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Bodensee Afterthoughts

Carolyn Lane

It is just as well that the joys of returning match the joys of being away – or perhaps those of us who travel might never come back! But we do, and before the realities of life-here overtake the memories of life-there, it's nice to reflect a little.

On seasons ... leaving aside the out-of-season swoops of temperature and deluges the world is now prone to, there is still a much more decisive note to the changes of season in Switzerland. Everything – trees, birds, farm animals, people – seems to take a sure step into a different direction. Two or three chill nights in September, and trees start to take their autumn colours. The pear trees turn burgundy, there's flame in the Eshen, and gold in the Buche. Already the viburnums in the hedgerows have gone from lacy white spring flowers to brilliant red berries – and suddenly the leaves are colouring too.

I picked a few branches of viburnum early, when the berries were just colouring, and put them in the big vase outside the front door that we normally reserve for sunflowers. They lived there while we went to Hungary, and were still brilliant when we got back. So they stayed, leaves turning crimson and sometimes augmented with sunflowers because who can live without those. When I took them out of the vase in that sorrowful time of “putting the garden to bed”, they were well rooted on the bottom. I say “sorrowful” because I am one who recycles flowers in vases, and chops back perennials only when they have truly finished flowering: somehow it seems disrespectful to the effort nature has put into creating its beauty to waste it before its natural death. But commonsense must prevail, and the chopping and pruning must be done before we leave, whether the natural cycle is ready or not.

The wild flowers have gone from the delicate yellow and blue of evening primrose and chicory to the

bolder hues of golden rod and something that looks like a purple verbena. I am often delighted to see the wild originals of our precious garden varieties – aubergine-coloured aquilegia up in the mountains, tiny cyclamen in the woods, marjoram and ladies mantle in the fields, something I'm sure is lavatera along the motorways. And isn't it wonderful how that delight transfers – how now what I might have called “weeds” along our own roadsides, now I see as wildflowers.

Our neighbour in Altenrhein nurtures a broom in his garden. He could not believe our stories of hillsides of it gleaming gold. This, by the way, is the neighbour who has Google-earthed Paraparaumu, and given us printouts with our own new house and little lake showing clearly, and the same one who took at least 5 hours over two afternoons to trim a conifer in his garden to an absolutely perfect round.

Something else I'm missing: the raucous laughter! Our gang loves to laugh. They practice daily, the louder the better. A quip in a conversation is greeted not with a smile, but a guffaw. If there's not enough laughing going on, funny stories will be told until there is. And those stories! Some I now understand for myself; some Mani translates, and others he won't. Put politely, they are much “broader” than the kind of stories I would ever hear told around here.

It's the same as with political opinions. Here, at least in the circles I move in, we will take some time to delicately explore other people's views or their sense of humour before we present a view that might be contentious, or tell a joke that might be marginal. There, trenchant statements are asserted, and un-PC jokes told, and it all seems pretty OK.

Anyway – here we are – settling back into this life. We had shifted to our new place in Kapiti Village in Paraparaumu less than 3 months before we went away, so re-entry has had the “where did we

put...?” elements of moving in afresh.

Now we have ducks, tuis, pukekos, and black-backed gulls instead of meisli to entertain us. We've had two afternoons eeling on our little lake – one successful, with five nice eels going into the water barrel, and then the smoker.

Despite best intentions and solemn promises, “German for Beginners” has not been opened since we returned and Mani and I are *not* having daily conversation in Deutsch. My excuse is I've been seeing a few clients (determinedly only a few), and there's so much to do. I suspect there was also the blessed relief of easily understanding and being understood that my psyche really needed.

Swiss Club Choir practice the other night was a good re-tuning of my ear – to Schweizer-Deutsch in conversation, and hoch Deutsch in the singing. And yes, the transitions were easier than they've been before, so maybe some things are starting to sink in. The next stretch is to come though: I've put a notice up on the Village noticeboard inviting other expert or novice German-speakers to come for *kaffee kuchen und conversation* to force me back onto the horse.

And next month – it will be into the bus that Mani has converted and off to enjoy the mobile life for a while. Perhaps there'll be some stories to come from that experience!

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Paragliding in Switzerland

Paul Werthmüller

When I see these colourful gliders way up in the sky I always get a great desire to be up there as well and enjoy the freedom of flying like a bird. 18 years ago I had a nasty crash with my hangglider, lucky enough I walked away from it unhurt but my glider was a wreck, so I gave it up altogether.

A few months ago our son Simon presented us with the news that he had started his training as a paragliding pilot. First I told him a few reasons why he shouldn't take it up: Too expensive for a student, too time-consuming, sometimes you will have to wait for hours for the wind to be right and so on. You know already, he didn't change his mind.

On a brilliant clear Sunday our family went to see how Simon was doing and when I saw all the colourful paragliders up in the sky I got this great desire again to be up there as well. His touch-down was as smooth as a landing can be and from there on I didn't get paragliding out of my head.

A few weeks later I was near Stans standing on a slope with different levels, listening to the instructions of Franz, a paragliding expert with over 10 000 flights under his belt. He has to fly every glider himself before he is allowed to sell it to a costumer, and after repairs he flies them first as well. He also flies new models for manufacturers and takes bi-place passengers on a regular basis for money. First he told us what's front and back and how to put on the harness. Then he showed us how to lay out the sail on the ground and how to pull it up.

The start helper checked our gear before take-off and soon we were running down the hill in wide curves and trying to steer the glider the same way. After three attempts I was able to run down the whole hillside with the glider staying right above my head. Franz was happy to let me go a bit

further up the hill and get my feet off the ground for the first time. A bit stiff I was, hanging in the harness. I followed Franz's instructions over the headphones and about half a minute later I was standing on the ground again. With a beating heart I shot up the hill again, a little higher this time and off I was again. Finally we were allowed to the top of the hill and make a decent flight, about 20 meters off the ground. Next weekend I was back on the practising slope again, this time near the Pilatus aeroplane factory in Alpnach. As I wasn't a beginner any more I was told to go right to the top, about 100 meters above the landing field. The novices had to stay below and do their training runs first and then go to medium height. The instructor checked my gear and I was ready for take-off. The



wind was right and I pulled up the glider above my head, gazed up to the sail to check there was no problem and then started to run at full speed. "Keep running until you are really up in the air, relax, enjoy your flight!" came over my headphone.. As the wind was playing silly games that day I had the wind in my back for the last few seconds and was landing on my b.... After another seven flights from the top we called it a day. "Tomorrow is going to be your first high flight" I was told by the instructor.

I had to be at the shop half an hour early to get a different har-

ness fitted. With a few butterflies in my stomach I showed up at the shop and was hung on the ceiling in my new harness to adjust all the straps to my body size. More and more pilots showed up and we were briefed with the weather forecast and its possible consequences for today's flights.

As a novice I had to stay behind and I was shown how to land under different wind conditions. I went back to my car, put on my heavy tramping boots and off I went with the small cable car 850 meters above the village. By the time I got to the take off, a number of pilots were already in the air. I was led to the easiest take-off spot for my first real flight. What a sight: Lake Lucerne right at my feet! "Perfect start, Paul, now just a little bit more to the left and straight towards the church! Enjoy your flight!" After a while I got more comfortable in my seat, relaxed and had confidence in the thin lines I was hanging on.

"Paul, we have to prepare you for the landing now and teach you how to steer properly. Do a full circle left now, right turn now. Come in at full speed, move out of your seat now and straighten up. Pull both brake lines a little bit, right so, pull them right down now!" - and a couple of seconds later I was standing on my feet, back on earth again. What a feeling! I was congratulated by everyone. I packed my glider and went back up again to do a second flight that day.

In the meantime I have done ten flights in three different areas and decided to do the paragliding licence as well. To become a hanggliding or paragliding pilot you have to do a theoretical exam in aerodynamics, weather forecast, gear knowledge, physics of flying and aeronautical law. When you have done a minimum of 40 flights in five different areas you are allowed to do the practical flying test. Once passed you are a licensed paragliding pilot who is allowed to fly solo worldwide. To keep the licence it is not compulsory to do a certain number of flights every year.