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What does 'Heimat' mean to you ?

The first of August celebration was just a few days after I returned from my recent trip to Switzerland. On that day, between all of those 1st August wishes and "happy birthday Switzerland" comments someone posted a photo on my Facebook page which said 'Heimat'. I had a bright smile on my face and was about to post a photo back from my new Heimat (NZ) but then I thought, well, what is Heimat actually? What's the meaning and where is it?

If you search for 'definition Heimat' on Google you will come across rather interesting answers like:

"Heimat is often considered a particularly German concept, because it does not have perfect semantic equivalents in many European languages (including English). Heimat refers to a place towards which one has a strong feeling of belonging, and (usually) a deep-rooted fondness. Most commonly this is one's native region, but it may also be that where one has lived for long, where one's family are, or where one feels at home for whatever reason...." (<https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Heimat>)

Or on Wikipedia it says: "A single definition does not exist. So for Bausinger home is a physically-social unit, medium range, in which man can find safety and reliability of its existence, and a place deeper trust..."

Ewww how dry, stiff and theoretical does that sound?! No Heimat-feelings arose when I read that definition! But then I found this note from a German pupil's work which said: "For me it is difficult to define 'home'. If you've never been away from home for a long time, you do not know what would be missing..."

Hmm... So is there even an answer for this question? And what do other people think about it? Well, let's find out I thought, and so I started asking friends and family here in New Zealand and also back in Europe what does the word *Heimat* mean to them and where is *Heimat* for you. The answers couldn't be more different and I tell you, you can't imagine what discussions arose from there!?

Feedbacks from Swissies who have lived their entire life in Switzerland and usually spend only their annual leave for a few weeks a year outside the country were short and simple like "Heimat is where I feel comfortable and where my loved ones are" or "Home is where my

people are and where the land of my family is".

Then there are those friends with family living abroad and/or went travelling in the past. Their answers were "Heimat? Hmmm difficult question... I think there are many places you can feel connected to, but it's definitely a place where you feel welcome" or "as a former Globetrotter I have to say: Home is where you feel comfortable and secure!"

And then last but not least: comments from us who have left Switzerland for many different reasons - some of us left the old *Heimat* just a few months ago; others have been living here for many years already.

Henry: "Heimat is where a shooting range is ..." and then added: "I believe that the meaning of Heimat can change, especially with us immigrants... Once our parents, family and friends move further in the background and our new place of living is accumulating new friends and families the meaning of Heimat will change location."

Laskarina: "The sweetest home is your heart; it's the place that taught you to breathe, thrive, and be your best self wherever in the world you find yourself to be during your journey..."

I myself say Switzerland is where I arose from, where my roots are and here is now the place where I grow and mature – both places feel like home – just in a different way...

Christmas is not far off. And I do not know how some of you feel, but for me, for example, growing up with 'white Christmas', mulled wine, candles everywhere and an advent calendar, I still can't get in the right Christmas mood here. That is absolutely fine by me because I won't be getting home sick while sunbathing on the beach! There are things that just feel right in the old Heimat... What probably leads to the conclusion that home is built up only and solely on feelings and cannot be easily defined in words. So, what's *Heimat* for you?

In this spirit I wish you a Merry Christmas and a happy New Year

Alex Beskid-Jung

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