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An unforgettable holiday in New Zealand

Our joy was great as my sister, Marlies, and I started planning a trip to New Zealand to visit our sister, Erna Zimmermann. It was no sooner said than done, our travel arrangements were made early. The fact that an epidemic was raging outside of Switzerland didn't unduly concern us. The whole trip to New Zealand went very smoothly.

After a few days of rest with Erna and Remigi in Taranaki, we started a round trip around the South Island that Erna had organised. As soon as we arrived in Dunedin on our tour we received all kinds of calls from Switzerland advising us to return as soon as possible because flights were continuously being cancelled. It was the first time that we had an uneasy feeling about our situation.

What were we going to do now? We decided to continue our trip for the meantime.

The beauty of Wanaka no longer pulled us under its spell, because the fear of not having a return flight home dwelled heavily on us. So we decided to find a travel agency. With a shrug of the shoulders the agent couldn't tell us, at that point, if the airline would be flying at all. Despite the shrugging of the shoulders I decided to take the risk and book the flights but we had to have our passports, which in hindsight, we thankfully didn't have with us.

The following day we heard that Australia had closed their borders and had we booked, we would have had a stopover in Melbourne, so the flight would not have gone ahead. We continued our trip to Greymouth in a somewhat sombre mood.

That night Erna had a brainwave; she rang Remigi to take photos of our passports and send them to us via WhatsApp. Armed with the photos, we went to another travel agency.

I was gobsmacked that we were offered plane seats on different days, but the best still to come – there were only business class



Erna's sisters | From left: Margrit, Marlies and Erna.

seats left at a price that made my hair stand on end!

We were relieved to get on a train bound for Christchurch over the Arthurs Pass with confirmed reservations and passenger seats with Emirates, as we really wanted to get home as soon as possible. We weren't shocked when the airline cancelled all flights one day before our planned return trip home!

So we spent lockdown with Erna and Remigi at their home in Hawera, Taranaki. Three women in the household; how would we make that work out? However, thanks to the organised daily routine, we all coped very well with the situation. As all three of us are good cooks, just looking into the pots made Remigi's mouth water!

Besides gardening, cutting hedges and shrubs, patching and knitting, cleaning and tidying up cupboards we always found time for a jass or joker!

The daily walk around the block was also a must! During one of our walks, what did we see, but a naked man watering his garden! Oh la la, what a sight! The biggest thrill was burning all the shrub branches, together with two cherry trees, which created a massive bonfire. The fire was so huge, I'm

sure a pig on the spit could have been cooked on it!

The story of getting home wasn't finished yet! We finally got some relief through the Embassy of Switzerland in Wellington, and completed many forms. Following their advice we booked another return flight with Qatar Airlines.

At home in Switzerland, my husband pulled out all the stops and called many authorities. And now the happy ending... through the Swiss Embassy we were able to register for an earlier repatriation flight with Swiss and hopefully get on the passenger list. A few days later we received an email from the embassy stating that we were on the list for the special flight.

Of course we were very happy, but there was also a touch of sadness, because that meant saying goodbye to Erna and Remigi. We were leaving our safe 'bubble' and heading in the direction of Auckland – leaving New Zealand with many lasting, unforgettable experiences and many beautiful memories.

One thing is certain; there will be another trip to New Zealand... when there are no disasters on the horizon!

Margrit Iten

Dear Society members:

The cost of printing and posting the *Helvetia* is continually on the rise.

Changing to an electronic version of the *Helvetia* would reduce the cost to the Society greatly. If you are happy to change to an electronic version, please advise **Marianne**, email marianne.drummond@swiss.org.nz