

# Life story

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## Life Story

Hello (Grüezi)

My name is Josef Franz Kennel. I was born in Immensee Switzerland on the 8th January 1932. The first child of 15, I was schooled in Immensee and left when 14 years old to work on a farm in Rotherturm for 3 years and then I worked at home cutting grass for our cows and working at a sawmill that cut the timber electrically and unusually, vertically. This was for an architect (Blundey) that I worked for, for 2 ½ years.



At 19 I went to *Recruten Schule* (Swiss Army) for 17 weeks. When I returned home I went to work in Küsnacht making concrete pipes for 5-6 months before going to work in Pfeffikon painting and sandblasting the inside of steel piping that was used in the construction of hydro-stations in Switzerland. This was really difficult work. I was accompanied by a colleague, Frank Siedler and we did this work for 2 years. During this time we were assigned to a couple of other jobs for 6 months, zinc spray painting of brewery silos and carpentry work at a school that was being built near Zürich.

At 23 I decided to come to New Zealand together with a friend named Herman Schuler. I didn't want to go to Canada, too cold. I could have gone to Australia but I liked the look of New Zealand better. This move was an opportunity to make something of myself as I was only a labourer in Switzerland. I didn't have a trade.

Many of my siblings travelled to other countries. Ferdinand to Canada to study for his doctorate and on completion returned to Switzerland. Franz and Albert also went to Canada where they remained and were very successful. Toward the end of 1956 a younger brother, Othmar, immigrated to New Zealand also and settled in Christchurch and became a flower grower. Tony also spent time in Canada and another brother Paul went to the USA to live. My sister Hedi, a nun, went to France in the 60's to teach and another sister Dori spent a few years in Germany.

It took a month to get to New Zealand in 1955. Firstly, we travelled by train to Naples, Italy. Then we boarded a ship called the *Oran Gay* which travelled via the Suez Canal, stopping in Eden, Saudi Arabia where I took on board a huge bunch of bananas. On the ship I made life time friends with a couple and their 4 children who were also migrating to New Zealand, the Weidmann family. We travelled from Perth to Melbourne then by train to Sydney where we boarded the *Wanganella* to Auckland. From there we caught a train to Wellington as we knew two Swiss brothers, (Fluehler) that had a room there for Herman and me.

I worked on the wharfs in Wellington with Herman for 10 months. I couldn't speak English. People would speak to me for half an hour and I could understand maybe 10 words but by the time I left Wellington I could understand quite well. Listening to the radio helped a lot.

I suppose I had a vision and knew that I wanted to be a farmer. I then moved up to Morrinsville and worked at the Motumaoho Dairy Company making casein for 3 years. During this time, I bought a little house in Morrinsville with an outdoor toilet. I built an extra room on and installed an indoor toilet but only needed a plumber to attach spouting to the house.

Unbeknown to me a Teresia Greiderer had arrived in NZ in 1956. Teres had decided that she was the person in her family that was going to travel the furthest distance from home (Austria) and accepted a New Zealand Government contract with a free ticket to NZ to work as home help along with 25 other women. These women arrived in

New Zealand in 1956 by a modified B52 with 7 stop overs on beautiful islands on the way. Teresia and Anna were friends who worked and flatted together in Auckland, looking after families. Anna and I had a mutual friend whom I always referred to as just Immelich. Anna talked about me to Teres and a bus trip to Morrinsville was arranged for Teres to meet me. Mueller, a photographer, who had introduced Anna to Immelich was also involved as he saw himself as a bit of matchmaker. Teresia and I were married in 1957 in Auckland. Mueller's wedding photos didn't work out, so we had to make mock photos for our wedding album. Teres then moved down to Morrinsville and worked in a sewing factory there until we started our family.

Our first two daughters were born during the time I worked at the dairy company. Elisabeth in 1958 and Christina in 1960. Then we went share milking for a lady in Springdale. Her husband had heart trouble and we received 25% of milk production for 2 years. She was a good person to work for. Following on from this we took on a 50/50 share milking contract in Kaiheri for 3 years and a further two daughters were born, Suzanna in 1962 and Erika in 1963.

In 1965 I bought a farm in Whangapoua, Coromandel - 1300 acres, much of it overgrown in blackberry, tea tree and gorse. The 3 bedroom house was in a fairly poor state. There was an old implement shed and the cowshed was a walk through that you could only milk 6 cows in at one time. I had 50 dairy cows. Between 1965 and 1966 I built a herringbone cowshed assisted by Joe Weber. It was 8 cows aside and a



concrete yard, much of the railing in the beginning made from tea tree.

Joe Weber also helped me build a very nice piggery together with a neighbour, Louis Holzgang. The milk was separated into cream that went to the factory in cream cans and the skim milk was pumped over to the piggery. By 1970 the herd had increased to over 100 and we farmed approximately 80 pigs. Teres was kept very busy with our 5 daughters, Julie was born in 1965. Teres also assisted me on the farm, improved the house and put in gardens.

We lived during an old-fashioned time in New Zealand; we had a real community. Neighbours worked together to get big jobs done, like putting up buildings and making hay. We had support from Kiwi neighbours and also other Swiss and Austrian friends who lived in the Coromandel. Alfons was the man to have over when something was wrong with the tractor, then he would stay on for one of Teres's excellent home cooked meals. We had great school working bees and dances in the community hall. Teres was a very creative person and always open to learning methods from books and other people on how to create or grow all variety of things, from the more uncommon Chinese vegetables to kumara and the most succulent strawberries. We made our own bacon and sausages. I built a very



functional smoke house that I christened the Italian shit house. We did all of our own butchering, we made pasta, jams and preserves and blackberry wine. Teres sewed most of our clothes and knitted all of our knitwear. Through Kiwi friends of ours in Auckland the Goode's who spent many a weekend on the farm with us we were able to acquire imported coffee beans and kitchen appliances that worked unceasingly. Tom Goode also captured a large swarm of bees that had settled into a part of our house - that was the start of our beehives.

In 1969 Teres went for the first time back to visit her family in Austria and



my family in Switzerland. In 1970 our first son John was born. It was time to extend the house and put up a garage with an extra room. I went for my first trip back to Switzerland in 1971. In 1972 our second son Paul was born. The farm had been improved vastly and further land was leased from the crown that was cleared and put into pasture. It was a very busy time for us all. In 1975 we were able to convert to tanker milk collection and therefore no more pigs. In 1977, I went for a 2nd trip back to Switzerland to celebrate my mother's 80th birthday. All the family from all over the globe was reunited. We had a wonderful time and my mother was still in very good health.

It was in 1981 that we sold the Whangapoua farm, after 17 years and bought a dairy farm in Te Poi, Waikato. At this time we had just the youngest 3 children still at home. They were schooled in Matamata. My oldest daughter Elisabeth and her husband Ruedi Wernli share-milked for a year before buying their own dairy farm in Galatea. We sold the farm which we had farmed for nine years and moved to a 50 acre property in Kaipaki, Waikato. Winding down, I had dry stock cattle and we improved the house and gardens.

There were 2 further trips for Teres to Europe in 1979 and 1994. With our sons, we travelled around the South Island, New Zealand and Queensland, Australia. Teres and I travelled together in 1989 on a 3-month trip to Europe and America and travelled again to Europe in 1997. A number of our children were living in Europe during this decade.

Teresia and I moved into the township of Cambridge in 2005. It was definitely time for a well-earned rest. I lost my wife in 2012 and it was very difficult being on my own without her. Thankfully most of my children have made Cambridge or a location in the near vicinity their home. My daughter Christina lives in Switzerland, where she has lived most

of her adult life. Julie settled in Australia and Erika in Wellington. All of my children except one have been to Switzerland, five of them living there for a time. Such a strong ancestral tie cannot be broken easily.

I have been very successful in my life and will leave behind a legacy. Though some of my children are fruitful in their own right, a little assistance in the early days from their parents never went astray. My wife and I worked very hard and we were careful with our money. I'm sure being this way was ingrained in us at an early age. We had a lot to be grateful for too. The two of us were healthy and strong and today all of our 7 children, our 12 grandchildren and 1 great grandchild have the same constitution. The home-grown food and good cooking, the manuka honey we consumed from our hives, the clean air we breathed that we all enjoyed on the farm in Whangapoua in particular and having faith would all have been very influential.

I have my Swiss friends in New Zealand, many of them I had known for more than 60 years, though sadly a lot of these friends have passed away. I still enjoy a weekly card game of Jass, speaking Swiss at every opportunity and the odd Schnapps, not to mention enjoying some very traditional Swiss foods that my children also prepare. I made my final trip to Switzerland in 2014 - well I would say it was my final trip, together with my daughter Elisabeth. The previous year I went to Fiji and Kiribati. I am considering a trip to the Sunshine coast to visit my daughter Julie. Though I've had a couple of bouts of illness I'm still feeling pretty good for 85. I am a New Zealander but still very Swiss. You can take a man out of Switzerland but you can't take the Swiss out of the man.

