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Where to start? The wonderful thing about thinking back over a month to work out what to share with you in Helvetia is how the impressions flood in. Last month, it seemed to be a lot about change. This month, it's more about the energy people have for continuing with things that give them pleasure and define what communities are about.

Some examples...

- a local Art exhibition, with painters and sculptors and a character of a wood worker who had us sampling his schnapps while we enjoyed his quirky work. Inspired, Inge (who is a fine artist) and Margrit and I (who are not) created a couple of collaborative canvases. A lot of laughter, paint up to our elbows, and we reckon we'll be exhibiting next time!

- an evening at a characterful old Heiden hotel with an Appenzeller yodelchörli. Audience participation was invited for *Talerschwingen* - that's when

a coin (the old "taler") is kept rotating in a *schüssel* (wide-mouthed ceramic bowl), and creates a wonderful sustained sound to accompany the singing. Think of plate-spinning - or maybe hula-hooping - it takes constant



subtle movement to keep the coin in motion. Mani took quite a bit of video, so anyone who'd like a touch of Appenzell entertainment later in the year, tell us when we get home.

- much bigger example - the Eidgenössische Musikfest in St Gallen. You've never seen so many brass bands! Indeed it was said to be the largest such gathering in the world, with 522 *Musikvereine* (local music societies) represented. We'd enjoyed some of them in the streets on Friday night when we'd gone in for the opera in the Kloster at St Gallen (another stunning Verdi production) - then on Saturday we sat down in a huge circus tent for more. The thing was - these were thousands of amateur players getting together for the joy of making music and entertaining their communities, as they've done for years. It took Mani back to playing first trumpet in the Rheineck city band so many years ago - and the hazards of marching across uneven ground with your trumpet to your lips!

- another huge example - friend Margrit is participating this week in a Gymnastics tournament in Lausanne - again said to be the largest such gathering in the world. We watched on TV last night - local gymnastic clubs (and some from overseas too) doing

splendidly choreographed routines designed to suit their very mixed memberships. All sorts and ages of folk, energetically participating. It reminded us of nephew Martin's wedding a few years ago. They were involved with the local gymnastic club, so the club came to the pre-wedding party and did a side-splittingly funny routine on the parallel bars.

- a small impromptu example. One of our neighbours here in Altenrhein is "chief accordionist" for our small community's *fests* (like 1 August). He had a musician friend around for the afternoon - so suddenly the outdoor tables and chairs from all the neighbours are dragged out into the driveway, and it's party-time! Everyone's singing - and some are dancing. Instant community spirit. A side-light to this story ...the unintended amusements of singing! You know how it is when you learn a song by singing along ... and you can't always hear all the words, so you sing what you think the words must be ... and much later you find you've been singing something the composer never wrote? (There's now even a word for those unintended words - "mondegreen".) Well, there are also problems in singing what you've read in a foreign language. At this impromptu party, the guy with the microphone was doing a spirited version of "Achey-breaky Heart" ... but of course he'd read the words rather than heard them - so it came out "ark-y breaky heart". I just smiled and quietly enjoyed it, and wondered what incredible manglings I produce when I sing along in *Switzerdütsch* at such events!

- a one-woman example. Bruno Böckli (remember him from Auckland in the late-sixties, early-seventies?) came to lunch along with Hans Küng (Wellington Swiss Club when he's in NZ). Lunch was full of reminiscences and laughter, and our admiration for these guys, who are in training for their next trek. Anyway, Bruno was saying that in his community, there's a woman who has done the 11am bell-ringing every day for the last umpteen years. Of course the 11am bells are vital: they're the ones that tell the women it's time to come in from the fields and prepare the midday meal. Though maybe that function's passed, the bells must still ring out. Of course I'd assumed automation... but at least in one place, no, it's still a community-preserving voluntary personal contribution. That's heart-warming, and seems "so Swiss", just like our neighbour who we saw planting his radishes the other day, measuring out the distance between the rows and between the seeds to get them "just so".

So many people, all busily involved in putting their spare time to doing things that they love, and things they share with others, and things that the rest of us can also get involved in (because every performer needs an audience too!)

Heavens, the end of the page, and I've not told you about our Greek Islands Cruise. Consider yourself saved from a travelogue. Now, are you *sure* you wouldn't like to see the slide-show? It's only 7 hours long... only joking!