

## **From Hamm to Saskatoon: The Journey of Stefan and Olga Schilling**

On a freezing January day in 2010, Stefan and Olga Schilling landed at the Saskatoon Airport with their four children: an eleven-year-old daughter and triplets, one boy and two girls, just over two years old. The temperature was a bitter 29°C below zero. Waiting to welcome them was a family they knew from Germany, ready to help them settle into their new Canadian home.

The Schillings had planned their move carefully. Originally from Hamm, North Rhine Westphalia, Germany, they had visited Saskatoon in 2008 to check things out and work with Star 7 International, an immigration consulting firm. Stefan had secured a job offer, and the family used funds from selling their home in Germany to start fresh in Canada. Everything seemed well prepared, or so they thought.



*Figure 1 Summer 2009 in Germany*

### **A Rough Start**

Their optimism quickly turned into stress. When Stefan arrived, the job he had been promised was no longer available, with no explanation given. Determined to provide for his family, he took on short term construction jobs. Unfortunately, two employers refused to pay him for his work. The harsh Saskatchewan winter made everything harder, and Stefan endured freezing days on job sites while worrying about his family's future.

Over the next two months, he sent out about 1,900 résumés, visited offices in person, and followed up with phone calls, but with limited English and no Canadian references, he received no responses. Olga, who spoke almost no English at the time, focused on caring for their four children.

## **Finding Help and Hope**

In Germany, Stefan had trained as an orthopedic shoemaker, a respected but highly specialized trade that is not recognized in Canada. In early 2010, he began attending Saturday breakfasts at Saskatoon's German Club, Concordia. There he met Johanna Tataryn, whom Stefan calls his angel. After hearing his story, she made a phone call that changed everything. Within days, Stefan was interviewed and hired by SaskAbilities, where he started working in March 2010. He has been with the organization ever since.

## **Building a Life in Canada**

The first months were so difficult that the Schillings nearly returned to Germany. But they persevered. Stefan often worked multiple jobs, at SaskAbilities by day and part time evening and weekend jobs repairing homes, cleaning ducks and geese for a hunting outfitter during hunting season, and more. Within a year, the family bought their first home in Saskatoon.

As their children grew and started school, Olga began selling home baked goods. Later, she joined the workforce, taking jobs in a grocery bakery, as a house cleaner, caregiver, and eventually as a cook in a retirement home, where she still works today.

Their children thrived in Canada. The triplets and their older sister are now grown. The oldest daughter became a dental hygienist, while the two younger girls attend the University of Saskatchewan and their son is training to become an electrician. (The younger three children are triplets). All four speak German, English, and French, though the family still speaks German at home.

Marie Louise is an accomplished pianist who won the Royal Conservatory Gold Medal as the top performer in her age group in Saskatchewan. Her sister Klara also performed at several rehearsals and became multiple times the best in her group, showing great musical promise.

## **Roots and Heritage**

Stefan was born in Hamm in 1973. His father worked in a steel plant, and his mother managed shipping and receiving in a large warehouse. Olga was born in Novosibirsk, Russia. Her grandparents were ethnic Germans who were exiled there during World War II. After the Soviet Union collapsed, her family returned to Germany, arriving with only two suitcases. They eventually settled in Hamm, where Olga met Stefan.

Their love story began on a rainy day when Olga stopped by her brother's workplace to catch a ride home. Her brother had come by motorbike, so Stefan offered her a lift instead, and that is how their story began. They married in 1998 and had four children in Germany.

## **Life Between Two Worlds**

Stefan had long been fascinated by the Wild West, cowboy movies, and stories about Canada's First Nations. When job prospects in Germany declined, he and Olga decided to take a chance on

a new life abroad. But the move was not easy. He still recalls the helplessness of those first months in Saskatoon, worrying about how to feed his family.

Today, both Stefan and Olga are Permanent Residents of Canada. They have considered applying for citizenship but have not yet done so. They do not plan to return to live in Germany since their children's futures are here.

They do, however, miss their families deeply. Stefan's father passed away in Germany during the COVID years, and he regrets not being able to say goodbye in person. Olga's mother died more recently, though Olga made it home in time for a final farewell. They both miss the close family gatherings, the coffee visits, and the festive celebrations like Advent and Christmas that were so common back in Germany.

## **Embracing Canada**

Despite the hardships, the Schillings have grown to love life in Saskatchewan. They enjoy the province's open spaces, quiet pace, and easy access to nature. Camping, boating, fishing, and hunting are now part of their lifestyle, and most summer weekends are spent at their campsite in Greenwater Provincial Park.

They do notice some cultural differences. Stefan feels that his professional training is not fully recognized in Canada, even though he works in the same field he trained for. Olga adds that German workers tend to take great pride in their jobs, while Canadians are generally more relaxed about work.

Their social circle has grown, especially through their church, the New Apostolic Church, located just three blocks from their home. Stefan sings in the choir, and both attend services regularly.

## **A Master of His Craft**

Stefan's work as an orthopedic shoemaker has earned himself respect far beyond Saskatchewan. With over 30 years of experience, he is known for his ability to help people with foot, leg, hip, and back problems, sometimes identifying issues others have missed. His dedication and compassion for his patients, especially those with special needs, shine through in everything he does.

## **Looking Back and Ahead**

The Schillings have returned to Germany a few times, including a 2015 family trip and again in 2023 to celebrate their 25th wedding anniversary and 50th birthdays. But Stefan says that the Germany he left in 2010 has changed, as has much of Europe.

After fifteen years in Canada, Stefan and Olga's story is one of resilience, hard work, and hope. They left everything familiar behind to build a new life and succeeded through determination and faith.

Canada has gained two remarkable people whose skills, dedication, and perseverance continue to enrich their community and their adopted country.



Story written by Stefan Schilling, with editing by Mervin Weiss. February 2026.