job offer to teach Hebrew, and worked as a private tutor for a family in Vancouver. "I was a very independent person before, used to travel all over the world. It was a big change for me to live with another family...

I traveled around Vancouver a lot trying to learn more about life in Canada. I didn't have any friends, so I was by myself a lot." - remembers Darya.

The family that she worked for moved to South Okanagan – the mother got a job in Kelowna and they settled in Penticton.

"When we came here...the first day...this is a fairy tale about how I found my husband, Greg... I went to a nature fare and I sat at a coffee shop and this is when I met him. I met him and...it was very strong. It was fate."

In one year, the family that she worked for could not afford to employ her anymore and she was left without a job and without a visa. She was without a job for a while.

"I did not want to burden Greg with my financial situation. We just met and were getting to know each other. It was challenging to survive but I have good faith – if I want something, I am going to do it."

In a few years, when they got married, Darya decided to start her own business – a daycare for eight children. She went through the licensing process and everyone was helpful along the way. She bought all the equipment for children but then found out that she could not use the space upstairs because the children couldn't sleep in the same space. This meant that she could only work with three children, instead of eight. Greg thought about a new business idea – a driving school. He learned how to do it and they established a driving school that they called "Right Turn Driving School".

"Apparently, he is a great teacher. We have clients from all over the region. And I am good at running a business as well. I didn't know that. It wasn't like that in the beginning. I had to learn a lot and I asked people to teach me, and I didn't give up." - continues Darya. "Now I am ready to start another business – something very close to my heart. I am an art and dance therapist, so I hope to start a center where I can work with people and share my knowledge."

"I had to leave behind my two daughters. It was the most challenging thing for me to do. They are 24 and 21 years old now. The older one is

studying at a university and the younger one is in a special needs program. She has autism. I can support them now, which I couldn't do after my divorce. My mom is also there, and my friends. Everyone thought I was crazy to leave my life behind but I believe they are not thinking like this now. My daughters have their family, their life there and I am building my life here. I am applying for my citizenship now."- concludes Darya.

Winemaker's CUT: Story of Martina and Michal



Martina Mosna and Michal (a.k.a. Michael) Mosny grew up in the small town in Slovakia with a poetic name – Ruzomberok. This is where they met and fell in love. The couple had a very active lifestyle. They loved to go skiing in the winter and engaged in other recreational activities. Travelling and attending cultural spots – theatres, museums and opera houses was a big part of their lives. “We are big fans of opera and tried to apply our love for opera and classical music to our business, as you will see from our tasting room decor”, shares Martina.

Michal worked as an accountant and Martina taught at a school for gifted children. They also had a small, boutique-style winery, which was more of a hobby than a business. They loved their lives but longed for a life-changing adventure. They wanted to start their family and build their future in a new and exciting country. Their destiny brought them to Canada. And not to one of the most common destinations for immigrants, such as Vancouver, but to our small and beautiful Penticton.

When Martina and Michal moved to Canada they did not know anyone here.

"At first, we lived from paycheque to paycheque. I didn't have a job and only Michal was working. We had only basic things. For example, I used only salt and pepper as spices during the first months. When you are in a new country, you are trying not to spend all your savings at once. We had to buy a car because it was necessary to get to work. We were counting every penny but it is funny that when you have nothing it is such freedom", remembers Martina.

"Our families are in Slovakia. My mom is a teacher, and my father is a chemist. And I have one sister, she is a dental surgeon. I am very proud of her. And I miss all the opportunities to be with her. It was very hard when my nephew was born. I really wanted to be with my sister, to support her. I thought I would move back to Slovakia. And when I was pregnant...now I have a son Henry...I was thinking how I wanted to be surrounded by my family. I also have a grandmother, who is getting weaker and weaker, and I hope to go visit next year, so she could meet our son – her grandson- Henry", she continues.

Martina and Michal didn't plan to open their own winery, although both of them have passion and experience in the wine-making field. They started off by working at a winery in the region, but, after putting their hearts and souls into this business, they had to leave it.

"I think we were a little bit naïve and trusted people too much. It was the time when I was the happiest because I was pregnant but also, we lost all our stability at that time. And it was the main reason for creating our own winery. We put our hearts into the project that wasn't our own and lost everything. It taught us to be more cautious. We wanted to have our own business where nobody will take from us. That is why we called our winery "Winemaker's Cut" – like a film director's cut, something personal that belongs to the people that created it. Finally, it is our own cut for our own "movie", shares Martina.

Martina and Michal started to produce wine in 2015 but opened a tasting room at the wine village in Oliver in June of 2021. The winery is doing very well. It is growing and producing more and more wine. Their hope for the future is to keep making good wine that people would appreciate.

"I believe in destiny and think that everyone should listen to their heart, guts or instinct. This way you can follow your path and reach what you dream about. We always say with Michal that if you are trying to force something, to be somebody or build something not because your heart wants it but because it is a good opportunity to make money, sometimes it doesn't work. But if you follow your passion, it usually works", concludes Martina with a wide smile.

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