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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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