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WE HAVE FOUND A 'LOST' BRITAIN

They are the blessed post-war generation whose later life has been ruined by crime, insecurity and depression but now they've rediscovered happiness abroad

By **Sadie Nicholas**

IT'S LITTLE wonder that record numbers of over 55s are fleeing the UK for a new life abroad, according to research. To many of the post-war generation Britain has lost its identity and under a hopeless Labour government, its direction too.

Here three recent emigrants explain what finally led to them moving overseas.

GILL SKITRELL, 54, a retired civil servant, emigrated from Welshpool, Wales, to Pyla, near Larnaca in Cyprus, with husband Ken, 67, a retired managing director, in September 2008. She says:

CYPRUS is like the UK was 40 or 50 years ago. It's a family-orientated culture where children can play in the street without fear. I can walk into town or along the beach in the evening without feeling threatened. There are no lager louts or hoodies around the way there were at home.

Don't get me wrong, nowhere in the world is perfect but the quality of life we're getting here is far superior to what we had in the UK.

We first came to Cyprus on holiday 20 years ago and bought a two-bed apartment here in 2006 as a holiday bolthole. But we began to think more seriously about moving after Ken and I looked at our finances and realised that our pensions just wouldn't see us through retirement. I'd have had to go back to work. We'd also have had to sell the large three-bed bungalow on an acre plot that we had built to our specifications, buy a tiny terrace and use any capital to live off.

The cost of living in the UK continues to rise faster than salaries do and many pensions are a lost cause. I don't know how people survive in the UK once they're retired. You have to keep your heating on for three-quarters of the year, and utility bills and petrol prices are sky high.

In April 2008 we came out to Cyprus for three months to see if we could live here. We loved it and returned to the UK in July that year to sell our house. Three months later we emigrated to Cyprus, moving into a beautiful three-bed villa with a pool with views of the sea that we'd bought

in the meantime - we rent out the apartment we already had.

Although the economic climate is making life more expensive at the moment with inflated food prices, we don't have the financial concerns we had in Wales. Ken and I know we'll be able to continue to enjoy a comfortable retirement here.

I feel sad at the state of the UK. I was a manager in social security offices and the government provided no incentive for a lot of people to work and many have no intention of ever getting a job. They treat the system like a bottomless pit because the government's allowed them to.

Old people aren't go out for fear of being attacked. Young women go out boozing and look a mess. Decent, hard-working people get penalised with extra tax for earning or saving more.

The country has gone so overboard with political correctness and health and safety nonsense that the do-gooders are causing it to collapse.

Here in Cyprus there's a generosity that hasn't existed in the UK since the Sixties. Our Cypriot neighbour brings armfuls of grapes, figs and salad to us from his garden. The only downside is that I still have to do the

ironing and mop the floors – housework is the same wherever you live.

Plumber PAUL MCCARTHY, 63, and wife Marion, also 63, an ex-accountant, moved from Bexley, Kent, to Marbella in Spain in spring 2008. Paul says:

I'D NEVER thought of living abroad until two years ago. I didn't even like being out of the country on holiday. But in my opinion Tony Blair took Britain, threw it to the dogs and left Brown to try to clean up the mess. Blair created a Britain that is unrecognisable from what it was.

Looking back, the Sixties was probably the best decade because there was an abundance of work. You could leave one job on a Friday and find another by Monday. The Seventies was a good era too because there was a certain freedom about it.

So, for a few years I'd felt unusually unsettled in the UK, even though I'd lived in Kent since the late Sixties. I remember thinking one day, "This isn't the Britain I used to know."

Everywhere I looked there were immigrants flooding into the country because they've been led to believe it's paved with gold. That's not their fault, it's the government's for making it so easy for them to come here and claim benefits and houses.

I'd also begun to grow concerned about what life would be like in the UK as a pensioner because once you're old you become invisible there. Nobody looks after you. As for what happened to pensions at the hands of the Labour government, it was legalised theft.

So having never thought I'd leave Britain, Marion and I moved to Marbella two years ago. She was reluctant because we have four children and nine grandchildren and didn't want to leave them behind, nor her mother. But I told her: "We're only a few hours away on the plane, you can go home as often as you like."

We'd been holidaying in this part of Spain for years so we had friends here and we knew there was a big ex-pat community we could fit into. I'd spoken to my boss Charlie at Pimlico Plumbers in London and he agreed I could set up a new arm of the business in Spain.

So, Marion and I sold our house in Kent and bought a villa with a pool

out here in spring 2008. We absolutely love it. The weather's better, we have an outdoor lifestyle here that we could never have in the UK, the plumbing business is doing really well and I know I'll have a good retirement with private healthcare.

Apart from family there's really nothing I miss about what Britain has become today and I never thought I'd ever say that.

KEN PITTS, 58, and wife Audrey, 55, emigrated from the New Forest to New Zealand in June 2008, with sons Mat, 22, and Toby, 19. Ken says:

FOR years I was a sales manager in the computer industry and the pressure to meet targets was ever increasing. Meanwhile Audrey ran our livery yard business from home, providing stabling for other people's horses.

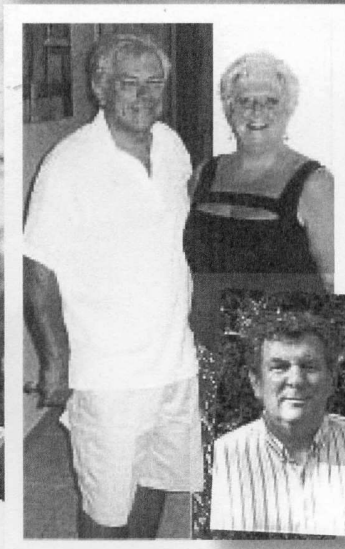
The New Forest is a beautiful part of England and there was a time when I thought we'd never leave but we began to have a niggling feeling that there must be more to life.

Audrey worried terribly about the boys going out at nights because of all the antisocial behaviour in the UK now and my greatest fear was that with the high cost of living and dwindling pension funds, I'd be working until the day I died. I wanted to get out of the rat race but I couldn't see an end to it in England. So, a few years ago we started to toy with the idea of moving abroad. Our eldest son Mat came out to New Zealand to play polo so we started to-ing and fro-ing to see him and we fell in love with the place.

The people in New Zealand are unbelievably friendly. They have a work hard, play hard philosophy and the atmosphere here is generally much cheerier than it was in the UK.

We sent Toby out here one Christmas to visit his brother and see whether he thought he could live here. When he returned and said he loved it our minds were made up; we would apply to emigrate to New Zealand.

For over-55s it's a daunting prospect because you can't just move out here to retire. We sought a lot of advice from The Emigration Group (www.emigrationgroup.co.uk). To gain entry you either have to have



GOOD MOVE: The prospect of a better life abroad has tempted many British pensioners to emigrate. Among them are Paul McCarthy, above, who went to Spain; Gill and Ken Skittrell, left, who chose Cyprus; and Ken and Audrey Pitts, below, now in New Zealand.
Main picture posed by models



close relatives in New Zealand, start a business here or go as a major investor with large quantities of cash.

We decided we wanted to open a business offering polo holidays. We were already heavily into horses and equestrian sports and we knew that with the equity from the sale of our three-bed country cottage with granny annexe in the UK we could afford to buy the seven-bedroom homestead with swimming pool, tennis court, land and 18 horses that we now have in Matira.

It took 18 months to get our visas but we didn't mind because we were so serious about emigrating.

In June 2008 we finally left the UK and we've honestly never looked back. Despite launching our own business www.newzealandpoloholidays.co.nz our stress levels are much lower than they were in the UK. Our business is doing well. There aren't many places offering polo vacations in New Zealand so the opportunity for us is huge.

There are a lot of very disgruntled people in the UK and until 2008 Audrey and I were two of them. I'm not surprised so many people our age are leaving, they're fed up with the weather, the government, the taxes. Our old neighbours came out to see us when we moved and they've since emigrated here too.

To be honest, the only thing I really miss is a good pint of British beer.

'This is the sort of place that we all loved 40 years ago'