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Autumnal musings...

Autumn “*..season of mists and mellow fruitfulness*” as the poet said... seems suddenly noticeably with us. The goldfinches are nibbling on the rosemary flowers - we don't see them in summer. The hawthorn berries are crimson along the country road-sides - and I think they are safe this season as we're running out of time to schnapps them. The feijoas and quinces are perfuming the fruit bowl. Over in Masterton at Easter, the huge old European trees were in brilliant colour. And - our other symbol of autumn - our “leaving Kapiti” checklist is lying on the table! The trees turning colour in Switzerland's autumn is always something we notice with mixed emotions; it signals time to get out the “leaving Altenrhein” checklist there, and take the tree-viewing trips to where we know the colours will be intense and the air crisp. We “top and tail” the two parts of our lives with autumn.

Even without the journey, autumn does always seem like a time for reflection - for looking back, as Spring is for looking forward. Our Easter had a lot of that. It was a packed-with-occasion family affair. On Good Friday we gathered in the lovely old Clareville Cemetery north of Carterton, to place my mother Rhoda's ashes in the family plot. That plot goes back to my father's great grandparents, so there's a real sense of continuity there.

Isn't it interesting to reflect on place and identity. When we've had several relationships, who do we want to lie alongside for eternity? When we've lived in different parts of the world, where do we want to end up? And, especially for us women, when we merge our family lines in life, which family plot feels like ours in death? Such are the thoughts of autumn.

Then the celebration! Easter Saturday was my father's 90th

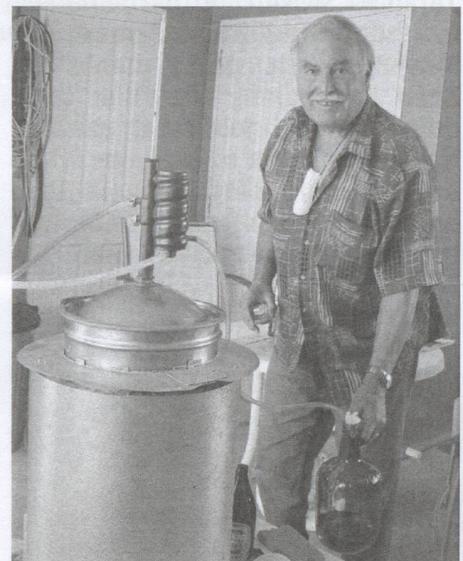
birthday. We surprised Alf by ferrying him to a “Birthday Bus” - suitably decorated - which carried us all around parts of the Wairarapa that had been significant in his life. I don't think the good folk of the Mangaterere Valley have ever seen a 45-seater bus negotiating its way up that narrow road, which we used to drove the dry stock up each autumn (yes, autumn again) and back down each spring.

Max Fuhrer will remember that road well. Until Max told me at a Swiss Club evening, I never knew he and I had a “family connection”. When he was a young cheese maker at the Dalefield Factory Max used to go “up the gully” with my grandfather and father to mill timber from the hill farm for Alf's father's new house in Kapiti. That was hard labour, cutting rimu and matai and rewarewa up on the steep hills, and milling it down on the flat. The post-war restrictions on truck cartage were still in force, so Alf used to truck the timber over the Rimutakas and over the Akatarawa Hill road to Kapiti by dead of night.

That story - and many many more - were told as the Birthday Bus travelled. It made me think how important it is to create the opportunities for swapping stories. The great-grandchildren on the bus heard things that were from a past that seemed so distant it could have been a foreign land. And imagine the sensation when the whole bus-load of us delivered Alf to register for the Dalefield Men's Hockey Club 100th Anniversary - which formed the third celebration of the weekend.

Another autumn tradition - schnappsing! Mani set up his still in the garage, and no fellow resident's sensitive nose was offended, as far as we know. This year's cherries have produced more lovely kirsch, and a crop of purple beaks on the pukekos! After the cherries had given up their alcohol, Mani poured them

as a mulch around the fruit trees. The pukekos went berserk! They rushed from fruit tree to fruit tree, picking up the fruit with their feet and eating the pulp off, but even such elegant eaters as the pukekos can't avoid getting purple mouths with cherries.



The re-engineered still, flowing beautifully

To add glory to glory, we've now poured quince syrup into some of the kirsch to make a liqueur redolent of autumn.

Now - here's a puzzle to finish with. The other day I was looking at the bottom of a shampoo container, to check its recycling status. Embossed in the plastic was the word “hope”. Outside the bathroom, the radio was full of doom and gloom - but in the shower-stall, the shampoo was saying “hope”. I looked at a *dusch crème* container we'd brought from Switzerland. Same message. I thought - perhaps it's Palmolive's message to the world. Ah, but the Wella shampoo says it too, and the Sunsilk - and they're different manufacturers. Perhaps it's connected to the recycling symbol, I thought...but it's not on various other brands of bathroom concoctions. Whatever the reason, don't you love the message!

Next bulletin - from Altenrhein!