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Autumn Upon Us

To everything there is a season, the psalmist wrote. You know how people talk and write of 'work-life balance'? Well, for us it seems to be a matter of getting that balance through alternating periods of relaxation with periods of hard work. "Balance over time" one of my favourite management authors calls it.

So, after our travels last month, for me this is a time of early mornings heading for the city and clients. Hard work, but really rewarding – and of course the train trip from Paraparaumu to Wellington is one of the great scenic rail tours of the world, and I get to see it twice a day. For Mani, he has been heading for a large workshop in Otaki, where the bus has been under cover. He has been scraping, sanding, and painting – all by hand – until the bus is a thing of beauty. It's back now in its holding paddock at Kapiti Village, collecting compliments.

That's one of the great things about having been on the road talking to all sorts of fellow-travellers – you pick up more than enough advice about what kind of paint works, and various application techniques. Even better, there's the do-it-yourselfer's grin about the money you've saved. One chap whose paint job Mani admired told us he'd had it done by a company in Levin "for a really good price". How much? Mani enquired. \$16,000! We can afford to run our newly painted beauty for the rest of its life on the money Mani saved through his sweat.

The body transformed, she deserved a name painted up front. Many have been the brainstorming sessions. We've been through all the kiwi classics, tried variations on the *zigeuner* (gipsy) theme – and – she is now called

Feierabend. It's such a wonderful word. It has also made us realise we don't have a real English or kiwi equivalent for that sense of celebration of the end of the day's work and the start of the evening's



Mani signwriting the name 'Feierabend' onto the bus

relaxation. To "down tools" doesn't have the same idea of celebration. "Gin time!" is a nice marker for that time of day, but doesn't quite do it either. But *feierabend!* – ah that's such a great toast as you sink into a comfortable chair with the day's effort over and a drink in hand.

Isn't it interesting how language and thinking entwine? Without a word for it, we cannot express a concept. But can we really have a concept without the language? I know I appreciate the *feierabend* moment of transition much more consciously and intensely now that I have a word for it.

Speaking of transitions, here autumn comes again. The hawthorn bushes are colouring in the fields and along the roadsides. There is mist on the low-lying paddocks some mornings. The pukeko chicks are getting scolded and chased away by their parents when they still beg to be fed. And ... the william bon chretien pears are ripened, and fermenting fragrantly in the barrel. It's the schnapps-making time of year!

The well-travelled cherries that did their fermenting in the back of the bus are lined up. As soon as the pears are done, Mani will have the still heating up, and wafts of alcohol-perfumed air will start attracting the neighbours.

That's one job that's moved into the garage now. In Miramar Heights Mani would somehow always manage to start schnapps-making exactly when the first really cold southerlies of autumn came through. He'd be under cover, but outdoors, and wrapped in scarves and coats, huddling over the still to keep warm. It looked so piteous. Here, now, the car gets moved out of the garage for the duration, and Mani stays

warm. I'm sure the schnapps benefits too from a milder environment for its transformation.

There's another few kilos of *mostbröckli* under preparation, too. The meat is absorbing the spices in the garage fridge, and soon the smoker will be lit. Mani's cleverly engineered system cools and cleans the smoke on its way to the smoking chamber, but there's still a nice little aroma of manuka smoke sometimes from the fire-box. Meat smoking and schnapps distilling both at once – now that will be a feast for the nose.

Some of the *mostbröckli* will go with us to Switzerland. It's so nice to be able to give to friends and family – and when it's around 90Fr in the supermarket, enough said! Some Kirsch and Williams might go too, though that takes more creative packing now we can't carry it on in our hand-luggage in those handy water-bottles.

As you can tell, we're starting to think towards that transition, too. But meantime, there's work to be done, and farewell trips to be made.

Yes, balance over time!