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Editorial

The Koromatua CWI (country woman's institute), Switzerland and myself.....

There it was on the calendar, staring me in the face day after day, for more than a month, the appointment to be 'guest-speaker on Switzerland' for the AGM of the CWI hosted by the Koromatua branch in our neighbourhood.

With due date approaching I couldn't help myself feeling trapped by my willingness to have accepted the challenge of 'guest-speaker'.

However, as I started to gather some topics about our home country Switzerland on paper, I felt a sense of privilege taking hold of my attitude. And just as well, since I asked

myself anxiously how qualified I was to describe a country I had only lived in for a third of my life span.

Equipped with supporting artefacts like cowbells of various sizes, a Swiss flag, 2 large ceramic dolls in Swiss national dress, several carved wooden figurines from Bernese Oberland and some Swiss chocolate saved from some recent parcel from Switzerland, I entered the packed Koromatua country hall with patriotic pride and a good deal of apprehension.

- Now, what topics would you have tackled in front of approx. 100 mainly grey-haired Ladies politely 'lending their ears'? Perhaps you would have started, as I did, introducing the Swiss flag and explaining the connection and difference with



1998 federal 'Schwingerkönig' of Switzerland, Jörg Abderhalden from Toggenburg

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the origin of the Red-cross-flag! How easily I remembered the name of the Swiss founder of the Red cross, Henry Dunant, but no way could I remember the year of the founding of this humanitarian institution! Could you have helped me?

- Hopefully I did somewhat better explaining the crossbow of our mythical Swiss Hero, William Tell on Swiss products, signifying Swiss quality. I even remembered that approx. 1500 Swiss companies are entitled to use this emblem since it's inception in 1932.

Yes, you would probably have told my audience that Switzerland has the most democratic form of Government in the world. So did I and I even tried to explain the subtle difference between an initiative and a referendum (without mentioning the exact number of signatures needed, since I keep forgetting anyway!)

My very attentive audience was informed that the Swiss do not recognise a 'King-on-a-throne', but do recognise a 'King-of-the-sawdust', the "Schwingerkönig" or king of Swiss wrestling. I explained with much pride that the 'latest' king of the sawdust had only just been selected by merit points at the federal Swiss wrestling championship in Bern. (Eidg.Schwingfest). His name is 'Jörg Abderhalden', I said, a nineteen year old and he measures 1.9 metres in height and weighs 120 kilos. I couldn't help myself adding that the new Schwingerkönig is a 'product' of the Toggenburg region which was my place of origin and which I had left to emigrate to New Zealand in 1956.

- Perhaps you would have done bet-

ter than I did explaining why we call the "Mother of our Nation" HELVETIA, just as we name our monthly magazine for the Swiss in New Zealand HELVETIA and why this name appears on the Swiss postal stamps instead of the familiar name Suisse or Switzerland. - Yes the Romans and in particular Julius Caesar have a lot to answer for, making me to study old history books!!

Talking about the origin of the Swiss watch making industry was much easier, after all I had witnessed the need for cottage industry in my own family home during my youth.

- Explaining what motivated Swiss people to emigrate during differing time frames was not so easy.

"How could anybody leave such a beautiful country anyway", was the question from some of the well travelled Ladies that had 'done Switzerland in 2 days' during their European holiday tour.

- Do you really still speak your dialect with your grown up Children here in New Zealand, was another question, and how come there are 4 different languages spoken in Switzerland?

I found Switzerland's neutrality quite easy to describe and I managed to explain the justification for a strong defensive army which 'provided' me with 17 weeks of compulsory military training as a 20 year old .

In the context of neutrality and self-defence I tried to explain the reluctance of the Swiss people to join the EU. Talking about various Swiss export industries, I wasn't at all sure if I should mention the importance of the Swiss banking institution, so I decided against it hoping that the topic in question would not be 'tabled' during question time..! Several of the CWI-Ladies were keen to direct questions at me and I think I did a reasonable job answering either as I remembered from long ago during my growing up time in Switzerland or as I remembered from recent times thanks to my hobby of short-wave listening to Swiss Radio International during the past 40 years. The one 'sticky' question at the end was; *How do the Swiss celebrate the New Year?*

What would you have answered?

I could only recall my own family's celebration of "Sylvester", or as we called it in Toggenburg 'Hüslinacht'. For us, during those lean years of

world war 2 and for the first few years of the 1950's it was a matter of celebrating with a special late-night-meal of perhaps "Sauerkraut, top of the range sausages (Servelat, Schübling) with salted potatoes. For dessert, the 'height-of-luxury' was whipped cream with meringues.! To mark the passing of the old year and heralding in the new, we experienced a more spiritual exercise by listening between 11.30 PM of 31. Dec. and 1.30 am on new year's day to the melodious sounds of several sets of church bells. On a crisp clear winter's night we could hear such festive bell ringing (all done electro-mechanically) from 2 or 3 different churches in neighbouring villages.

- And so my duty as guest speaker for the Koromatua CWI ended on a nostalgic note, much appreciated by an attentive audience.

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Wherever you are, everyone you talk to seems to be saying the same thing at the moment - where has the year gone? Already in October shops have been preparing for Christmas, so maybe that's why we think the year passes so quickly. Others say that time goes faster as you get older, but of course I won't argue that point! But no matter, we have now reached the last month and the close of another year.

Looking back over the past 12 months there has been much activity within the Society. All the Clubs around the country have held a great variety of successful functions for the enjoyment of our many members, and I would like to pass on my congratulations and thanks to those people involved in organisation and work which went into these numerous events. It is attributable to the tireless efforts of the local Club committee members and helpers that the Swiss Community is so active and thriving in New Zealand.

To conclude for this year, I would like to wish everyone a very happy Christmas, and much good fortune and good health for the New Year. I hope you all have enjoyable, relaxing holidays, and when travelling, please drive safely and carefully.

Beatrice

HAPPY 40th ANNIVERSARY!

To **Josie and Bert Flüher**, of Hamilton, who celebrated 40 years of marriage on 15th November 1998, we send our heartfelt congratulations. With best wishes from both the Swiss Society and the Hamilton Swiss Club for many more future years together.

To **Henry (Heiri) Oetli**
in Hamilton

Congratulations on your
80th.

BIRTHDAY

best Wishes from both the Swiss
Club and the Swiss Society