

Thriving in Community

by Ellen Candlish, RP Victoria

Robert, Liisa and I have always believed in the power of our ability to learn from others, contribute and thrive by being a part of many communities. We are concerned that as we get older our community could shrink and become so small that we might become isolated and not have any real social connections. We began to wonder where we would live as we age.

Both of my parents are great role models for us and they have found options that meet their needs: my mom in Kelowna in a condominium complex for seniors with a variety of support options and my dad in Comox living in a condominium near my sister, the marina, restaurants and shopping. The Seniors Centre is just around the corner. My parents' housing choices are wheelchair accessible, in great locations and are meeting their needs well. They plan to age in place. Robert, Liisa and I know we have found something that will work for us too.

Obviously, our family has talked about getting older and its implications but it took a bit of a scare to get us moving. We call it "the warning". A few months ago, Robert woke up with a terrible pain in his upper abdomen just below his heart. Just a simple gall bladder surgery and he'd be out in a day. Not so, things went terribly wrong. Robert ended up on life support in ICU. Once stable he had surgery and then was sent home. The nightmare didn't end there! He saw his doctor the next morning and was taken to another hospital. There he was moved to a private room and watched carefully for a month with a rare and very serious infection and heart issues.

It was during those long days at the hospital that we seriously began talking about aging and what we were going to do.

At the same time, Liisa, was now in her 40's. We were told we'd be lucky if she lived to 25. Some of you may have heard that before. Liisa's been doing great and we see no reason why she won't outlive us. Hummmmm! There is a problem. What if something happens to us? What if we can no longer support Liisa? What if, what if, what if? These were all questions that we have asked ourselves for years. It's like the nightmare skulking around just to remind you that you are always vulnerable. Like we need reminding!



Liisa

As it happens, some of our questions were answered when Robert came home with the Seniors Living Magazine, February 2013 edition. There was an article titled A Small Town Sense of Community by Judee Fong. Low and behold this article was about two cohousing projects in the Victoria area and one of them was in Sooke, only 20 minutes from where we currently live.

Robert and I had heard about cohousing before in 1986 when a friend in Maple Ridge had told us about it. We were told about the safe, more accessible neighbourhood, about staying independent, controlling our future and our lifestyle as we aged. She had lived in Germany and said there were cohousing projects throughout Europe, originating in Denmark. Our friend said it would be perfect for our family. We were very interested in the concept.

We arrived at Captain Ralph Hull's beautiful Sooke Ocean Resort for an information meeting. My first thoughts were "I could die looking at this view". Morbid, I know but what a view! As we walked through the door Robert and I were overwhelmed by the amazing energy in the room and the warm greeting we received. It was like coming home for us. After the info session, we decided to become Associate members so we could get involved in meetings, learn more about cohousing, co-caring (mutual support) and consensus decision-making. We were given a book called The Senior Cohousing Handbook by Charles Durrett and assigned a buddy, who helps you when you have questions. In addition,

Possibilities! Summer 2013

we were encouraged to take a course through Royal Roads University called Aging Well in Community.

Cohousing is like a village or neighbourhood that is functional that allows us to build community, socialize and partake in activities in our own backyard. We liked the idea of owning our own home (strata title) designed for aging in place, self-sufficiency, and we could sell at any time. The Common House at Harbourside already exists and is where the larger group can meet to share meals, use laundry facilities, has guest rooms and is large enough for the membership to use it for whatever they decide. These decisions are made by consensus.

Robert, Liisa and I intend on living for a good many years as healthy and happy people. We already experience a sense of belonging, of mutual support and active living with the fellow Harbourside members.

For example, Liisa will have the opportunity to have people nearby that she can visit, buy clothes or pick up groceries for, take their dog for a walk, and to have meaning in her life. At the same time as we age, we have to concern ourselves with how to get about, how close are the services that we need (health care and food) and whether our immediate community can offer the activities (recreation centre, pool) that we enjoy. Because all of these can be found at or near Harbourside we have become equity members and plan to move in the fall of 2015.

Robert, Liisa and I encourage you to learn more about cohousing as an option after retirement and the next part of your lives. For more information you can look on several websites:

- www.cohousing.ca
- seniorcohousing@gmail.com
- www.canadianseniorcohousing.com
- www.harbourside.ca



Robert and Ellen
Photo taken by Priska Stabel

**“This is what matters most.
A caring and daily community life”
~ ~ ~ Charles Durrett ~ ~ ~**

