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Ethnicity - Celebrating cultural diversity

Kiwi blokes the blot on landscape

Swiss watch-maker George Westermayer was not impressed with Kiwi blokes when he moved to New Zealand in 1961.

He was living at the time in a central city boarding house for men. "They would play poker on a Saturday night and burp and fart," he said. "If anybody burped after a flagon, everybody would clap. I lasted six weeks."

Mr Westermayer, a non-drinker from a tiny Swiss-German speaking village in the Swiss Alps, had come to New Zealand on contract for Omega. He loved Wellington - except for its accommodation.

After leaving the boarding house, he moved to a small room run by an elderly woman. It was fine, he says, except for the small offerings she sometimes left with his breakfast.

"She would leave her false teeth on my tray. In the end I had to ask her if I could pay less and not have the breakfast."

Lotti Napp, who came to New Zealand in 1955, agrees finding decent accommodation was a battle for many new settlers. She, however, was lucky. Within a short time of arriving in Wellington she moved into a flat with three New Zealand girls. It suited her to a T, Mrs Napp said. "I had a whale of a time. If I have to pick one year of my life that was my best year, it was the first year in New Zealand". Mrs Napp had been working for the Swiss Government for only a few months when she was sent to New Zealand. "I didn't believe it, I very nearly jumped through the phone on hearing of the posting", she said. Mrs Napp says she had the travel bug early on and New Zealand always seemed the furthest away she could possibly get.

"I grew up in wartime Europe. I felt bottled up in a country you couldn't get out of. All I could think about was travelling and that's why I joined Foreign Affairs." She says many Swiss felt the same way after the war. Masses migrated to the United States, leaving small villages deserted.



Join the club: At home in New Zealand are George Westermayer, Ruth Messmer, left, and Lotti Napp.

Now many of their children are returning to Switzerland - one of the most prosperous countries in Europe.

For Mrs Napp, New Zealand was her first and last post. "I arrived here and it just absolutely suited me. It's almost as if that was the country where I was meant to be. It was quite uncanny, really."

Mr Westermayer says many left at a time Europe was fearing nuclear confrontation with Russia but he was running from the village life. "It was too small in those days. I never fitted into the small village scene. It was too regulated, too pedantic. The idea of taking over my father's watch-making business or jeweller's shop didn't appeal. Now it's totally changed because so many people travel."

He had planned to use New Zealand as a base, but after marrying an Australian during his travels, he decided to return to New Zealand.

Ruth Messmer was less willing to leave her

home city of Zurich in 1950. Her husband, Hans, a hairdresser, had applied for a job in Wellington through a Swiss newspaper. "I said to him, I will come if you get the job, but I was hoping he wouldn't."

The hairdressing contract was for four years, but the couple never returned to live in Switzerland. Instead, they set up a successful hairdressing business and later, Mr Messmer co-founded possibly New Zealand's first hairdressing apprenticeship.

Seven years after arriving in the capital, the Messmers set up Wellington's Swiss Club. Mrs Messmer is now the club's treasurer. They have clubrooms in Wainuiomata and compete in various Swiss-style games with the four other Swiss clubs in New Zealand.

Mrs Messmer says she and her compatriots had the best of both worlds in the recent America's Cup Challenge. Either way the cup went, they could feel satisfied. But it's clear where her loyalties lie now after more than 50 years in New Zealand. "When I was asked who I support, I always say there are Kiwis on both boats."

Source : The Dominion Post

Swiss cuts flights

The national airline, Swiss, is to reduce flights due to weakened demand resulting from the war in Iraq and the outbreak of Sars in Asia. The struggling carrier said it would cut dozens of flights between late April and May 31 to a number of destinations including Beijing, Hong Kong and Washington. The airline also said that it is to use smaller aircraft on flights from Zurich to a number of European destinations. Earlier this year, Swiss announced that it had made a loss of SFr980 million (\$706 million) in 2002 and said it would not return to profitability in 2003.

A REMINDER - SWISS

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News from SWISS

- * Summer of 2003 will see SWISS rejuvenating its product through many aspects including new cabin configurations and the introduction of a new A340-300 to its existing 26 long-haul aircraft fleet.
- * SWISS will name every aircraft in its fleet after one of the country's mountains. This gesture confirms the airline's commitment to Swissness and acknowledges the significance of the Alps as part of Switzerland's global identity.
- * SWISS passengers are welcome to use the facilities of Allegra Arrival

Lounge in Terminal 1 on arrival into Zurich. The lounge offers showers, toilets, newspapers, drinks, fruit and snacks. Swiss TravelClub members as well as Business and First Class passengers can use the lounge free of charge, while Economy Class passengers pay approx USD20.

SWISS offer one way and return economy and business class fares to Europe from New Zealand with both NZ and QF. Contact either Travelair or SWISS for further information.



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