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Goodbye snow, hello surf and sun



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We packed brown box after brown box. "Kitchen." "Baby." "Fragile." We labelled one after the next - in a hurry. We were on a tight timeline.

In just six weeks, Shawn and I deliberated, made a decision, broke the news to family, broke hearts, informed our employers and took our seven-month-old son Ari (now 11 months) on a 24-hour trip across the earth. That's what you do when opportunity knocks - in Australia.

Spurred by slow economic times, the Australian government has implemented a series of programs to create jobs and encourage growth. Shawn, who managed a hot-water-heater installation company in Toronto, has started a home-insulation business in Australia, where the government pays entrepreneurs to insulate older homes at no cost to the homeowner.

It sounded like a win-win situation, but funding expires in two years; hence the hurry. We moved in October, 2009, and it is truly a race to the finish. He is starting from scratch, building a team of senior managers, buying trucks to handle the installations, hiring and training installers and door-to-door salespeople, and marketing the program to residents. He and his team have got the smarts, drive and financial backing to make it a success. Only time will tell if our move is worth the risk.

But enough about business. This is about me. I would be a liar if I told you I was excited about the move. Yes, we lived in Boston for two years while Shawn pursued his MBA. And yes, this time around we are in the land of sun, sand and surf, Ugg sheepskin boots, Nicole Kidman, Kylie Minogue and koalas.

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But I am scared: scared the business will fail and we will have given up everything for nothing; scared to say goodbye to Bubbys and Zaidas at home in Toronto who might die before I return; scared to raise a child away from his grandparents, aunts and uncles.

These are relatives who delight in Ari's every smile and who have been there for all the firsts: his first giggle, his first solid meal, his first clop-clop-clop crawl across the floor. They will miss a lot of firsts from now on. It doesn't seem fair.

Yet I know we aren't the first people to move away from their families. It's hardly a phenomenon in Canada, where everyone is from somewhere else and has downloaded Skype on their computer. With our itemized boxes now safely in storage, we have joined millions of other expats who live abroad. And, naturally, we have Skype on our computer.

So far, it hasn't been so bad. Living in Brisbane has been a great adventure. I've learned to drive on the left side of the road and to order a flat white (a delicious, frothy, hot coffee) and not an iced coffee (a coffee milkshake topped with whipped cream).



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We eat muesli and raisin toast for breakfast, Turkish bread at lunch and kangaroo at dinner. We have morning and afternoon tea, and Tim Tam cookies for dessert. We are tanned and fit from trekking through markets and swimming in the ocean. We have met nice, friendly people, and are picking up the lingo - "sunnys" are sunglasses, "aircon" is air conditioning and "car park" is parking lot. Business isn't booming quite yet, but it is being built with rigour and vigour.

I do feel homesick at times. I miss the smell of banana bread baking in my mom's oven. I long for family dinners where my Bubby and Zaida - who have been divorced for 40-odd years but attend the same family get-togethers - bicker as if their separation was fresh. I even miss the cold weather, which I've clearly romanticized in my mind.

I long for a cozy, overcast day, the ability to pop over to Shoppers Drug Mart for a stroll down the aisles and the chance to catch up with friends over coffee at Second Cup. I miss *Canadian Idol*, *The Globe and Mail*, Peter Mansbridge on the CBC and, of course, American television.

Skype has been a lifeline. I chat with my mom every morning. When Ari and I eat breakfast at 6 a.m., it's 3 p.m. the day before at home. At lunch it's 9 p.m. and I get to see the rest of the family. Ari stares at the computer while he eats the way I used to stare at the cereal box when I ate breakfast as a kid.

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He smiles and waves at everyone in recognition, and is thrilled with all the attention. He gets to show off his new understanding of words (fan, kick, up, down, to name a few). They get to see him stand without aid, bang on his musical drum set and open and close kitchen cupboard doors on his fingers. We speak so often that sometimes I feel as though I can smell the banana bread in my mom's kitchen in Canada.

When we board a V Australia flight home in December, 2011, I hope to arrive through Canadian customs a little richer, definitely more independent and a lot less scared of change.

Erin Dym is a Canadian living in Brisbane, Australia.

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