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Obituaries



Niklaus Brunner

October 1927 – 23 December 2014

Niklaus Fridolin Brunner was born in Zuzwil/SG. He died in Matamata. Niklaus went to school in Zuzwil and Wil. Then he did an apprenticeship as a Cheese maker which he followed up with his Masters Diploma. After working in Switzerland, Holland and Denmark he moved to New Zealand in 1961. His first job was with the Matamata Cheese factory where he stayed until it closed.

In 1969 he became a New Zealand citizen and in 1971 he got married to Brunhilde Zingerle. In 1973 his daughter Helen was born, followed in 1975 by his son Nikolaus Paul. He was a very happy and great dad. He had many friends and a personality that got on with everybody. So far I have not met anyone who didn't like Niklaus. He had very close Swiss friends in and around Matamata and was well known to the members of the Swiss Club in Hamilton.

Niklaus died of Asbestosis. He suffered quite badly in the last 6 weeks before he died. He got a lung infection, was hospitalised twice but at the end his compromised lung just couldn't fight it anymore. Niklaus left behind a very sad family. He is sadly missed by his wife Brunhilde, children Helen, Nik and Catherine and the grandchildren Nia, Rhiannon and Alys.

The family would like to say thank you to all the Swiss friends that came to the funeral and have contacted us since.

Brunhilde Brunner



Ruth Messmer

10 September 1921- 15 May 2014

Ruth Martha Sulz was born on 10 September 1921 in Seebach, Zürich, where she was also raised. She was an identity of the Wellington Swiss Club spanning several decades, a founding member with her husband, Hans Messmer, in 1957, and Treasurer for half a century. Her grip on the Club finances and her eye for savings were legendary, and provided for the alteration of Max and Rosina Fuhrer's chicken shed in Ohariu Valley into the clubrooms in the 1970s, and later, for the Club to become a substantial shareholder in the current premises in Moore's Valley, Wainuiomata.

Ruth met Hans when his family moved to the area and he joined her class at school when they were around 10 years old. Ruth was the more confident one; she used to make Hans blush by embarrassing him, but at that time she already liked something about him. As teenagers they started dating and joined a ski club, which they loved and were very active in. As young adults, they lost touch for a year because Hans moved to the French-speaking part of Switzerland for his hairdressing career. As fate would have it, the day he arrived back at Zürich railway station, he stepped off the train, and by accident bumped straight into Ruth – a story she enjoyed telling in her later years – it was always meant to be!

Ruth and Hans married, and then emigrated to New Zealand in 1951. Hermann Schlatter was by all accounts the only serious women's hairdresser in Wellington and recruited his staff from Switzerland. Schlatter's was the place where the wives of Ambassadors and prominent businessmen had their hair done, in the permanent waves and curls of the post-war era.

Hans was bonded for four years and when that time was up, Hans and Ruth bought their own salon, with several employees. For the next few decades, the Messmer salon prospered, in the building next to the Majestic picture theatre in Willis St. Ruth was a great support, as receptionist, in customer relations and general background work. That year, 1955, they moved into their new house with great views in Seatoun, where they were

hospitable to all-comers, especially to new arrivals from Switzerland. This was a time when the journey by ship was a six-week ordeal; Wellington would have been almost like another planet.

Certainly, it was with the Swiss Club that Ruth became best known by Swiss abroad all over New Zealand. As Treasurer, she attended many Society AGMs - she was the person of the Wellington Club everyone knew. Ruth has been described as "the most trustworthy, meticulous treasurer imaginable, always looking for savings that would benefit the club". When paid once for something and asked to keep the change, she said that would never do, the books would not balance.

Ruth was always very interested in classical music and from an early age played the piano. At Christmas time, she accompanied the carol singing on the piano. She was also an accomplished chess player and played the national card game, Jassen, very well.

In 1961 Hans and Ruth had a son, Bernard, and for many years he became the focus of her life. In due course, Tess, her beloved granddaughter, gave her a lot of joy. Ruth liked travelling, she did many trips with Hans overseas, always to Switzerland where she visited old and new friends, and in later years, to Canada to visit Tess and to India to see her son who lived there for a few years, taking a lively interest in his life and activities.

Ruth was a great organiser, very energetic and after the death of Hans in 1993 managed her houses, looked after the holiday home at Lake Tarawera, and in her eighties, had a house built on top of her very steep section to get an even better view and more sun.

Eventually, old age, and indifferent health made life on the hilltop too difficult for comfort, and she moved to an apartment in a retirement village in Paraparaumu, where she was near Bernard and his partner Amanda, who were great company and help to her in the last few years. She died there peacefully on 15 May 2014.

Contributed by Andre Schleicher, Lotti Napp and Bernard Messmer

The Swiss Society and Clubs extend heartfelt sympathies to the families and friends concerned.