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Rubrik: Carolyn Lane

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After every party, there's always the dishes to do - and after every holiday in "Feierabend", there's always the pack-out and clean-up process. She's sitting in the drive now, with Mani waxing the paint-work so we won't feel so cruel leaving her standing outside through the winter winds and rains.

Actually "pack-out and clean-up" seems to be the theme of the moment. I've just been helping my father move out of his home into a more supported environment. As a family, we thought we'd been doing quite well getting rid of "stuff" over the years, but when it actually comes down to it, there's so much accumulated over time.

Which raises the question of "what's really precious?" What must we keep even if no-one really wants to take it home, because future generations could be really cross that we dumped it? And what might matter to them? Is it Nana's crystal? Or those heaps of photo albums? Worse still - the boxes of slides without the projector to view them?

And how must it be for people whose "family treasures" are largely on the other side of the world? Mani has brought over just a couple of things in his life-time, so for his children those are likely to be in the "you WILL take these and treasure them" category.

For those of us who are noticing time passing, and old friends passing on, deciding what to preserve suddenly becomes more urgent. My sister Ruth has taken on the task of digitising the old slides. I'm digitising Mani's videos. And when we met up with Jürg and Ursi Stucki on our travels - yes - he is digitising a treasure trove of old films including Swiss Club activities decades ago. The joy is that, once the hard work of conversion is done, it's so easy to make copies and share them.

Catching up with Jürg and Ursi was such fun - and they also had Annamarie Schweizer from Mata-mata visiting - so you can imagine how the stories flowed. Those of you who know Jürg and Ursi will also be able to imagine how good the *Gugelhopf* was!

Other travelling pleasures

Lake Taupo cruise to see the Māori rock carvings. Sometimes we need to give ourselves permission to be tourists in our own country.

Waikite Valley Thermal Pools. We'd not visited them before, but, put off by the queues pouring into Wai-o-tapu, we went up the valley opposite and - serendipity - they're now in our "top 3 pools".

Matakana Island. We took our bikes across on the ferry and explored. Though so close to Tauranga, it is a different world! Just the one shop ("Toot if you want something.") Eating our ice-creams on the bench outside, we watched a car pull up with a very young-looking driver. Driving lesson, we thought. He climbed out through the sunroof (non-opening door). Hmm - about 12 years old. His passenger scooted across and moved the car up a little further. But, no driving tutor that one - he'd

have been about 10! Mail collected, in through the sunroof, and off they drove.



Matakana Island Transport

Forgotten World Highway. This is the road from Taumarunui to Stratford - and from the present into the past. It's one of those roads where the unrealised dreams of the settlers who struggled to create farms out of nothing nudge you from the roadside. Signposts tell the stories of the days when ships came right up the river to supply those farmers and take the hard-won produce out - and near-abandoned towns tell the stories of the railway workers who put through the tracks that finished off the shipping.

Tawhiti Museum outside Hawera. One man with a talent and a vision has created this extraordinary way of illustrating Taranaki history through combining artefacts and finely made models. And he's attracted others - another guy's collection of 70-plus tractors includes Taranaki's unique box-thorn hedge cutting machines. They're like a huge mechanical equivalent of Ned Kelly's helmet - riveted plates of iron armour on Bren gun chassis. Earlier, I'd been wondering at the box-thorn hedges - some huge, and others cut-to-the-skeleton. The farm-made machines were a wonderful "aha!"

Tawhiti Museum has given new life to an old dairy factory. Another old factory north of New Plymouth is a marvellous brewery. But there are so many, the decaying evidence of change ... the Natural Gut String Factory, Taranaki Clothing Co... that it reminded us of the huge derelict factories of eastern Europe.

Other impressions of Taranaki

- huge old hydrangeas are still holding out against the aggressions of the agapanthus at many farm gates and fence-lines. Swiss friends paying a fortune for hydrangeas at the garden centre and florists would be drop-jawed!

- more dairy herds with their tails intact - or only lightly trimmed. While I've sympathised with farmers in milking pits not wanting a face-slap with a filthy tail, I've sympathised too with the cows waving an ineffectual stump at flies.

Bother! - the end of the page, so my turn to take over the bus-clean-up!