



BY TIFFANY JANSEN

# SAVED BY THE BOW

Archery is more than a sport. It might be just the thing expatriates need to ease into their next assignment.

Packing up everything and moving to another country is not for the faint of heart. It doesn't matter if it's your first relocation or your tenth. It never gets any easier.

You leave everything and everyone you knew and loved behind to head to a strange country with a strange culture and, more than likely, a language other than your own.

The good news is, more and more companies are wising up to the fact that they can't just plop their employees into an expat assignment and leave them to sink or swim. Companies are beginning to offer more support to their expat employees and the families they take along with them.

And any gaps left by these in-house programs can, more often than not, be filled through services offered by expat groups and organizations in the destination country: expat clubs and help desks, relocation specialists and counselors, and archery sessions.

Yes, you read that right: archery sessions. That age-old pastime of bow, arrow and bulls eye. Uncanny as it may sounds, Robin Hood's favorite sport has numerous therapeutic benefits.

Unlike lying on a therapist's couch or sitting across from a life coach, you're not going to hash over the root of your problems or possible solutions. In fact, there's very little discussion that goes on during an archery session.

Verbal discussion, that is.

Meanwhile, your body is speaking volumes. "There are parts of the body that are connected to your thoughts," says Netherlands-based archery coach, Jac Rongen. "When my clients discuss their problems, these parts of the body are affected – they wake up."

It might be a stiffening of the leg or the tensing of a shoulder. "It's not just a mental thing," Rongen insists. "It's really physical."

## WHY ARCHERY?

What makes archery the perfect means for this sort of self-discovery is its simplicity. It's a very straightforward and uncomplicated activity. As soon as the process becomes in any way complicated during a session, it alerts Jac that something is going on.

"At that point, I draw my client's attention to the fact that something's happening there,"



Rongen says. "Then I'll invite them to do things a little differently with their bodies: a slight change in posture, the opening of an arm, the focusing of the breath. In doing so, something changes in the whole set-up of movement. And the mind has to adapt to that. As the body changes, the mind has to change as well."

What goes on in the body, according to Rongen, is a metaphor for what's going on in the mind. While a client may not voluntarily give clues as to what's going on in the mind, Rongen can tell right away when something is happening by observing the body.

"The people I work with are focused on something outside of themselves, outside of the here and now," Rongen says. "When you work to get people into the here and now, a lot of the issues that keep people focused in a certain direction



**"When you work to get people into the here and now, a lot of the issues that keep people focused in a certain direction get loosened up."**

get loosened up. And that gives them more freedom to move."

"The body," he continues, "the movements of the body, the posture, have a much bigger impact on one's success than people are aware of."

The power of the bow and arrow "I didn't think I got anything useful out of my first session with Jac," admits Carina Franco, an executive secretary for a water consulting firm. "But he kept talking about just taking time away from your computer, to stop working and take five minutes to come into yourself and breathe. So I did that for a couple of days and I started to feel some changes. I was applying what he told me about the way I carried myself, and it was really helping me through my work and life."

Franco wanted to integrate more of the lessons the art of archery had to teach her into her daily life. So she called Rongen about a week later to schedule a second session. Since then, Franco has lost 70 pounds – a feat she credits largely to what she learned during the archery sessions.

But, while she can see and feel the results, she has difficulty pinpointing why the sessions had the effect that they did. Nathalie van Delden, head of human resources at a gaming company who worked with Rongen to overcome her fear of stepping out of her comfort zone in the workplace, thinks it has to do with the physical nature of the archery sessions.

"Since it's more active and visual, you're able to think back to that day you were in the woods with Jac. Whenever I need to relax and be more focused, I think 'okay, so what did I do then?'" she says. "Jac also takes photos during the session and sends them to you, so you can always look back and remember what you talked about and some of the tips he gave."

"You do it with your whole being," adds Loes de Jong, a senior support worker and philosopher, who not only worked with Rongen, but also observed him in action when he conducted a session through her employer for psychiatric patients and the homeless.

## ARCHERY FOR EXPATS

A lot is asked of us expats. We're expected to orient ourselves in a strange country, to adapt to a foreign culture, to learn a new language, to make new friends, to start all over, to perform at work. It's a very exciting but very stressful situation to be in – for everyone involved.

Though courses, welcoming committees and help desks help to ease that burden, sometimes we need a little bit more. Sometimes a counselor, coach or therapist needs to be brought on board. And other times may call for a good old-fashioned archery session.

"It's amazing what you see in the archery sessions," de Jong says. "People begin to move in another way. They smile in another way. It changes their being." ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY PERJIN VLASMAN

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