



**FAMILY VALUE:
OBSTACLES ARE OPPORTUNITIES**
Find your passion – and don't let anything stop you

dream on

BY CHRISTINA SYMONDS

Life as a farmer makes you tough," says Ofer Barmor. The Israeli expat isn't kidding. He and his wife, Ofri, have faced down death, injury, a forest fire and perhaps one of the toughest adversaries of all: fickle foodie trends. Owners of Carmelis Goat Cheese Artisan, a buzz-generating fromagerie based in the wine region of Kelowna, B.C., the Barmors and daughters Carmel, 13, and Lior, 11, packed their bags (and dairy equipment) four years ago and left the small village of Kfare-Yehzekel, in northeast Israel, for the earthly paradise of the Okanagan Valley. Starting from scratch is hard to do, but for them it was just another twist in their family story.

For starters, 10 years ago, a horrific car accident in Israel left Ofer a quadriplegic, and Ofri fighting for her life. Today, Ofer leads an active life from his wheelchair (in fact, Kelowna's Silver Star Mountain Resort's disabled skiers association was one of the region's initial lures), and Ofri is healthy and fit, a personification of the outdoorsy B.C. subspecies of yummy mummy.

The couple run the fromagerie together, with Ofri looking after business management while Ofer oversees the cheese making. "I feel so fortunate to work near Ofri," says Ofer. "There's such a strong connection between us."

"Yes, together we can solve problems much easier than if we were alone," says Ofri. "But unfortunately, if I get mad, I can't fire him."

The couple became involved in the dairy industry back in Israel, after Carmel developed lactose intolerance to cow's milk, and quality goat's milk proved to be in short supply. The Barmors bought a herd of goats and started producing their own. Next came a business plan, and

Ofer, "I thought, 'Where's the cheese?'"

The potential to tap a niche market sealed the deal. On the last day of their trip, they boldly put an offer on "a little house in the forest" at the far end of Kelowna's most popular wine-tasting circuit. It's an idyllic setting with a rocky hilltop vantage over the glassy, blue hues of Lake Okanagan.

Soon, Carmelis Goat Cheese Artisan was born. While the girls settled into their new lifestyle and school, the barn, cheese

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cellar and milking station were built. By the time 90 milking goats arrived, it seemed that everything had fallen into place. But in August 2003, just four days after the goats filed into the barn, a forest fire swept through the outskirts of Kelowna, causing massive evacuations. At the fire's peak, nearly 1,000 firefighters blasted the flames; 239 homes were lost, along with nearly 62,000 acres. Although the Barmor family home and goats were spared, the barn, cellar and cheese boutique burned to the ground. But the family refused to let its dreams go up in smoke.

With its reputation for peace and opportunity, Canada seemed an obvious destination. And as if on cue, a Google query led the Barmors to B.C.'s spectacular Okanagan region. Inspired to check it out in 2002, the couple was floored by Kelowna's natural beauty, rugged mountain terrain, laid-back lifestyle and friendly farming community. "But when I found out this was wine country," says

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CANADIAN
family

"This was just another bump in the road," notes Ofer. The Barmors rebuilt.

Today, Carmelis cheese is served in first-class restaurants and wineries from Vancouver to Calgary and beyond (in fact, demand has outpaced supply, says Ofri). And if you're thinking little-logs-of-chevre-what-else-is-new? stop right there. Carmelis is turning heads among discerning foodies with its line of 20 different cheeses – everything from fresh yogurt cheese (serve it with good pita bread, plus a drizzle of olive oil and a dash of zatar, a Middle Eastern herb mix) and mature Goatgonzola, to Vintage – a hard cheese with a pinot-noir-soaked rind.

The family business has roped in the next generation, too. Always-charming Carmel makes a perfect salesperson in the rustic lodge-style cheese boutique; gentle and sensitive Lior – a true animal person – tends the goats.

"They've always been part of the business, so the girls understand that sometimes you struggle," says Ofri. "It's made them more mature." CF

Christina Symonds is a Vancouver-based writer and photographer whose work has appeared in Canadian House & Home and Style At Home.



Cheese Shop

Ofri and Ofer Barmor travelled across the globe and started a business together. Here's how you too can chase the dream.

IF YOU WANT TO DO IT, GO FOR IT. Research, budget, get started. Don't wait until after you burn out at work or hit Freedom-55 age.

FIND A WAY TO CAPITALIZE ON YOUR RESPECTIVE STRENGTHS. You're partners, not competitors.

FIND A MARKET NICHE. Don't start yet another baby-blanket biz: Choose a family business tailored to your unique abilities.

MAKE LEMONADE. Setbacks? They can knock you out or make you even stronger. You decide which. "We've completed our dream," says Ofer. "We came to a new country and built our business into a source of joy."

Visit carmelsgoatcheese.com for more info.

