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We drove up to Te Puke to visit my father a couple of weeks ago, and that set me thinking about story-tellers. You know the kind of person. They can sit quietly, and then at an appropriate moment, say: "That reminds me of when..." and launch into an apt little anecdote. You can tell it's a story that's been told a few times before, because it's polished with use, and comes to a perfectly phrased conclusion that leaves you smiling and nodding with recognition at the human truth it tells.

Those stories are precious. They remind us of family history, they tell us about the things that matter enough to be told over and over - because they're sad, or funny, or typical of someone, or typical of the time.

My father's not one of those story-tellers. He's always been more of a do-er than a talker. But now he's proudly into his 90's we've been setting out to record the things he remembers - the stories that could well die with him because they've not become part of our family repertoire of "do you remember when" stories. Getting them written down starts to become a bit urgent!

I guess there are things about how and when people get together to talk that mean some people are practised story-tellers - and the re-telling of the stories fixes them in memory, and shapes them into a little art-form. For others, they need someone else to talk with, and the conversation sparks more and more stories.

I set a recorder going when Jack Herzog (remember him from Wellington and Hamilton in the 60's? - he's in Vancouver now) visited. Jack and Mani were talking in Altenrhein, and the recorder captured six hours of reminiscences. They're all my favourite stories about the City Band playing at the Rheineck railway station when Jack and Mani left - and the early experiences of the young adventurers in a (very!) strange land.

Ruth Waldvogel in Waikato was telling me there's a group of Swiss who came out together on the Dutch ship Sibajak in 1957 - and they've been getting together for reunions on an increasingly frequent basis. They're doing that again soon - and wouldn't you love to hear that story-telling!

With all that in mind, I've *almost* decided to make a book of the stories of Swiss coming out to NZ. It's a scary thing to write that down. Psychologists say that if you're really going to make a resolution, you have to tell others about it. Then it gets too embarrassing not to carry through. Or perhaps it's that saying you're going to do it means people set out to help.

A case in point: I've been talking with Joan Waldvogel, who made some oral history recordings of Swiss folk in Taranaki and Wellington a few years

back. She's put those in the Turnbull Library, so they're preserved for the future, and we think we might be able to help each other to both complete our writing projects.

Joan is a different family to Ruth, but Ruth was able to point me in Joan's direction because Joan had taught one of Ruth's children in Wellington more than 20 years ago ... don't you just love how connections work?

Anyway, if you're of that generation who came out in the 50's and 60's, or perhaps your parents did and you've got their stories... you might like to get in touch, and add to my psychological pressure to get on with it! Carolyn.lane@vodafone.net.nz will get me.

Meantime - it's the run-up to Christmas again already. We've got our choir together for European Carols in the Soundshell in Wellington - a great collection of Swiss Club members and German friends - and we're tuning up our vocal chords. There's plenty of motivation to join in - from remembering the familiar Christmas songs and all the times we've sung them in different places and with different people; the pleasure of singing with a group; the conversation and catching up that goes on between numbers - and not least, there's famous suppers!

There are other signs of the time of the year too - a while ago we planted three chestnut trees, and they're flowering now. Mani and I are not convinced there's an after-life ...

but if there is, his version of heaven is a large ever-flowering chestnut tree in an ever-flowing beer garden. Insurance policy against no after-life: sit and lie under chestnut trees now!

The swallows are back on the lake, swooping around and scooping up insects. The Canada geese are flying noisily in and swimming around looking very handsome, and for the first time we've had a white-faced blue heron come visiting.

I remember when the swallows and blue heron had just started to establish themselves in New Zealand, having flown/blown over from Australia. It must have been the late 1950's and early 60's. That was of course just the time a lot of Swiss arrived too - but in the Wairarapa we kids weren't as concerned with spotting *those* exotic migrants as we were with collecting the evidence about the strange new birds.

Interesting to think about our accidental and intentional arrivals. Some enrich our lives. Others, like PSA in the kiwifruit orchards which were looking so lush when we were up in Te Puke just a while ago, are a threat. And the way that we accommodate some, embrace others, and try to reject those we don't want is the story of a small new country growing up. Isn't it great to be part of making *that* story!



Canada geese