



QIEU Teacher Exchange Program

For some, the idea of swapping occupations, houses and lifestyles with a stranger in another country is a little, well, intimidating. However, where others may see difficulty, English teacher John Elliott saw the perfect opportunity to pursue adventure and move closer to his brother.

Profile:

Name: John Elliott

Occupation: Secondary School English teacher

School: St Paul's School, Nundah Queensland

Mission: To head to Canada on Teacher Exchange program

Crew: His wife Jane and three children aged nine, eleven and thirteen

Destination: British Columbia, Canada

Exchange School:

- Meadowridge School, Maple Ridge, British Columbia, Canada
- 130 students
- 10 staff

John has been a QIEU member since 1990 and last year saw QIEU's teacher exchange program as the chance to step into a new life without having to organise the logistics. And so, John, his wife Jane and their three children packed their bags and headed to Canada for a year to experience chilly winters, refreshing summers and the feeling of throwing yourself in the deep end.

John's motivations for applying for teacher exchange were numerous. "I was motivated to see my brother and his family who live in Canada. My wife and I are also adventurous spirits and we knew this was the perfect time to take our three children overseas before they began High School.

"I joined 10 other staff members in the secondary section of my exchange school which taught 130 students from Years 8 – 12. It was a gorgeously appointed school with excellent technology, enthusiastic students and a great atmosphere of learning. The Headmaster was a passionate academic and this appreciation for education translated into an appreciation of his staff as educators.

"The school's wireless technology was fantastic. Instead of heading off to a computer room, teachers could roll a trolley full of 25 laptops into the classroom and utilise the wireless internet system. It was brilliant for research as the class wasn't disrupted by heading off to the computer labs.

"The students were encouraged to be independent and proactive. They organised school assemblies, directed their own musicals and ran an active student council.

"I volunteered for Rugby Union and the Strollers Club as my extracurricular activities. The rugby team was a mixed team and we were very successful." The "Strollers Club" involved John and a bunch of students who strolled into town from time to time to catch the drama happenings.

“My family adapted well to the Exchange. My children went to a public school and my wife and I were very pleased with the public education system in Canada. It was run very well, and the Maths seems a little more advanced than what we do here. Our children quickly translated their netball and rugby skills into basketball and hockey prowess, and one of my children didn’t actually want to leave to come back to Australia.”

Of course, when the weather was bad, it was very, very bad but when it was good, it was brilliant. John and his family battled a dreary winter where “drizzle” was the only weather forecast for three months. These conditions called for indoor sports with the Elliott children taking up indoor hockey and basketball although of course snowboarding and fly fishing for trout and salmon were also viable weekend activities. Oh, how dreary.

“Summer and spring offered magnificent weather. We didn’t roast through summer as we tend to do here in Queensland. Instead, we found summer in Canada to be refreshing.”

So, would John do it all over again?

“Yes. Definitely. It was nice to know the school liked us and it was a great experience to find out where my strengths lay in teaching. I also picked up some ideas for what I’d like to see happen in my school here in Queensland. I was pleased to find that English teaching here is at the forefront in terms of professional development.”

John’s only cautionary advice to others who might follow his sprightly footsteps is to carefully check the accommodation arrangements. While John was appreciative of his exchange home and its central heating, he felt it was too small for his family during winter as they are used to an outdoor lifestyle.

“I’m refreshed and invigorated. Bring on 2002,” John chuckles.