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**Reflections....**

For us living in the southern hemisphere the early summer period November to January is the year's most memorable time, I think, as it contains pre-Christmas, Christmas, New Year and holiday times all in one.

If you are anything like myself, the Kiwi Christmas-time is in great contrast to the "Weihnachtszeit" we remember so vividly from our young days in Switzerland. The annual 'excursion' up to the loft of our house to bring down the Christmas decorations invariably brings back to me 'memories-of-old'.

Have you ever recounted to one of your Kiwi-friends 'the way we used to celebrate in the old country?'

Not an easy task to undertake and equally difficult to hand-on the more unique aspects of our Swiss Christmas heritage to our young and New Zealand

born families. Doing so demands an effort over and above the Kiwi Christmas routine, I think. It can be almost like 'swimming against the tide'.

The 'handing-on' of Swiss Christmas customs also demands that we concentrate on the spiritual content of the occasion in greater detail, beginning with the feast day of Saint Nicholas on Dec. 6th and not having a real connection with the Swiss Christmas. A real effort, I think, to place 'Samichlaus' into his proper place here in New Zealand, where 'Santa' has captured the commercial aspects of Christmas totally.

Isn't it all too easy to 'go with the flow', after all someone has to bring the presents that can be found under the Christmas tree next to the crib of Bethlehem.

Sadly even in Switzerland itself it is becoming more difficult to explain the love-motivated deeds of the 'Christ child' (Christkindli) to bring presents and to fulfill the children's dreams.

Santa Claus (of American origin) with

his image of a red-clad old fool with pot-belly and 'ho-ho-voice' has according to reports from Switzerland made real 'in-roads' into the Swiss Christmas culture these days with thousands of the 'jolly-old-things' having appeared all over the country.

All the more reason, I think, for us Swiss abroad to cling to the 'old ways' as much as possible, don't you agree?

I can't imagine Christmas Eve without the sound of Swiss church bells (never mind if only reproduced by CD). Every year I enjoy lighting the few wax candles (with fire extinguisher at the ready) on the Christmas tree and around the crib....

I love to see the brightly wrapped parcels for young and old under the Christmas tree.....

Lucky for us (and maybe for you), to have a good number of Grandchildren to perform a nativity play and read from the Bible as well as performing some musical items or Christmas carols..... Lucky for all of us Swiss Kiwis to know that there are a goodly number of our compatriots still taking the trouble to 'hand-on' some of the more spiritual customs to our young families.....

And now that the next Christmas trees have another 10 months of growing period ahead of them, and the various decorations have been packed away, we are reminded to live the Christmas spirit in every-day-life. In 'good times and in bad' we are to live out the commandments to love God and our neighbour. For most of us, our Swiss as well as our Swiss-Kiwi culture has a Christian fundament. I think we can honour our culture by living our lives based on that special spiritual message which had its origin, brought to mankind as a gift, by the Christ child some 2000 years ago. - May the hope contained within that gift guide us throughout all the days to come.

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