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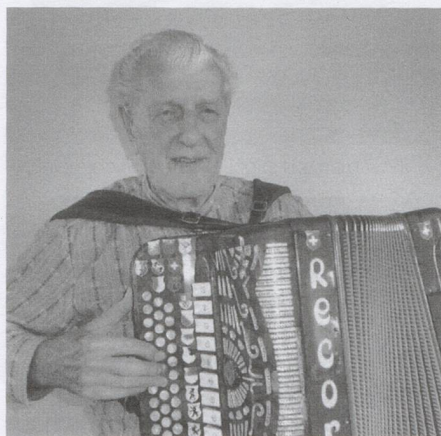
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Swiss-New Zealand life histories: Emil Tellenbach

How do you fit or reduce down someone's story into one page, while also portraying the love and passion it is lived with? Especially a personality such as Emil Tellenbach's.



Emil was born in 1932 and grew up in Aadorf, the youngest of 6 boys – his older sister who he never met, died of an accident at age 3. His father was a carpenter who acted as schoolteacher when there was a need. His mother was a dedicated mother and housewife. He witnessed the second world war as a young boy and remembers clearly how sparse food was and hearing planes flying in the distance and bombs being dropped over the German border. He was also quite conscious of his working class roots from an early age. It may have been that which spurred him into his ambitious sporting career. Running was in his blood, he felt, and he joined his brother in the decathlon competitions. Wherever he was as a young man, he was always part of the athletics club and always at the forefront of competitions. The most advances were achieved when he joined TV-Unterstrass in Zurich, where he achieved a stunning 48:8 seconds for 400m and 1:49:6 minutes for 800m. He represented Switzerland in many European Nation meets with top results, mainly in 400m and 800m running, and relay competitions. At the peak of his career his training times were better than those of the top Swiss runner at the time, Bruno Galliker. He trained for the European Championship in 1962, but an old injury crept up in his knee and cut his endeavours short.

Emil trained as a fitter/welder/locksmith at the iconic company Sulzer in Winterthur (their office block, now not used by them any more, towered over the city and could be seen from far and wide) and later expanded his skills to heating

installation specialist. After a time working for Sandoz in Basel as group leader for various high pressure installations, his work took him to Würenlingen. In 1957 he was employed as the first fitter-welder by the Swiss Institute for Reactor Research. Special welding skills were necessary for this and of course Emil took on the challenge and perfected the technique. While working on site he lived in Bad Zurzach where he met a group of people who led him onto his next project. Part of a 52-people group who shared their skills he built his own house, in his spare time. He also started his own business, Tellba, which contracted a service in specialised welding. At the same time he managed his own Sport and Shoe shop in Bad Zurzach. He took up soccer again and joined the local club, also a yodel group in which he took part in many singing and theatre performance. Here in Zurzach he made a name for himself as a smart businessman, member of sports clubs and entertainer. This name still echoes as Telli the legend, in the region.

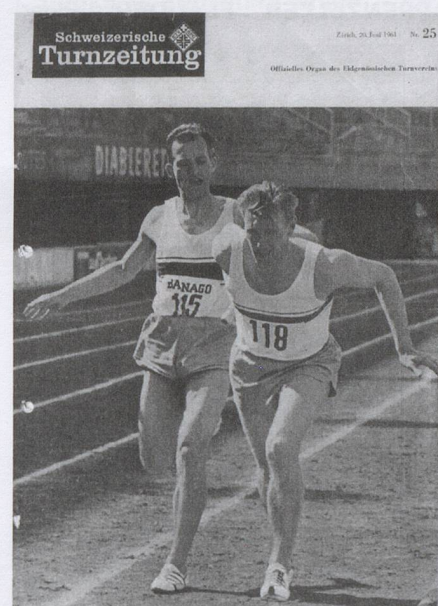
One of his many acquaintances drew his attention to New Zealand, and after a reconnaissance trip, at 45 years of age, he sold up his house in Switzerland and sailed on the Oriana to the other side of the world, where thanks to his skills and business sense he soon established himself, managing a sports shop, and joined the Swiss Club. For a few years he acted as president and in 1982 was accepted as a bass singer of the Swiss Kiwi yodel group. In between he managed to travel widely in North America, Asia and Australia. He ended up living 2 years in Perth and travelled by campervan around Australia. With his accordion he founded a "Oberkrainer" band and their swinging rhythms and uplifting music was in great demand for many years at events throughout the country. The joint business venture with his Swiss mate Nick, which was the reason for his emigration and involved technology in the commercial fishing industry, never came off the ground, as the latter, just on the point of making his move to New Zealand, died as a result of a brain haemorrhage. For some years Emil worked in an engineering firm which developed wine bottling technology. For the last ten years of his working career he worked for himself as a property developer.

Though he never had a family here in New Zealand, Emil has a grown son,

Heinz, back in Switzerland, who he regularly visits. In 1992 he met the love of his life, Noleen, who is his friend and companion, and with whom he shares all his travels around the world, from China to Stockholm, Australia to Italy, and always back to his homeland Switzerland to catch up with his brothers and friends. He celebrated his 80th Birthday in the Zurich suburb of Hoengg – "Auf der Weid", in 2012.

Whenever I catch up with Emil, be it at one of the Club events or in the health shop where I work (uhuh, he does!) I am always inspired by his wide knowledge and interest in all matters of life. And he has the interests of the Swiss community in New Zealand at heart. One very important task he feels obliged to fulfil is to teach someone how to play his accordion.

Trudi Fill-Weidmann



Swiss champion in the 4x100, 4x200 and 4x800 relay. Here with Bruno Galliker handing over the baton.

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