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Down-to-earth in Switzerland

By Peter Selby-Huber

"HEY... you haven't written anything for the Swiss Observer for ages... When was it you did those articles about our motoring adventures in Switzerland?" (The wife from the kitchen.)

"You mean that piece about the singer on the Susten... Let's think... yes, you're right, it was ages ago - October 1980 to be precise". (Me from the depth of my armchair.)

"I thought they were funny". (Wife.)

"Nothing funny's happened since then... oh yes Aunt Clara threw the cat in the washing machine... she got a sock in the

puss for that".

"That's NOT funny. Why don't you tell everybody about the family get-together last year at Emilies?"

"You mean when I fell out of the car and smashed my face in".

"Yes".

"That WASN'T funny".

"Everybody else thought it was. Anyway, since you retired you've been moping about like a lovesick Toggenburg. A bit of writing might

help keep your mind balanced".

All the male readers of this excellent magazine will have realised that the above conversation was drifting into very dangerous waters indeed.

So, just to keep the peace, and my mind balanced, I'll tell you about the 1982 Swiss family get-together.

It all started with Anton from Bavaria. His regular visits to Switzerland in search of family connections had been 99 per cent successful. We were his one per cent failure rate.

This was mainly due to the fact that as we arrived on holiday he had just left, or as we just left he arrived, if you see what I mean. Anyway, 1982 was the year it all came together.

Anton always stays at the Gasthaus Kapelle, situated in the Schwendenen some 3,000 feet above the village of Siebnen.

Run by our good friend Emilie it's a haven of peace and tranquillity, miles off the beaten track, yet patronised by holiday-makers from as far afield as Austria, Germany, Holland and Leeds.

It was in this setting that we first clapped eyes on Anton, smile on face, glass in hand, seemingly without a care in the world.

"That's him," I whispered to my wife. "He's got Huber written all over his face".

I haven't a clue why I was whispering.

English is as rare in those parts as a bell-ringing town crier in the middle of a bingo session. But I was right, contact was made and the ice broken.

Inevitably a gathering of the clan was arranged. Cousin Sepp and a friend, well known to Swiss radio and television audiences, were to provide the music; there was to be singing, dancing, eating, and of course drinking.

I am not a stuffy Englishman. I learnt my German party pieces a long time ago and I find I am always congenially accepted at gatherings such as these.

On this particular evening however, congeniality was seasoned with conspiracy. Whilst Anton distracted my attention, Sepp topped up my glass, relentlessly and continuously, all evening.

I understand that I gave a fantastic rendering of "Orpheus in the Underworld" on my harmonica, started a class in the art of Scottish highland dancing, and made everyone laugh with a rendering of "Albert and The Lion" in Yorkshire dialect.

At this point, someone told me later, my dear wife suggested that she had better drive the car home as she didn't want me giving a Dukes of Hazzard demonstration, what with all those steep drops on either side of the road.

The lights over six lakes of Zurich presented a wonderful sight on the way down, but all too soon we reached our destination.

It was at this point that the full impact of the evening out hit me. Stepping out of the car I fell flat on my face, suffering embarrassing nose cuts, black eyes, and broken dentures.

The event became the talking point amongst my in-laws, and, as I improved, the cause of much hilarity as I turned tragedy into comedy in the retelling of the story.

These Swiss... they can be a right shower sometimes...

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