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AT HOME

Vacation starts new life

BY JULIO GOMES
THE CHRONICLE-JOURNAL

The Far East has been her home for almost three decades, but Elizabeth Thomson has maintained her connection to the "small piece of paradise" where she grew up.

"It was very important to me when my children came along to be real Canadians, and I can't think of a better place to be a Canadian than Thunder Bay," Thomson said in an interview.

She's been coming back across the Pacific regularly since 1993 and has solidified the connection to her homeland by ensuring her children — 17-year-old James and 13-year-old Simone — were born in Canada and have been able to experience a life different from their upbringing in Hong Kong.

Life in the bustling, multicultural metropolis is a long way from Thomson's early years on Thunder Bay's north side. She attended Central School and Port Arthur Collegiate Institute before finishing high school studies at a Toronto private girls' school.

The stint at Bishop Strachan School was intended to give her additional language credits so she could follow

Where are THEY NOW?

through on her ambition to be a translator. She studied at the University of Western Ontario, with a year in France, graduating with an honours degree.

"By then I knew I didn't want to be a translator," Thomson explained with a chuckle.

So it was off to McGill University. Inspired by the ministry of her father, Canon Alvin Thomson of St. John's Anglican Church and the Missions to Seamen chaplaincy, she decided to become a lawyer. Eventually she received two law degrees.

Along with teaching French to new immigrants, Thomson helped translate Quebec's Civil Code into English.

A life in law based in Montreal was in the cards for Thomson until the FLQ crisis started making anglophones nervous.

"I loved Montreal," Thomson stated. "I loved being in a bilingual environment, but it was very uncomfortable."

A stint articling at the Thunder Bay

firm of Dubinsky, Kovanchak, Ferris & Ross preceded a six-month course at Osgoode Hall Law School in Toronto. That's where she met a friend who'd moved to Hong Kong and suggested she come over for a visit before settling down.

"I went to Hong Kong for what was supposed to be a three-month vacation, and I'm still there 28 years later," she said with amazement.

She was able to work as a lawyer and is currently a member of law societies in Ontario, Hong Kong, the U.K. and Australia. However, in 1980 she decided to try something different and started working out of her apartment with the help of a part-time secretary.

Today, ICS Trust (Asia) Limited has a staff of 35, including her husband Kishore, a director.

"What I'm doing is very law-related. It's corporate and tax structuring," she explained.

The company offers a variety of services for independently-owned businesses looking to expand into the lucrative southeast Asia market.

The high cost of living in Hong Kong is a huge barrier. Along with some of the highest rents in the world (about

\$10,000 US a month for an apartment), residents also have to deal with expensive basics, from clothing to vitamins.

Thomson — who coyly reveals her age as "early 50s" — is involved in a variety of organizations, such as the Hong Kong Women's Foundation and the Women's Business Owners Club.

And because Hong Kong is a small place — there are more than seven million people spread over just 1,004 square kilometres — she's met other ex-Thunder Bayites: former councillor and MPP Taras Kozyra and his wife Pat, and restaurateur Chris Lenz.

"I always say in a joking way that I'm president of the Thunder Bay club," she said.

In Thunder Bay, Thomson is visiting her mother Vi. Her brother Michael lives in Niagara Falls.

Please help us continue this feature by making Where Are They Now suggestions to Julio Gomes at 343-6255, by sending an e-mail to wherearetheynow@chroniclejournal.com or a fax to 343-9409. Individuals can be once prominent members of the Northwest community or those who have gone on to interesting new ventures.