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I used to laugh at older folk when they said that time is going faster and faster. Now I'm confused. The physics of the situation hasn't changed... time still goes at the same pace it always has (at least in our planet-bound world), but oh dear, it feels to be going faster to me! Add to that the peculiarities of this particular time of the year - rushing towards Christmas and all that "should" be done before the year ends, and it can get a little stressful.

We've decided to slow down on the rushing side of the equation. We've lived long enough now to be pretty certain that another year will follow this one, and that will give us time enough to do the things that are still undone at the end of 2009. Living "two lives" might have helped us understand that. We've got accustomed to the idea that "there's always next year" for the things that we thought we'd do while we were in Switzerland, and never got round to. We're getting better at doing that for the New Zealand phase as well. Indeed, Mani now thinks he's managing to live twice as long, by virtue of having two lives!

And that leaves more time for enjoying things and counting our blessings, which is a much better use of this time of year.

Blessing 1 - the singing! The Wellington Swiss Club's scratch choir has reassembled to practice for Carols in the Soundshell. We get together round the piano and sing the old favourites till we think we can be bold enough to put ourselves on stage. Practices finish with Theres Scherrer's famous cakes - Zwetschgen pie was a hit last week. Theres not only hosts us, she conducts our efforts as well. Sadly the European forum which organises the Concert has decided this will be the last year they do it. They're having difficulty getting the person-power together. Everyone's too busy, or getting too old. Which brings me to ...

Blessing 2 - the strength of the Swiss clubs, and the energy of our organisers. Our Wellington Committee seems tireless, and their work is rewarded with ever-increasing turn-outs to events - and a "youthening" instead of "aging" of the attendance. This is just the reverse of what's happening to many organisations, so there's definitely something special going on.

Blessing 3 - the colours of spring (note, I am **not** mentioning the weather!) We drove up to Te Puke a few days ago and almost ran out of exclamation marks. The variety of the greens! The glory of the golds in the broom and the late kowhai trees! The bright white of the snow still on Ruapehu! The rhododendrons and azaleas in all shades from the softest pinks to fire-engine red! The smart-as-paint black and white of the Friesian calves!

Blessing 4 - the lengthening days. That's something Mani and I so look forward to when we make the Switzerland/New Zealand seasonal switch. Suddenly we go from evenings arriving sooner and sooner, and the sense of days closing in, to more light, and the promise of long summer evenings.

Blessing 5 - being able to "do stuff". We've just about finished building a fine construction inside our trellised area where Mani's creative and construction skills were well exercised. The blessing is not just in having a sheltered morning-sun place for sitting in and growing tomatoes and fruit without having to compete with the ever-hungry pukekos - but in the do-it-yourselfer's pleasure and pride. I suspect we sometimes overlook the importance of being able to "do stuff" to our human sense of worth. We do need to feel competent and useful, don't we. So what does that mean for those people who grow up in our society feeling useless? And for those whose sense of being useful is tied up in their work, from which sooner or later they will retire or be made redundant? If I could give the world a Christmas present it would be that every person had something - anything - that they can do that makes them feel useful, and competent, and valuable.



Under construction

Blessing 6 - asparagus! I loved the text I got from a New Zealand friend when we were preparing to leave Switzerland. It just said "the asparagus is out, and so are the Nelson scallops". I was instantly ready to hop on the plane.

Blessing 7 - reconnecting with friends. I think that's one of the great things about being away for a reasonable length of time - you enjoy meeting up with people again so much more. There's the initial rush to gabble out all the exciting things that have been happening in their life and yours, and then that comfortable slide into familiarity. The friendships that we treasure are those where it doesn't really matter if there's a week or half a year between conversations, you just pick up from where you left off.

Blessing 8 - to have more blessings to look forward to! Family time. Glorious weather when it decides to come and stay. All the joys of the festive season. A little of whatever takes our fancy. Enjoy your blessings!