

working WE PROFILE: DANIELLE MILLAR

interviewed by Danielle Tate-Stratton

Very briefly, could you describe who you are and what you do?

My name is Danielle Millar. My husband Todd Millar and I run our investment company Glenn Simon Inc from our dual offices in Canada and Japan. In our free time we enjoy health, fitness, and of course traveling. We have spent time in North and Central America, the Caribbean, Africa, Europe, the South Pacific, and extensively throughout Asia.

How did you end up in Japan?

Eight years ago, my husband Todd, then my fiancé, and I were working on opposite coasts of Canada. We had to fly six hours to see each other. We knew that lifestyle was going to be impossible to maintain. We both love to travel and thought a year off from our respective careers (Todd was a chef and I worked in the quality control department of an international cosmetic company based in Canada) would be just the thing to refresh us; Todd had been to Japan before and suggested we go there for a year. That year turned into eight!

What keeps you here (besides your company, of course)?

I love Japan. It is safe, interesting, constantly changing, yet at the same time static. I have an excellent network here and I feel that by coming to a country where everything is so (or was at the time) “foreign” that it challenged me in a way I wasn’t getting in Canada. Meeting those everyday demands is the foundation of the success I am seeing in my company, Glenn Simon Inc. If you can come to a country where you speak three words of the language and make it, what else can you succeed at? I feel constantly inspired here. Plus, the food is delicious....

Do you have any interesting or ‘I feel like a stupid gaijin’ anecdotes from your work-life?

Unbelievably, I can’t think of anything! A long time ago I walked into the men’s *onsen* change room when I couldn’t read the kanji on the door, but other than that nothing much. My work is largely liaising with the Canadian team.

When and why did you start your business?

Glenn Simon Inc was born in 2002 as a Canadian (Alberta) corporation. When Todd and I first came to Japan at the end of 2000, we began looking for ways to send our money back home or grow it here.

Then, we started getting educated. We read a lot of books, went home, attended seminars, and learned how to really grow our money. We had a big dream and the options around us here or back home weren’t going to fulfill it unless we took matters into our own hands

and became accountable.

Todd and I realised that for us, the key was to own and manage residential real estate in targeted areas in Canada. Our focus and strategy became more refined and that was the catalyst for Glenn Simon Inc.

Have there been any benefits to starting a company here as opposed to in Canada?

There are fewer distractions. I can choose what enters my sphere, for example, my TV is in Japanese so I am not compelled to watch it. Instead, I spend more time on my company or with my husband. It is easier to focus yourself.

Are you reaping the financial and emotional benefits of your business yet?

Definitely. I am really seeing all my hard work come to fruition. My husband and I were selected to be one of the fifty-one stories featured in a book by a Canadian best-selling author Don Campbell: *51 Success Stories from Canadian Real Estate Investors*. I can take long holidays and I have created a business that can run itself without me constantly at the helm. (Of course, that took several years to achieve—and I still put in long hours.)

What is your level of Japanese? Would speaking more Japanese be helpful to you?

I am an intermediate speaker of Japanese. My work is largely liaising with the ground team in Canada so it’s not necessary to speak Japanese fluently or even at all. Todd is more of the PR person in the company. My company also has bilingual associates who communicate with our Japanese partners as necessary.

One area where Japanese is needed is in running our office. Internet providers, the telephone lines, and our office machines require me to speak Japanese for servicing or upgrades. Every new problem improves my vocabulary.

What, if any, are some of the main differences you have noted about doing business in Japan as opposed to in Canada?

Well, the initial setting-up and operation of my company in Canada would have been significantly easier than doing it from here. We have a niche market serving the expat community in Japan and around the world, whereas in Canada our clientele is looking at inter-provincial investing. The needs of these customers are significantly different.

What is a typical day-in-the-life for you?

I get up at about 6:30 and spend the next four hours checking correspondence from the Edmonton office and working on that. I review



Entrepreneur Danielle Millar.

and sign legal, insurance, and banking documents as well as preparing investment reports that go to the clients. The time difference dictates that we have a very early start to our day.

I usually go to the gym for an aerobics, yoga, or aquatics class for an hour-and-a-half, then I come home and have lunch and a strategy meeting with Todd.

In the afternoon, I post on my blog, do SEO and marketing, update the website, and do the bookkeeping on our properties. Real estate generates a lot of paper even if you are largely online, as we are, so that takes a lot of time to manage. After dinner, I usually go for a long walk and come back to prepare any communication that should reach Canada by the beginning of their business day. I usually get to bed by 11pm.

What is the best part about your job?

I work from a home office—I can schedule my days and holidays as I like. I cover a lot of areas in the company so I am constantly challenging myself to learn something new. I especially like SEO and internet marketing and improving our internet presence. It was completely new to me, but the results are tangible when you are doing it well.

The worst?

I work from a home office—so the workday almost never ends at a set time. Basically, no one is there to kick you out and turn the lights off, so you can end up working incredibly long hours and not taking enough time off for yourself. If you have big goals or deadlines, seven-day weeks and seventeen-hour days are not unusual.

Do you have any advice for other foreign women who are hoping to start their own businesses in Japan?

Try and get a mentor who can help you through the morass. I suggest this for anyone in any country and any field. There is somebody out there who has done what you want to do in one form or another and can give you really good advice. My mentor is a very successful businesswoman and she has taught me so much and inspired me to be more. As many a wise person has said, “stand on the shoulders of giants.”

The expat community is an excellent source of information. It may be the intermediary to the connections you need to get your business rolling, so don’t be afraid to tap into that network.

It can be infuriating to get things going, but I think if you have a good idea and are willing to get through the red tape there is so much opportunity here. The first thing you will hear is ‘no, you can’t do that,’ but usually there is an alternate route available to accomplish your goal. So keep pushing and you will find an answer or a solution.