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Editorial..

The "number 8-wire solution"...

"Did you go through the war, Grossvater?" was the question by one of my teenage grand daughters the other day!? - My reply turned (unintentionally) into a somewhat 'longwinded' answer and it started stirring up many disturbing memories in my mind.

A simple 'yes' would have meant taking the easy way out, and a simple 'no' would have been a denial of sorts, and since I have been looking forward to the time of having meaningful discussions with teenage grand children, I lost myself unwittingly in a longwinded explanation. Soon after that I read a short article in a Swiss magazine about a Swiss immigrant turning discarded timber into new furniture. That article to-

gether with the answer given my grand daughter resulted in the 'editorial headline' of this month's. - Allow me to take you back some 60 years of recent times and would you come with me to the place of my birth in the upper Toggenburg of Switzerland as we write the year 1942.

Europe was in great turmoil as the second world war engulfed nations and peoples.

As a seven year old growing up in a mountain farming family of five children with parents and grand parent I did not understand war, comparing it to some childish games we played as 'warlords' and 'foot soldiers' in the forest or on sloping hills of the small plots of land that constituted the mountain farming area of our region.

How happy we children were in moments of relaxation as talks of daily

events of war affecting our home country were pushed aside. But fear and hunger gradually eroded such happiness as I well remember. The fear of Switzerland being 'drawn into the war' was written on the faces of the adult population. Soldiers (including our Dad) long since drafted into defence duties, everywhere. Villages turned upside down for military purposes; sweating, heaving horses pulling gun carriages uphill, sliding and falling over themselves coming downhill together with the shouting of commands by the military. Disturbing images for a seven year old boy.

Rationing of all food except some basics like potatoes became the order of the day. Fresh bread (dark-brown mixed with potatoes to 'make it go further') had to be 'aged' for 24 hours by the bakery in order to better satisfy the hungry population. Every hen in our small 'chicken-run' had to be counted and numbers registered by the rationing authorities as was the case with cows, pigs and all 'profit bearing animals', so that the allocation of food-coupons could be adjusted downwards taking regard of 'home produce'.

Never to be forgotten the distinctive smell of turnips (cooked as soup or vegetable dish) in our house as well as in most others in Toggenburg, the region of the 'poor farmer' as it was always known due to the harsh climatic conditions and the mini-plots of land families had to live on. In our case it was 3.5 hectares allowing some 3.5 head of dairy-cows to be kept with young stock in similar numbers. We considered ourselves fortunate, our parents being able to rent another two hectares of adjacent land off a neighbour.

It was not only the shortage of rationing allocations but the general poverty that drove people to near despair in those days in our region. Vegetables were scarce, growing on tiny garden plots in low fertility soils, and a harsh climate. The shortage of bread was the main worry in our family of growing children. I well remember each of us guarding a shoe box containing a daily allowance of some 300 grams of bread allocated for the day by our mother in the morning, knowing it had to last for 24 hours! Hunger and worry about the progress of the war around us were constant companions. 'May devotions' in our church,

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(quite common in those days), which were supposed to be uplifting occasions) turned into prayer vigils petitioning 'St. Niklaus von Flüe', Switzerland's patron-saint, to save the country from the fate of total war as our neighbouring countries had to experience.

Living became a daily struggle for everyone and especially for families with fathers in military service and mothers managing farming (manual work with primitive means) with half-grown sons dividing all spare time between school and duties, often on an empty stomach. No wonder the 'old scourge of tuberculosis' reared its ugly head again among some of us school children, and I well remember two of my school friends confessing to me that they would soon receive some 'support from the authorities' due to the fact that they had been diagnosed as malnourished beyond the ordinary.... (It was well known that their whole family lived mainly on stray cats and dogs, a delicacy for the 'poor of the poorest').

But now going back to the headline of this article I must admit that, with all these hardships befalling us, there was the versatility of the human inventiveness that I remember well, even as a seven year old. There was my Mother's ability to turn old clothes into 'new' children's clothing, Dad repaired shoes to stretch their life-span as did most other Dads of the day. Mother made a name for herself as self-taught men's barber and applied her services for boys and men in our region, often for a heartfelt thank you only, or a few meager cents of pay. (I well remember the frightened look on the faces of boys from our neighborhood as they sat themselves down on the 'barber's-stool' in our kitchen, expecting to suffer bravely the consequences of the coming haircut with hand clippers.)

Mother became a well known expert at killing and dressing chicken for everyone lucky enough to be able to spare such a livestock-commodity, or for anyone suspecting that one of the treasured hens showed signs of illness....! People in rural areas spoke softly when gossiping about the latest rumor that a 'black pig' (one that missed the strict counting for the food rationing authorities!) had been dispatched during the darkness of the night, and that some

such meat might be available on the 'black market'.

Yes, there were dark days, not only dark nights (due to obligatory 'black-outs') during those times, some 60 years ago in Switzerland.

But the inventiveness of people was a triumph in adversity showing itself in various ways of daily life.

This very human ability came to the fore not only in Switzerland but in many countries affected by the war and in New Zealand, our country of adoption, it has survived to this day, known as the 'number eight-wire solution' in farming and industry alike. Let's hope we never lose it!

President's Message

A well known and respected Swiss charitable organisation is currently in the process of extending its reach to include Swiss Abroad. The *Glückskette* or 'Chain of Fortune' is currently collecting as many e-mail addresses as possible, along with a brief personal message in the theme of "how my life is here" about living abroad (max. three short sentences, any language), by 20th April.

The charity, which uses various media systems to raise funds, was established in 1946 by employees of a radio station, and has become one of the most well known in Switzerland. It offers assistance to disaster victims in Switzerland and abroad, and is currently supporting 40,000 children, both in Switzerland as well as (mainly) in the Third World, and annually provides aid to around 2500 people and families in financial difficulty. And now the *Glückskette* Switzerland is hoping to extend its reach to the 10% of citizens currently living abroad, and all Swiss Abroad are being asked to forward their e-mail addresses, together with brief personal details to:

<http://www.glueckskette.ch>.

In return, you will be directly notified by e-mail about all future fundraising activities

To publicise this *Glückskette* 'launch', a function will be held at the 'Place of the Swiss Abroad' in Brunnen on 20 April, where a selection of the messages received will be projected onto a large screen for everyone to see.

(Advising your e-mail address

places you under no obligation, and addresses or information will not be passed on to a third party.)

"Five Minutes for the Fifth Switzerland"

And in connection with the *Glückskette* campaign, a further event could also bring some of us a nice surprise!

On the 20th April (Saturday) you could be receiving a phone call from a loved one in Switzerland. Under the heading "Five Minutes for the Fifth Switzerland" Swisscom is enabling a free phone call, of up to five minutes duration, from each of its 'Fixnet' (fixed telephone line) connections to an overseas number. Also taking part in this promotion are the Swiss Abroad Association, the Foreign Affairs Department, swissinfo/SRI, and the Gemeinde (borough) of Brunnen.

With over 580,000 Swiss nationals living abroad, phone lines will certainly be ringing hot around the world!

So make sure you're near your phones on the day, and I hope many will receive a brief 'catch-up' call from family and friends from Switzerland.

Best Regards,

Beatrice



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