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EDITORIAL

ANNIVERSARIES - days to remember, including HOMESICKNESS and such like.....

Just as the artist steps back from his work or creation to review his handiwork, so it seems all of us have the need or desire to step back every now and again to appraise and to celebrate annually recurring days of significance - days that are worth a remembrance.

Numerous are the jokes about the husband getting 'into trouble' as he forgets the Wedding Anniversary in busy daily life, and is then chastised in no uncertain terms by his wife.

Lucky is the man celebrating his Wedding on August the second, I said to myself forty years ago in 1960, as 'our big day' had been arranged for the day following our National Day in Switzerland (a day that nobody forgets in any case).

Yes, and as you have guessed it by

now, my 'better half' and I have recently been celebrating 40 years of togetherness in 'bad days and in good days, in sickness and in health'. They call it the 'Ruby Wedding Anniversary' and for most of us reaching this milestone, it happens during advancing years of age!

For my wife and myself, it coincides with reaching the significant 65th birthday. Having kept contact with some of our Swiss school friends in 'the old country' throughout the years, we have been made aware for some time of the plan to re-unite with a Class reunion celebration at reaching the entitlement to call ourselves pensioners...!

I don't know about you, but the necessary preparations for another trip 'home' seem to re-activate a host of nostalgic and quite emotional memories that have been rather dormant in my subconscious mind. Trying to analyse one's feelings of the past can be a fascinating undertaking for

anybody I venture to think. Why all these mixed up feelings of expectations during the time of travel preparations, I asked myself?

Do I subconsciously grieve the thoughts that 'it's never going to be the same' as we left it, that old country of ours, when returning once again this time? How foolish, I say to myself. I should know by now that change is inevitable and have I not heard and read about all the 'wonderful' advances in living standards and technology in my country of origin, Switzerland?

Why can I once again feel the scars left behind by homesickness in my emotional 'memory-box' 40 years ago? Why should some of us have had to suffer so much homesickness anyway during the first few years of life in this desirable country of adoption, New Zealand?

Have you asked yourself such questions? How many Swiss immigrants of earlier years have carried scars of homesickness with themselves to their graves? Why should people emigrating and escaping relative harsh living conditions suffer homesickness once they live an easier life in 'the country of their choice'?

Has anyone ever taken a survey among immigrants (Swiss or otherwise) to find reasons for people with or without homesickness?

- Have you, the 'long-established Swiss-Kiwi' ever recorded on paper or in your mind the things you most missed 'from home' in the early days, or were such thoughts trivial??
- Well, I for myself, to this day, don't know if it is a sign of 'patriotic love of homeland' or a sign of weak emotional character that I suffered greatly under homesickness for the first three years as a single man in New Zealand. A list of mitigating factors explaining my homesickness is firmly set in my mind.

As a twenty year-old, I left behind numerous relatives and friends (of both genders), made during primary and secondary school years; during years of professional training; military service, the church choir; gymnastic-circle; shooting-club; as well as several neighbouring families that had a been part of my life up to the "time of maturity" which was twenty-one in those days...!

Living in New Zealand and working as a 'dairy farm worker by necessity', where was I to find the friendly attachment of camaraderie I was used to in a Swiss gymnastic club?

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Where was the church choir that allowed me to participate in singing 'Mozart or Schubert' in German, rather than in English? Where were all the people that expressed their emotional attachment to each other by greeting and farewelling with hand shakes in everyday life? (a hand shake is reserved for introductory purposes only in NZ)

How much did I miss the sound of Swiss church bells dividing workdays and Sundays into timely parts or calling us to worship? How would I ever be able to ban the image of Swiss mountains glowing in the evening sunset from my mind?

No wonder we had so much feeling for and so many people attending the Swiss club functions in those late fifties, Or wasn't it homesickness that played a big part?

- Be grateful that you can afford to travel back to the 'old country', my mind tells me after such thoughts.

Think of the early settlers of Aotearoa, how they felt, knowing that 'homeland' was something never to be seen again, or at best a re-visit had to be earned with a sea journey of several month's duration!! Inevitably, such realisation brings about joyous thoughts and expectations to my mind at present and I think of all the 'great encounters' awaiting us in Switzerland.

I hear myself say: "we must visit the museum of transport in Lucerne, the 'Technorama' in Winterthur, the 'Ballenberg', and we must take the cable car to 'Säntis mountain', which we are able to enjoy at reduced fare as the 'Säntisbahn' is celebrating 40 years of existence, having been built in 1935, our year of birth.....!

And what about a trip to 'Heidiland' as was described in HELVETIA recently, or a trip to Saas Fee, remembering the front-cover competition on a recent HELVETIA? Will we be able to partake at the convention for the 'Swiss Abroad' in Zug.

And how far will the 'pocket money' reach, will our credit card stand up to the rigors of the low exchange rate? But, let's ban such thoughts I tell myself, it's ANNIVERSARY TIME,!! Remember the quotation "*man soll die Feste feiern wie sie fallen...*" (an event should be celebrated whenever it's due).

A big thank you to Beatrice Leuenberger for creating the HELVETIA (September and October) in my absence, and to the editing team for their usual, helpful cooperation. R.R.

The President of the Swiss Confederation, Mr Adolf Ogi, (Minister of Defence, Civil Protection, and Sport) addresses Switzerland's 27th Canton, the Swiss living abroad, on the occasion of the Swiss National Day, First of August, 2000.

My dear fellow citizens abroad, Our country's birthday is a special day, a day of joy on which the Swiss get together. I know that for you as Swiss people living abroad, the Swiss flag has special importance as a symbol and August 1st has a special significance as the national day. I would like the sound of the bells in my home town of Kandersteg in the Bernese Oberland (*played on audio-cassette - Ed*) to reach you, wherever you are, and touch your heart. In the name of the government and of the Swiss people, I send you my best wishes on the occasion of our national day. It is a day on which we should be thankful: we have enjoyed peace and freedom for more than 150 years. We can also be proud of a century and a half of democracy and federalism. This is much more than a tradition; it is a way of life, a choice of society, a force for the future, and represents modern values.

We can also look to the future with confidence. We are at the start of the third millennium, and Switzerland is ready to face the challenge. Every challenge is an opportunity, a chance to do better, and I believe the Swiss are prepared to exploit the chances that come their way.

My fellow citizens, your geographical distance from Switzerland gives you a different perception of our country. But, to turn a controversial slogan upside down - Switzerland does exist! It's evolving; it's moving; it's progressing.

Our four cultures, our four language regions, and the 26 cantons, are demonstrating every day the will to live together despite our differences, to turn these differences into assets.

The clear 'yes' vote by the Swiss people to the bilateral treaties with the European Union is the latest evidence of this. Another example of Switzerland's openness and solidarity is its involvement in the Balkans to try to stabilise the situation and to promote peace. The cross on our flag must remain the symbol of a country that is committed and shows solidarity.

More than half a million people live and work abroad - some just briefly, others for longer periods. Whatever the reasons for moving, you have to show creativity, courage, confidence and tenacity to succeed. These are the qualities behind our country's reputation, and I'd like to see them as the qualities that unite all Swiss people, whether at home or abroad.

My dear fellow citizens.... I wish you all the best for you and your families, and hope the celebration of our national day is a happy occasion, a time for reflection, and that it strengthens your ties with Switzerland.



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