



A Part of the Community

By Mark Calzavara,
Quebec Chronicle-Telegraph

San Francisco was the ideal home for high-risk obstetrics nurse Sharon MacLeod, when she met her husband Sylvain Huard. The cosmopolitan city suited her outgoing personality and her career was both demanding and satisfying.

MacLeod rang in the Millennium in Quebec City with her new love and his family. The experience made quite an impression on the Californian. "It was like a fairy tale to be here at Christmas with all the snow and the beautiful architecture. It was so special, so different from what I knew back home," she says.

They married in 2001, but with the birth of their son, Alexander, the following year, their priorities changed. Affordable housing, a low crime rate, less traffic and a better work-life balance were what the new parents were hoping to find by moving to Quebec City.

Shortly after arriving in Quebec City, MacLeod started her French courses at the Centre Louis-Jolliet. Her dream of being functionally bilingual within a year quickly evaporated. "It was so much harder to learn French as an adult than I ever expected."

After six months, her frustration with the language led to feeling isolated and alone. "I couldn't stand myself anymore. I remember being at my physiotherapist for a shoulder injury and I just broke down in tears on the table," she says.

"I needed to feel useful, to have purpose, but I was struggling in this rut. When you are depressed like that, it is harder to reach out and find the support you need. It put a lot of stress on our relationship. Sylvain knew me as a go-getter, as somebody who strives, who is always doing things, having goals.

When we came here I needed to rely on him a lot more. The balance that we had in California as a couple was thrown way off. It was very difficult. I started taking anti-depressants," she says.

Around the same time, she saw an announcement in the QCT for auditions for the Quebec Art Company's mounting of *My Fair Lady*. A classically trained soprano, MacLeod leaped at the opportunity.

Her contact with the company encouraged her to explore the anglophone community. Eventually, with the birth of her daughter, Leah, in 2005, she managed to make some terrific new friends through the Jeffery Hale Community Services.

In November 2006, MacLeod applied to the Order of Nurses of Quebec for permission to work but didn't get a response until July 2007. They declared that she would have to take a six-month full-time Cégep course at her own expense as she had been out of nursing for more than four years. The eight-month delay in their response is what put her past the four-year limit.

"At that point, we were ready to put a 'for sale' sign in the front yard. We were so fed up," MacLeod says. "But we decided to fight it, and in the end we won."

Accreditation in hand, MacLeod started job hunting. In the end it was word of mouth that got her resume into the right hands at Saint Brigid's. "It's far from my specialty," she says, laughing. "I had a great offer from the CHUL, but the flexibility they offer me at Saint Brigid's is so important with two young children."

MacLeod remains active onstage, performing with the OSQ choir and Les Rhapsodes, as well as the QAC – most recently as the lead in *Oklahoma*. She has also joined



Sharon MacLeod

the QAC board as a member-at-large.

She appreciates the quality of life here. She loves that it is safe to let her son walk over to the neighbours' unaccompanied. She loves the thunderstorms and feels that the change of seasons is good for her soul.

Most of all, she loves being part of the anglophone minority. "It feels special to be part of this small community, almost exotic," she says.

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