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Swiss-Kiwi Stories: Peter and Cora Vogel By Susie Wood

A slice of Ticino in Henderson

A motor home with an interior resembling a Swiss chalet, beautiful wood carvings, hand crafted alphorns and a philosophical approach to life – these are the “trade marks” of a unique couple in the Auckland Swiss club: Peter and Cora Vogel. They are often present at the Swiss farm and sell their wares at the Swiss market, standing out with their big smiles and hearts. It was finally time to find out more about this special couple and they generously agreed to share their story.

Peter is one of the few Society members hailing from the Ticino. Born in 1936 to parents from the canton of Berne in the Swiss-German part of Switzerland, he grew up in the village of Magadino at the top of Lago Maggiore. Peter’s father was a wholesale trader in meats, cheeses and other goods, sometimes travelling into Italy.

Peter was the middle one of three children, with an older brother Hansueli (John) and younger sister Susi (Katharina Susanna). In Magadino, Peter attended primary and intermediate schools, and then secondary school in nearby Vira, walking there and back for half an hour four times a day. He did not like school

much, especially disliked numbers, but loved his Saturdays when he attended “design” (art) at which he excelled: First inklings of his artistic talent.

Although his talents were recognised, Peter was not able to go to art school in Lugano. Instead, he undertook “avviamento” (work training) in Bellinzona, followed by an apprenticeship to become a cabinet maker at the firm Piaggi Furnera in Locarno, commuting by ferry from Magadino. The firm’s talented master cabinet maker helped Peter become a skilled craftsman – something he really appreciated. He later worked for a couple of years at the Oerlikon Maschinenfabrik near Zürich, interspersed with his military training in Fribourg and Payerne, which he thoroughly enjoyed.

Growing up in the Ticino in a Swiss German family was not easy. Although the children were fully integrated into the Ticinese life style, the parents never quite felt at home. The Ticinese of the times could be parochial and did not easily welcome newcomers into their communities. Visits to relatives in the canton of Berne were rare, as it was a significant journey and relatives were

always busy. This situation led to some unhappiness and tension in the family.

It was this situation which prompted Peter and his brother John to consider leaving home and the Ticino. Having heard about New Zealand from a couple of cousins who had already emigrated (Hans and Ernst Gilgen), John and later Peter both took fate into their hands and emigrated as well, John in 1955 and Peter in 1957. They soon settled in, with Peter earning his living as a cabinet maker. Marriage and two sons – Jerry and John - followed. Brother John and Peter bought a large property in Henderson in West Auckland some 50 years ago, where the “Vogel community” settled with their respective families and remain to this day. Their parents had a try at emigrating to New Zealand, but it was not quite right for them.

Life was not easy at times. Peter’s first marriage did not work out. He lost his younger sister Susi, and tragically also his younger son John, his daughter-in-law and young grandchild in a car accident. Peter ended up caring for his two surviving young grand children. These memories bring Peter great sadness to this day. However, he appreciates having these grandchildren on his land today, as well as his older son Jerry and his family at Bethells Beach.



Happiness also came along. Peter found a soul mate in the lovely Cora from Davao, Mindanao in the Phillipines, to whom he has been married to for 24 years. The youngest in a harmonious and closely-knit family with five siblings, Cora gave Peter the courage and inspiration to create a new life. On some spare land on the Vogel estate, he built their Ticinese haven "Orgnana", named after a small village above Magadino. Stone by stone, timber by timber, he lovingly created a Ticinese cottage, large covered pergola with abundant grapes, and of course workshops where he can attend to his passion of wood working. He cannot enter the New Zealand bush without spotting a piece of timber or a branch – preferably curved – on which he can make his impression.

Entering Orgnana is like being "helicoptered" to the Ticino and one of its grottos. It is filled with Peter's creative pieces, testament to his great artistic talent. He loves cooking on his mother's old stove from the Ticino which he imported after she passed away, although these days he has to be bit watchful what he eats. In his pergola, the wine barrel brews away. Of course, grappa is always on the agenda, as is "Nocino", a grappa liqueur infused with walnut.

Peter's heart definitely is still implanted in the Ticino, as is Cora's in the Phillipines. Both miss their childhood homes acutely, but find companionship in dealing with this. Peter walks up the road to visit his brother John where together they contemplate their lives – a conversation that is ongoing. He spends time carving another piece of wood or

playing one of his many handcrafted alphorns. The couple trundles around Auckland in their cozy campervan, occasionally venturing further afield – maybe to Ahipara up North for a spot of fishing. Cora is Peter's rock, always there with a beautiful smile, taking care of Peter and managing the essentials of life. She is the "technology-savvy" of the two and has good computer skills

– essential for keeping in touch with her large family. Peter has managed to get back to Switzerland occasionally, the first time after 30 years in New Zealand and once with Cora. There have been visits to the Phillipines, too.

It was inspiring to spend an afternoon with Peter and Cora at Orgnana, and we thank them very much for their hospitality and openness.

Farewell to Swiss Ambassador Marion Weichelt Krupski

The Swiss Society, on behalf of its members, extends grateful thanks to Swiss Ambassador Marion Weichelt Krupski for her service in New Zealand.

We have appreciated the Ambassador's approachability, thoughtfulness and innovation during her time in New Zealand. This includes of course her diplomatic activities on behalf of the Swiss Government, but also services provided to Swiss people in New Zealand. Many of us have been able to meet the Ambassador at the various functions she held and attended, and to take advantage of the Mobile Passport Unit touring around New Zealand. Most recently, we enjoyed the celebrations on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Swiss-New Zealand diplomatic relations, including the creative YouTube series about outstanding Swiss-Kiwi personalities. We also thank the Ambassador for the many speeches and articles she provided for the Helvetia magazine, giving us a greater understanding of her professional role and views.

We wish Marion and her family the very best for the future and her next appointment.



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