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Auf Wiedersehen Neuseeland

By the time you read this, we'll have flown. And how time has flown: It's hard to believe that we've been back for more than six months. These last couple of weeks are a helter-skelter mix of preparations. Is anything (credit cards / insurances / licences / passports....) due to expire? Have we got an exemption for registration of the vehicles? How are we going to manage the mail? The checklist is a daily reference document, until ... time's gone and what's un-done will have to wait!

Our bags must be a strange and wonderful sight to the x-ray eye of the baggage checkers. Mani's is a travelling larder: those plastic bottles, double heated-sealed in heavy grade plastic....which clever checker would guess that's 70-80% Williams and Kirsch, to be diluted at the other end. And then there are those salamis and mostbröckli, again sealed securely.

Mine is all books, cables and gadgets - the laptop, the iPod, cameras, and enough chargers and connectors to keep them all talking to each other.

Just as well we have clothes (and shops) in Switzerland - there's no room for carrying the normal contents of suitcases!

The Kirsch is a triumph. This is the brew that started its life fermenting in barrels in the back of the bus - "Feierabend" as she's now called - as we travelled in January. My only-so-slightly-biased opinion is that it's better than any other kirsch I've tried. Our neighbours and visitors here are also impressed, but the real test will be the reaction of kirsch's "country-of-origin" expert tasters!

One of the other pleasures of the last months has been a couple of outings for our cowbell. It's a good-sized traditional bell which Mani brought back some years ago, and which I've since adopted as my

crowd control mechanism when I'm facilitating very large meetings. In the last month my work has included facilitating 120 retired folk for the Kapiti District Council and 100 or so people involved in Refugee Resettlement.

Both are really worthwhile endeavours, with some real similarities despite the apparent differences of the participants. Kapiti's new mayor had promised to have more community involvement with the very large population of retired people up here on the Kapiti Coast. We reckon there are more retired public servants per hectare than anywhere else in NZ. The meeting was a huge brainstorm about how, by working together, that retired community and the District Council could move the region ahead.

The Regional Refugee Resettlement Forum was in essence just the same. Many people from the various refugee communities and the various agencies involved in their resettlement, came together to talk about projects and initiatives to move those communities forward. In both meetings, the power of having the community and the policy makers and service providers all talking together was just wonderful. But a polite "ding" of a biro on a glass simply doesn't work when you've got a hundred or so people all talking at once. A hearty swing with the cowbell certainly gets their attention!

Every time I use the cowbell I am reminded of a time when Mani and I happened upon a cow fair in Grub. It was that typical local fair, with a flower-decorated arch through which the cattle had entered a roped-off paddock. They were all tidily tied up, heavy bells off their necks, when suddenly a small scuffle broke out and one cow broke her horn. The animals all round were upset and restive, shouldering each other, and moo-

ing their shared anxiety. Quietly, two men picked up a pair of heavy cowbells apiece, swinging them rhythmically from each forearm. Two others formed into a square with them, and they started an Appenzeller yodel - one of the traditional zäuerli for cows, no doubt. That's what was so wonderful. This was for the cows. Not for the crowd - and certainly not for tourists. This was four farmers, in their red Appenzeller coats, yodelling over the soothing low tone of the bells to settle the cows. And settle they did. Within moments, the cows had quietened down and were standing sedately while the owner tended to the cow with the broken horn. It was something we remember with real joy each time we drive past Grub.

So of course, when I use the cowbell to quiet a crowd of participants in a meeting, I have this private smile to myself. But I wouldn't try to accompany the bell with a yodel!

That said - I do have an invitation to join one of our local Jodelchörli, and when I'm more able to manage the language I hope to do that. We often play their CD to remind ourselves of one warm summer evening a couple of years ago when we were sitting outside and heard the sound of singing drifting over air. It was the Jodelchörli practising in the garden of one of its members. We wandered down, hovered on the edge of the group, and sang along. Perhaps it was the wines, or the beautiful simplicity of the tunes - it all just flowed.

Now, that's another incentive to really get stuck into my language training again. Best intentions have come to very little while we've been back here, but all the excuses are now disappearing with our jet-trail.

Auf wiederhören an euch. We'll let you know how we go!