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I have been having serious conversations with the weather gods through September and the start of October, warning them that Mani is coming back from Switzerland and he is expecting it to be warmer here than there. They took not a bit of notice, as they stripped the cherry blossom and kowhai from the trees.

However - he has arrived, and happily the first few days at least have been balmy. To his delight, the proper seasonal changes arrived in Switzerland: snow down as far as St Anton meant not far to go for the ritual snow-ball fight, and the trees did a sudden and dramatic colour change, the most brilliant he has seen for years.

Last month I reported that he'd held the annual *Holdermues* party, but now I hear the whole story. Something nasty had happened to the *holder* - the elderberries on our trees had been looking promising and starting to colour nicely, and suddenly they withered on the branch. The same happened to other trees around the district. It seems there was a blight of some sort in the air - and woe, the annual party was under threat. Happily one of the gang received a gift of berries from another friend, and an important ritual was able to proceed. It's one of the highlights of the year for our friend Ferdi, who is in his 93rd year and has sold his *Altenrhein hüsli* now he can no longer drive - so the idea of no *holdermues* party was awful to contemplate.

And yes, the blutwursts have been well sampled - the *Freundschaft Laube* hosted a blutwurst party and the Migros variety are endorsed as still the best.

Speaking of *freundschaft*, Jack (Jibo) Herzog was over from Vancouver to visit family and he and Mani were able to catch up. Jibo also brought news of Pierre Bieri, who has also moved to Vancouver Island. Many were the reminiscences of the time when the City Band turned out to farewell

Jibo and Mani from the Rheineck railway station more than 50 years ago - and all the stories since. Mani and Jibo go back to school-days together, when their school teacher frequently told them that they would come to no good! Now we know all the research that says that teachers' expectations are the greatest predictor of students' success - so we can count ourselves lucky that both Mani and Jibo were rebels who took not a bit of notice of the teacher's predictions.

Those of you who also made that long migration, back in the 50's and 60's, will know the importance and richness of the friendships that are maintained



Roman, Margrit and Mani stripping the holder

over time and distance. How much easier it is now to stay connected, with air travel and email, than it was then, when going to the other side of the world was truly separating from home. Of course, that then leads to the conversations about the ethics of air travel and our carbon footprint - and more recently about whether the world economic crisis is going to turn us all back into peasants (and maybe solve global climate problems that way!)

What's NOT being talked about any more is the soccer. Oh the humiliation, *eine Blamage* like never before. Switzerland was beaten by Luxemburg and is out of the European championships. The sports talk has switched hastily to the ice-hockey!

Meantime back here, I've been enjoying a lot of music, and mak-

ing a little of my own. I've picked up the cello that I bought many years ago, and been working on getting my finger-tips toughened up and making sounds that won't drive Mani from the house. I've also been doing some piano practice, and some choral singing, all good for the soul.

I am humbled though, by the glorious things I hear from real performers. Aren't we lucky to have so much music around us. Highlights for me over the last while have been Bluebeard's Castle, and the Jerusalem Quartet.

There was also a lovely true-Spring day when I went with friends to the reconstructed Rangiatea Church at Otaki for a concert of baroque music. The music was composed when James Cook was sailing this way, and played on a copy of a harpsichord made in Germany in the 1700s, and a cello as old as the original Rangiatea. My once-mother-in-law is buried there, so I spent some time with her, the more poignant since it was just a month since my own mother had died.

Most of us who travel seem to have this little underlying concern about whether our family and friends will be okay while we're out of the country. It's like that extra earth-quake-proofing you do when you're going away, based it feels on some strange belief that while you're around you can prevent catastrophe. Well, it was the right time for my mother to go, and she held on until the day after I got to her bedside, so it was as good as these things can be.

Now - confession time! Until Mani got back I had not spoken a word of Schwizerdütsch or German, and German for Beginners sat unopened, glaring at me. The huge relief of the ease of understanding and being understood in English had overwhelmed me. Now Mani is here, it will be back to readings from *Pu der Bär*, I promise him. Or is that a threat? He smiles kindly....