

Zeitschrift: Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand
Herausgeber: Swiss Society of New Zealand
Band: 68 (2002)
Heft: [10]

Vorwort: Editorial
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Editorial

**This month's editorial is by
Anne-Marie Amstalden.**

Well, we're all at the end of another year. Christmas and the new year are just around the corner.

Over the last few years I've been releasing how much I love my memory of my childhood Christmases. This made me start to wonder about other peoples' festive seasons and how New Zealand children celebrate Christmas compared to Swiss children.

All around the world many families gather during this festive season, it is a time of celebration and also for reflection.

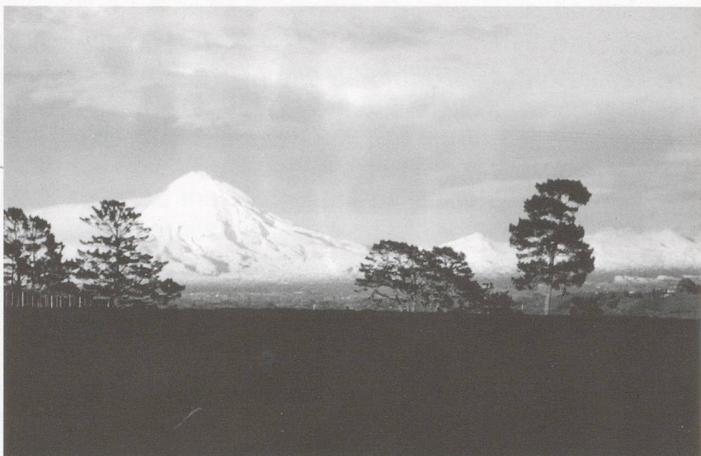
Traditionally in Christian religion the 25th of December was the day when Jesus Christ was born, the saviour of human kind. Since that time this day has been celebrated as a day of sharing and thanks giving.

Over the years treasured customs have grown around Christmas Day. In New Zealand most children - that follow the English tradition - have grown up with the ritual of going to bed a little early on December 24th. All in the hope that a certain jolly person will visit their homes.

This person we all know as Santa Claus or Father Christmas, who brings presents to the homes of the world with his sleigh and eight reindeer.

He's a kind old man who lives at the North Pole with his wife and, with the help of many busy elves, manages to make toys for all the good little boys and girls around the world.

I can remember many Christmases of my own, feeling very excited all day long. In our family we celebrated Christmas with a few precious customs. Like many other New Zealand children, our family eagerly awaited the visit of Santa Claus on Christmas Eve. But as my mother had grown up in Switzerland, her family tradition was to gather and unwrap the gifts on Christmas Eve. An activity us kids whole heartedly took-on here in New Zealand. For what kid wouldn't want their presents



Maybe Mt Taranaki/Egmont will be looking like this over Christmas and then we'll have our own little piece of Switzerland right here.

12 hours earlier?

I have many pleasant memories of waiting in the kitchen for that thrilling and fun moment when one of my brothers or sisters would suddenly hear sleigh bells outside or reindeer hooves on the roof of our house. During those times while we were held in suspense my mother would sometimes tell us her memories of Christmas as a child in Switzerland.

In the area where she grew up, Santa Claus or as she calls him the Samiclaus was a person who was cheerfully dressed and carried a big staff like bishops used to carry.

He would visit all the schools on December 6th and give out fruit and nuts to the teachers for the good school children. With the Samiclaus was his servant - Schmuzlie.

He was a small man dressed in dark clothing who carried a large bag, which was to frighten the children into being good. Every child knew that you would be carried away in the bag if you were naughty. My mum has already admitted her terror as a child at the thought of the darkened inside of the sack. No, she claims that she was too good a child to have been shoved in the bag. We're still debating this.

On the night of December 24th a lady dressed in white called the Chirstkindal did a similar job as Santa does in New Zealand. She travels through the snow to peoples' homes to give gifts on Christmas eve.

My mother often remembers waiting in another room with her siblings, to be called in later by her parents. There they would find that a lovely Christmas tree had been set up, with the presents waiting to be found.

Probably because of the weather, my mother would often receive clothing for Christmas, which she joyfully reviled in on her first day of school a week later.

A large difference between New Zealand and Switzerland are the seasons. For a long time my mother simply just didn't feel as festive about Christmas in New Zealand because it doesn't snow here. When she lived in Switzerland the whole town would be covered in glistening snowflakes and icicles. The whole community would attend church, which had many bright candles lit and bouquets around the church and headstones of the graves.

Her family had a practical way to get warm after a chilly walk home. They always had hot milk drinks with a tasty Birnenbrot and hot butter on top. The whole atmosphere of Christmas in New Zealand was upside down for her.

People were having barbecues and most farmers were still hay making! I personally think that the best traditions are universal. We gather as a family to celebrate in good health and thanks giving, with good wishes. Besides, if the current weather holds, mum might get her wish for another white Christmas

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