

Zeitschrift: Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand
Herausgeber: Swiss Society of New Zealand
Band: 85 (2019)
Heft: [3]

Artikel: Lina Rufer
Autor: Rufer, Anna
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-943850>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 18.08.2025

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

Lina Rufer

The following article serves as a life story as well as an obituary. I was a 7 year old girl travelling with my 5 brothers and our parents, Alice and Josef Arnold, on the same boat as Lina. As Editor of the Helvetia I approached Lina a few times in regards to her life story but she felt she had nothing to tell. On attending her funeral I felt that Lina had a story worth telling and the family has kindly supplied the following life story. At a time when NZ is in turmoil over Christchurch's terrorist attack of 2 mosques and immigration is once again in the headlines we see in this life story the complexities of language learning and the challenges of building a new life and retaining one's own culture while assimilating the culture of one's new homeland.- Ed.

Lina Langensand was born in Alpnach, Obwalden, Switzerland on the 3 January 1933, the eldest child of 5 children of Franz Langensand and his wife Wilhelmina Bieler. Her parents were quite old when they married (50 and 37) as Franz had spent many years with his twin brother in the goldmines of Sacramento California and Wilhelmina had refused to go with him, but rather preferred to wait until he returned home. Times were tough growing up during the war, and the family supplemented Wilhelmina's income, as what would best now probably be called a Karitane Nurse, by raising rabbits, growing their own vegetables, and foraging for berries in the mountains. Lina says her mother always knew where to find the best blueberries, strawberries and cranberries, and the children would go out with her, sometimes sleeping in old haybarns whilst they gathered the bounty to bring home for pies and jams, and to preserve for the lean winter months. As the oldest she had plenty of family responsibilities, with meals to cook and stockings to darn, and she was 7 years old before she even discovered when her birthday was. Why did she need a birthday, she was asked, when she had just had Christmas?

Lina went to the convent school in Alpnach, and had a reputation as a bit of a clown, getting into trouble for making the class laugh at her antics, and after that getting the blame for trouble whether it was her fault or not. She then spent 2 years at secondary school.

She had thought she would like to be a hairdresser, but an Auntie discouraged her with tales of having to wash & cut



Lina with Alpnach church spire in background

dirty lice-infected hair! Instead she did a 2 year apprenticeship in a shop in the neighbouring town of Giswil, then 3 months at a training school near Basel before going to work in the "Consume" (or grocery shop) in Munchenbuchsee near Bern.

Lina's great passion has always been music so it makes sense that it was music that was to introduce her to her future husband Otto Rufer. In those days the main form of entertainment for young people was to go dancing, so of course Lina went dancing. Otto, a coppersmith by trade, happened to be playing the French Horn in the local band, and a

beautiful new face attracted his interest. He asked her to dance, and soon she was one of the family – spending many a Sunday lunch at his parent's place in Munchenbuchsee during their courtship.

After the "Civil" marriage service in Alpnach on the 9 May 1957, the church wedding took place at the Marienkirche (Bern) at 11am on 10 May 1957.

Marcus arrived in 1958, and Bruno in 1960. There are many photos of the happy young family during these years, with grandparents and cousins, and also with the family of a friend and work colleague of Otto's – Ernst Rust.

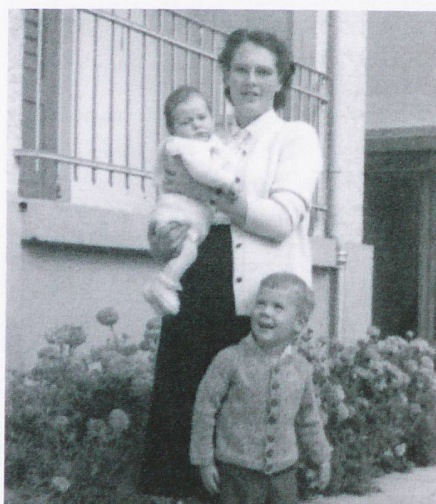
Ernst's brother Rinaldo Rust had recently returned to Switzerland full of enthusiasm for the wonders of life farming in New Zealand and Otto liked what he heard!

It is fair to say that Lina did not want to emigrate at all. They lived in a nice warm flat in Mannerdorf, on the shores of Lake Zurich. Otto had a good job and the company was good to the workers – paying them SF200 for every child born, and paying for a Xmas do every year. They had worked hard to save to get married, they were settled with their 2 children and Lina was content. Neither of them spoke English, and they did not even know where New Zealand was! However in those days the man made the decisions and the wife followed – and so Otto applied for entry to New Zealand, with the help of Rinaldo Rust found a job on a farm. Apparently Farming in New Zealand required a car so they then sold virtually everything they owned, including Otto's scooter to gather together enough money and Otto travelled to Zurich to purchase a 2nd hand English Austin A90 (which was right hand drive) and then quickly had to learn how to drive it!

The time came to leave, and on a very memorable Wedding anniversary (10 May 1961) the family of 4, all their worldly possessions - and Otto's parents who



Lina, Marie Louise and Franz 1937



Lina with the two boys Marcus and Bruno



Lina with Rinaldo and Gritli after arriving in NZ



Extended Rufer family in 1960

were coming to see them off - made the long journey to Amsterdam in the new car. They nearly missed the sailing for at some stage along the long night journey they made a wrong turn, and got hopelessly lost. Finally they were pulled over by police who told them they were heading to Denmark, and kindly escorted them back to the correct route. They finally arrived in Amsterdam at 4am. All passengers had to be aboard the ship Oranje by 8am.

The Rufer family occupied a 4-bunk cabin just above the waterline. They had their own window so they could look out over the water.

For Lina the sea voyage was a misery. She was seasick the entire time & found washing nappies a real trial. The Arnold family from Alpnach Stad was also on the same ship, and Otto whiled away many an hour playing Jass with them. Marcus (3 ½) was happy in the kindergarten, so Lina was left with baby Bruno, her seasickness and piles of dirty nappies! They arrived in Auckland at 8am on the 13th June 1961. The weather was terrible, what was to be the first day of 6 weeks of continuous winter rain - not at all like the stories they had been told back home! Rinaldo Rust and their new boss John Storey had come to Auckland to meet them and help bring their belongings to the farm. However the wharfies would not unload the ship in the rain so eventually it was decided that Otto & Rinaldo would stay in Auckland to wait for the car and belongings while John Storey took Lina and the children to Rinaldo and Gritli's home in Hamilton.

Gritli looked after the boys for a whole week while Lina cleaned - to make the farm cottage liveable. Even then they only concentrated on the rooms that they would be using. John Storey provided some wallpaper & Otto papered the walls in boys' room. The stove was the worst & there were 2 rats living in the warming drawer.

During the first year on Storey's farm Otto worked from 4am to 7pm. There was another farmworker, a Maori man nicknamed Kiwi. They had a very flash new 18-a-side herringbone cowshed. Otto was shocked to discover how much broken equipment was thrown away and on discovering Mr Storey possessed a welder took on the job of fixing it. He made an apple press so they could juice the apples which were left to rot on the ground in the orchards. He worked hard, but for very little money and after the first season found another farm job in Kio Kio near Otorohanga. Lina learnt how to milk as she was expected to help with the evening milking. No flash new cowshed here. They washed the cows' udders from a bucket of water. Again Otto's metalworking skills came to the fore and he convinced Mr Russell to purchase some pipes with which he rigged up a system of running water - no more buckets!! Farming life in New Zealand in the 1960's was hard work.

Lina had been teaching herself English courtesy of the newspaper and a German-English dictionary. Her written English became reasonably proficient, but due to the isolation of living on the farm she could still speak very little.

Marcus turned 5 and started school - without a word of English. The teacher sent him home with readers and Lina learned along with her son.

The family attended Mass at St Patrick's Catholic Church in Te Awamutu where they were good friends with the Marty family, and a number of Dutch families with whom they could also communicate. One day after Mass Lina asked Mrs Marty "why do people keep talking about cheeses? What have cheeses got to do with Our Lord?" After a moment it became clear: No - not "Cheeses" - we are praying to "Jesus"!

Aside from the Sunday excursions to church it was a lonely life for Lina, who was desperately homesick. In 1962 tragedy struck when their newborn daughter Yvonne died, then shortly after Bruno was badly burned with scalding hot water. For 6 weeks they had to visit the doctor to have the burns dressed, and Lina was shocked to see the rusty state of the doctor's scissors so after the first appointment she brought her own scissors with her. This really was the last straw for her so it was finally decided that they would look for a better paid job in Otto's metalworking trade and save up to return to Switzerland.

Mr Truscott of Truscotts NZ Ltd (later to become National Dairy) answered Otto's advertisement in the paper. That was the end of farming life and the Rufer family moved to Hamilton in 1963.

At this time farms were having to change to refrigerated milk vats and Truscotts were working hard to secure the contract to provide them. They were under pressure to get a prototype made by the deadline but all the instructions were in German and they were making little headway. Otto at this stage was just a lowly worker with barely any English but once he discovered what the problem was he convinced first his foreman and then the bosses that he could help by reading the plans and showing them how to build the vats. With his help they managed to meet their deadline, secure the contract and 3 or 4 months later Otto was promoted to foreman - despite still speaking very little English! Clearly Otto was no longer considering returning to Switzerland.

The family briefly lived in a flat until Mr Russell with whom the Rufers had stayed in touch generously offered to loan them the 20 pound deposit to buy a house of their own. With this and TWO mortgages the family bought a brand new 3 bedroom Beazley Home at 31

Lina Rufer

Carrington Ave, (with no carpet or vinyl) for the princely sum of 3300 pounds!

And so they were settled. The boys went to school, and Lina did house cleaning in Hamilton 4 mornings per week which covered the cost of food for the week.

Lina joined the Cathedral Choir and as she had a car took Maureen Gilchrist from up the road with her. They became close friends, and Maureen suggested that Lina remember 3 or 4 English words that she did not know the meaning of at each choir practice and then on the way home Maureen would explain them to her. And so Lina's English continued to improve.

In 1966 Susanne came along, and Lina was kept busy with sewing and knitting clothes for the family, and preserving the produce from their large veggie garden. In 1968 Lina's elder brother Franz offered to pay Lina's trip back to Switzerland. Lina was very excited but then discovered she was pregnant with Erica, who was born in April 1969, so it was not to be. Roland's birth in 1970 completed the family.

By this time the 3-bedroom house in Carrington Ave was bulging at the seams so the decision was made to lift the house up and build a large basement underneath. The family continued to live in the house while this was all going on beneath them - it was a bit precarious for a while, climbing up and down ladders to the "house" until the stairs were built!

With more room Lina started taking in students from the nearby Waikato University. She had a reputation for the best food, so there was no shortage of students to choose from and whilst it turned out NOT to be the hoped-for source of extra income the boarders quickly became part of the family.

Once there was a "Recipes with Honey" competition at the Home Show. Lina

said she would enter a recipe for Basle Lekerli. The hardest part was translating the recipe into proper English, but she must have got it right because after a long wait she received a phone call to say she had won the competition! The prize was 6 huge containers of honey - about 12 kg in total - and her photo in the newspaper!

In 1974 Otto came home one day with a colour TV and Lina was not at all happy with this extravagance. She had never got over her homesickness so in the end the decision was made that she would make a trip back to Switzerland when Roland started school. She was very excited to be going back home but on arrival she quickly realised that friends and family had moved on, and Lina started to feel homesick for New Zealand!

Lina and her sister-in-law, Erna, went on a bus trip from Lucerne to Rome, full of singing and fun and Lina captivated everyone with stories of New Zealand. They walked and walked in Rome - too scared to take the underground! - and whilst there who should she bump in to but Ron Kennedy from St Matthews parish in Hamilton, New Zealand! Small world!

In the end Lina was happy to return to New Zealand and was never homesick for Switzerland again!

In 1977 the family became Naturalised New Zealanders, having their certificates presented by the then Mayor of Hamilton Bruce Beetham.

Lina's greatest joy has always been music. One of her fondest childhood memories is of singing with her father at home when doing dishes. Lina cooked for the family when her mother was at work and she and her father sang together a lot at home.

She would have loved to learn to play a musical instrument but it was not possible. She always said if any of her children showed an interest she would allow them to learn. Susanne was very interested in playing the piano, but there was no room in the house for one, so Otto suggested she learn the accordion. It wasn't too big & could be stored under the big fish tank in the lounge! For a while Bruno also learnt and then Erica joined Susanne.

Lina enthusiastically followed and encouraged her daughters' musical talents, through competitions and exams, and extending to learning the



piano and playing the organ at St Matthews Church.

The family was growing up. Otto decided it was time to take early retirement and finally go back to visit Switzerland. Once the decision had been made he was very excited about it, biking the considerable distance from Silverdale to Te Rapa to work each day to "lose weight before the trip, as he intended to eat whatever he wanted whilst in Switzerland"! Tragically it was not to be. One morning at the end of May 1990 a car cut a corner and hit Otto who was on his bike. He died 1 June, at the age of only 57.

After Otto's death, along with her grandchildren, the Church became the most important part of Lina's life. She was an active member of the St Matthews parish for many years, being part of the flower arrangement and cleaning rosters, doing sewing and regularly had the priest over for dinner. Her strong faith helped her get through the tough times, and also give thanks for the good times.

Lina was a keen member of the Hamilton Swiss Club, and always enjoyed the club events, the music, playing cards and of course was more than a little partial to the traditional Swiss "goodies" (home baking)! Lina loved spoiling her 5 grandsons, and lasting memories of visits to Grossi will always be of being plied with pocketsful of "goodies" to take home.

On the 22 February 2019, Lina finally lost a lengthy battle with cancer, and slipped peacefully away to be with her Lord. She was 86. Rest in peace Grossi.

Anna Rufer

The Hamilton Swiss Club and the Swiss Society extend their condolences.

