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Vitus' Life Story



I was born in 1940 in Beckenreid, NW to parents Vitus Achermann & Brigitta Kaeslin, the eldest of 9 children. The house I was born in is over 300 years old and is still lived in by members of the family on my mother's side. We lived there for 3-4 years then as the family grew, we moved first to Ennetbuergen then to nearby Buochs for about 6 years. In 1952 our parents decided to build a house in Ennetbuergen which is owned now by my youngest brother Richard and his family. I started school in Buochs and the last 1 ½ years of primary school were spent in Ennetbuergen.

With my father being an unskilled labourer, there was never any spare cash so during school holidays my brother Bernhard & I used to be sent to my mother's brothers to help on their farms. During these so-called 'holidays' it was up at 6am or before to help Uncle Gotfried up on Klewenalp to get in the cows – which on foggy mornings could only be located by the sound of their bells – and then help with the milking. Later during haymaking, the hay was carried down in nets down extremely steep slopes. Every 2nd day we processed our milk and also that from the neighbouring alp; we also made butter and rounds of cheese. The churning of the butter after the evening milking was usually my job. We also went with Dad into the nearby forest to cut wood for the winter.

Secondary school was spent in Stans but not being of the studious type, I left after one year with my teachers' comments "could do better if he tried". I then decided to work for my uncles on a full-time basis – and get paid for it. After 18 months I left and went to work in Schneisingen AG where I did my agricultural apprenticeship and learnt how to become a farmer. My boss was very progressive with all the modern farm machinery of the time. That was a big change from the alpine farms where everything was done by hand. The farm was mixed with cows and various crops. I was there for 2 years then attended agricultural college in Pfaeffikon. Our chemistry teacher had spent some

time in Argentina and he was always telling us about Los Toldos which got me interested in immigrating. I spent two winters in Pfaeffikon; in between I was working for a few months in Stans on a dairy farm where my time was split between the alp and the valley farm. In between the farm work, we all enjoyed a great social life. There were five of us between 18 and 25 and we all enjoyed the local village dances as well as hikes up the local mountains.

In 1958, our family suffered the tragic loss of our mother at the early age of 46, with my youngest brother only 3 years old. I was 18 at the time and as I was working away from home, it did not have the same impact on me as it did my younger siblings and my sisters Marietta and Vreni took it in turns in the running of the household at aged 15 and 16. My youngest sister Elsbeth stayed at home for many years until she married later in life.

Schloss Sonnenberg in Stettfurt, TG became my next place of employment. The castle and farm then belonged to the Monastery of Einsiedeln which is now owned by an Austrian millionaire and has been under renovation for at least the last 15 years. The farm consisted of around 160 acres of which 100 were forest. I was in charge of two Oldenburger horses, Frida and Bella whose job it was to drag the logs out of the forest to the road. We were also busy cutting and carting firewood to the local bakery. One dark and foggy morning, there was a scary incident while carting the milk to the collection point. Frida missed her footing and slipped off the track. I managed to undo all the straps from buggy before she went further down the bank. Back on the track, she was re-hitched to the buggy and we carried on. While working there, I met Hans Rust who was the tractor driver, and I mentioned that I had thoughts of

immigrating and Hans expressed some interest. In fact, about 3 years later we were to immigrate together.



I did my army training in Payerne as an anti-aircraft gunner. I enjoyed my time in the army, regarding it as an annual holiday. In 1962 I also did several army marathons.

From there I went back to Schneisingen for a few months. I then became a tractor driver in Reinach AG; the farm was very spread out over a large area as the boss was leasing any available land and small plots as they became available. The livestock consisted of about 40 cows, young stock, pigs and the boss' army horse. The area was well-known for its cigar manufacturing and we also did quite a lot of contract work, carting the by-products from the factories. The farm also had a combine harvester which at the time were not widespread so I spent a lot of time driving the harvester during late summer and autumn. As opportunities for farming in Switzerland were very limited and considering I wasn't from a farming family, thoughts of immigrating were still uppermost in my mind and so I applied for a job in Canada as a tractor driver. But the job did not eventuate so I made enquiries as to where to go outside Europe for farming and was advised either New Zealand or Canada. I decided New Zealand was climatically better. I knew little about New Zealand and spoke no English before



Sampling during grape harvest

arriving in Wellington. Hans and I travelled on the "Northern Star" arriving in Wellington in June 1963. Looking back, I really have no idea how two ignorant, non-English speaking farmers managed to get from Switzerland to Southampton and catch the boat on time. But the lack of English was no barrier to us having a great time on board.

On arrival, I was 'lucky enough' to get work at Ruakura Agricultural Research Station near Hamilton – firstly in piggery research, then at No. 5 Dairy. I lived in the homestead with other workers and there I started to learn English. There were lots of young people and social events and it was there I met Rae who was working in the Diagnostic Department. We married in 1966 and travelled back to Switzerland where we spent about 8 months. I worked at the nearby Pilatus aeroplane factory for a few months. Then the urge to return to New Zealand took hold. But before we returned, we bought a Mini car and drove all around Europe, shipping it back home at the end of our travels.

We then worked for a year on a dairy farm just out of Matamata before taking on a sharemilking job in Turanga-O-Moana. We stayed there for 8 years, during which time our two daughters were born in Matamata, Sharon in 1968 and Corina 2 years later.

In 1976 we bought our small dairy farm in Woodward Road, Orini, milking about 110 cows. Later we bought a 54ha run-off in Kneebone Road which was very run-down and covered in tea-tree and blackberries. So several years of hard graft was spent developing the land and fencing it. Rae reared 120 bull calves each year (some bought in) so eventually we ran 100 18 month old bulls, 100 yearling bulls, 50 heifers and 50 heifer calves. For a number of years we employed Massey and Lincoln agricultural

students during their summer holidays which enabled me to develop the run-off and for us to get away for family holidays.

During that time, Rae was busy every weekend taking Sharon and pony to Gordonton Pony Club and also instructing at Tauhei Light Horse Club. She also attended a weekly Ladies Riding Group. In the 1980s we did a lot of multi-day tramps in New Zealand with friends, taking in all the major tracks in the North and the South Island. I also was a keen squash player and for 30 odd years enjoyed the fellowship of the Taupiri Squash Club.

The short and severe downturn of the 1980s found us financially stretched and under a lot of stress as we had just taken out a bank loan to buy the run-off. So it was a matter of tightening the belts while it lasted.

Both our daughters spent a number of years working in Switzerland so we had several visits to see them and enjoyed the many walks in the Swiss mountains. My youngest brother Richard came for a visit to New Zealand in 1976 and stayed for 10 years before returning back to Switzerland with his Samoan wife. Toni immigrated to Peru in 1980 where he has been very successful. Peter married a German lady and lives in Pullheim, Germany.

We sold the run-off in the early 90s and it was then converted into a dairy farm. About the same time we bought 25 ha from a neighbour so we could increase the herd to 180 cows.

In 1996 we put a contract milker on the farm for 4 years and we moved into Hamilton. We then employed a 50/50 sharemilker and after 3 years the farm was sold to a neighbour.

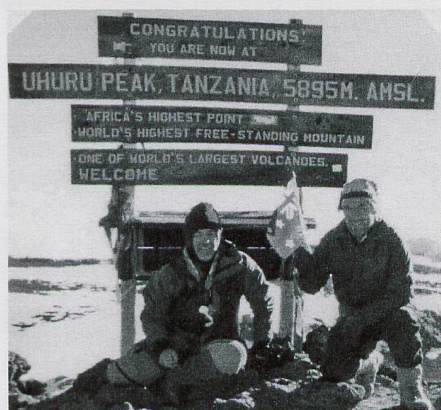
After moving into town, I became more actively involved in the Hamilton Swiss Club which kept me occupied on the committee, helping to run their various activities and the making of sauerkraut and the grating of cheese for the fondue, with the late Bert Fluehler's magnificent machine, became an annual event. I also made various types of schnapps in the back yard, to the benefit of Swiss club members and friends.

During my time at Ruakura I did Artificial Breeding training with Livestock Improvement and after we had moved into town I did a refresher course. For the next 23 years I had an AB run in the Hamilton area and the job also took us twice to Georgia, USA and for 7 years we worked in England for LIC. We usually worked for 6 weeks, after which we were able to travel extensively around England and Europe.

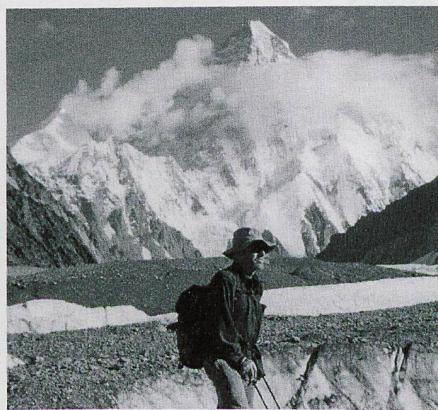
We have also been very fortunate to be able to take several overseas trips with friends. Two of my notable achievements was the successful climb of Mt. Kilimanjaro in Africa and reaching the Base Camp of K2 in Pakistan. Another memorable achievement was completing the Swiss section of the St. Jakob's Weg, walking from Rorschach in the east to Geneva in the west with family members and friends.

Life in New Zealand has been good to me and I never had any desire to go back to Switzerland to live but always thoroughly enjoyed catching up with friends and family during our many holidays there.

Rae and I celebrated our 79th and 80th birthdays recently with family and plan to move to our new home at The Lakes in Pyes Pa when it is finished – presently held up due to Coronavirus lockdown. There we will be closer to our family who live in Te Puke.



Vitus & Hans Vetsch conquered Mt. Kilimanjaro



Vitus with K2 in background



Vitus, Rae & family