

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

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JOURNAL REPORTS: RETIREMENT

Traveling the World, Rent Free

Their new careers as international house- and pet-sitters sit well with globe-trotting Canadian couple



Being an international house- and pet-sitter, Faith Coates says she and her husband live rent-free, and, “we’ve gotten to see places we never would have had the opportunity to in a million years.” PHOTO: ALAN HOGAN

By *Julie Halpert*

April 20, 2018 9:31 a.m. ET

Living on a limited income, Faith Coates and her husband, Alan Hogan, have spent the past two years dividing their time among homes in Tipperary, Ireland; Sonning, England; Palomares, Spain; and Paphos, Cyprus.

The homes aren’t their own. Nor are they rentals.

The couple, formerly of London, Ontario, are international housesitters. Ms. Coates and Mr. Hogan book long-term stays in homes free of charge in return for looking after the property, and often pets.

Over the past 18 months, they have lived in the village where George and Amal Clooney and British Prime Minister Theresa May have houses, they have enjoyed views of rural Ireland and the Mediterranean, and they have cared for 25 dogs, eight cats, four tortoises and two horses.

“I never thought I would have the money to do this much travel,” says Ms. Coates, who is 58. “We’ve gotten to see places we never would have had the opportunity to in a million years.”

The couple dreamed about living abroad for years before taking up their current occupation. They got the push they needed when Mr. Hogan, now 59, retired from his job as a letter carrier in 2014. Ms. Coates followed suit the next year, retiring from a long career in marketing and business consulting.

Next, the couple sold their house and all their major belongings and moved to Chelem, Mexico, where, in a rented a house on the Gulf Coast, they set to work planning their new lives—as international house- and pet-sitters.

 FAITH COATES

Age: 58**Hometown:** No permanent address**Primary career:** Marketing and business consulting**Current path:** International house- and pet-sitter, blogging and consulting**Why this path:** “The freedom from consumerism is so liberating. I haven’t bought a decorative item in years.”

They found their first few gigs on websites where homeowners and pet owners post listings looking for long-term sitters. For June and July of 2016, they found themselves back in Ontario, taking care of a shepherd mix named Oliver in Toronto. But after that they headed to Tipperary, where for two months they looked after seven rough collies.

“What’s nice about long-term stays is that you’re part of the community,” Ms. Coates says. “They recognize you at the fish-and-chips shop, which is really nice. We get to experience life instead of a brief tourist-style interlude.” The homeowner in Tipperary also gave them use of the car, so they were able to explore less touristy parts of the area

as well.

Housesitting doesn’t pay the bills, Ms. Coates says, but she and her husband live rent-free with no mortgage or utility costs. Their main expenses are food and transportation. They do have some income. Mr. Hogan has his Canada Post pension, and Ms. Coates earns money from advertising on her blog, xyuandbeyond.com, freelance writing and consulting, marketing and Web-services work. The couple are citizens of three countries (Canada, to which they pay taxes, Britain and Ireland), and they have permanent access to private health insurance through Mr. Hogan’s former employer.

The life is not without its challenges, like the time Ms. Coates had to rush to a vet in Cyprus with a dog that was having an allergic reaction to a wasp sting. But these are small drawbacks in the scheme of things, Ms. Coates says.

They are currently housesitting in Belfast, where they expect to stay until May. Then they are booked through the end of the year.

The couple expect to stay on the move for the foreseeable future, even if they decide later to set down roots. Housesitting gives them the chance to “try on places we might like to live,” Ms. Coates says.

 JOURNAL REPORT

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After two weeks in Donegal, Ireland, she says, she and Mr. Hogan decided they would like to eventually end up there permanently.

"It's stunningly beautiful," Ms. Coates says. "Every time you turn a corner, there's something else to see."

Second Acts looks at the varied paths people are taking in their 50s and beyond. You can reach Ms. Halpert, a writer in Michigan, and let us know how you're starting over, at reports@wsj.com.

Corrections & Amplifications

Tipperary is a rural county in Ireland's interior. An earlier version of this article incorrectly described a home in Tipperary as having ocean views. April 20, 2018)

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