

Thursday, 06 January 2005

I'm now on the train to Zurich – Landquart – Klosters for the last leg of my trip. The day before yesterday, Dieter picked me up at Delemont station, although the hotel Du Midi was just across the road. I enjoyed hearing Swiss being spoken again, especially by the kids on the train from Basel. Unfortunately my joy was short lived. Although Delemont is only a half hour from Basel, not a word of Swiss or German can be heard. In fact, for the first time on this trip I was unable to communicate with the locals, even in the shops. I would face the ladies at the Patisserie and say: “Sprechen Sie Deutsch”.

Inevitably their jaws would drop like I was a leper from another planet, and they'd reply in clear, firm French: “Non!!!!!!”.

Then I'd look questioningly at them and say “English???”.

Not a murmur of recognition.

“Schweizer Deutsch???. Afrikaans????? Gavaritye pa Russki?????”

On very rare occasions some low life French Swiss would confess that indeed he had bothered to toy with some non-French language, but really it was beneath him and he had done this in a previous life under coercion but possibly he could muster a few words that might be helpful. But mostly I stopped trying to order very weak coffee and made do with “Schokolat”. Said patisserie was where I had vouchers for



breakfast, since the hotel where I was staying was strictly speaking closed (I was the only guest). Unfortunately the vouchers did not cover custard slices or truffles.

The train I'm on is now entering Zurich (it was express Basel to Zurich) and I'm very happy because I just finished a bottle of wine brought by the only black man I've seen so far in Switzerland.

But Back to Dieter. He and his wife Sabine live a little way outside Delemont in



Seprais. They have a gorgeous farm house, with a few sheep, a donkey to look after them, a few cows and calves and a couple of excellent sheep dogs that respond immediately to whispered commands. Out in Seprais it is all farmland. They invited me for dinner on the very first night I was there. They thought I might appreciate a typical Swiss dish of Roesti and Bratwurst with a huge salad and a fruit salad for dessert. Then Sabine said she'd planned a

Fondue for me the next evening, would I be interested??

Most of Wednesday Dieter and I had discussions. I'm particularly interested in the parallels between the problems experienced by the Feldenkraise practitioners and Buteyko, and Dieter could fill me in on that.

Saturday 8 January 2005

I'm now happily nestled into a wonderful little room owned by a delightful lady, Mrs. Betty Jann. I had some trouble actually getting here after the train refused to stop at



Klosters Dorf. I managed to take a bus back with all my luggage and then I could not find a taxi or any telephone number for me to call a taxi. To make matters worse it



was about 12.15 and all the shops were closed and didn't open again until either at 14h00, 15h00 or not at all till the next morning.

To make life even more frustrating, there are no internet cafes, just two very expensive computers at different locations that won't let me upload files off my disk. From an internet point of view it looks worse than London.

The snow is a bit thin at the moment. They had no snow right up till Christmas, and much of it is melting. I was probably a bit optimistic booking an 8 day lift pass, but I only realized that once I had been up the mountain. I had a spectacular day skiing yesterday, making the most while we still have snow. It was just a bit too warm with virtually a clear blue sky. Most of the day I skiid with my jacket open, no gloves nor hat and still broke out in a sweat. Since I felt cold going up on the lift, it made me realize you burn quite a few calories skiing. I got back to my room at 4.30 and nearly fell asleep in the shower!

Sunday, 9 January 2005

I have to say, I think the first day up in the snow the altitude change got to my brain, although post Buteyko I didn't feel the extraordinary weakness and lethargy I felt at altitude when I was young. But what made me realize my brain was a little fuzzy, was that it took me about half an hour to work out why my boots didn't fit into my skis when I picked them up again after a stop. It was infuriating. I actually saw the lady at the shop adjust and fit the boots into my skis, so why didn't they fit now? The skis were set about 2cm short! I figured the setting must have somehow slipped, which was extraordinary, given that both sides were the same. I was pushing all sorts of buttons trying to reset them, when it dawned on me. I had someone else's skis.

I had a few tumbles yesterday and am still pretty sore, battered and bruised. I've had to slow down a lot because of age, being out of condition, and not having skiid for a long time. I'm quite happy to suffer the indignity of having young girls zooming past me. Well, not really happy..... but it's better to just focus on enjoying the skiing than risk being splattered across the piste.

Yesterday was another carbon copy of the day before, just extraordinary skiing weather with beautiful sunshine, clear blue sky and wonderful visibility all day. I've just looked out of the window and the third day seems to be heading in exactly the same direction. Whereas the Madrisa run on the first day was marred by a shortage of snow, the situation is a lot better further up in the Parsenn area, which I will return to again today.

Tuesday, 11 December 2005

Today has been just another sensational day for skiing, making it all five days in a row that I've been here. Although the snow is melting away, Parsenn are doing an incredible job scraping together snow from the non-piste areas and dumping it onto the pistes and grooming all of them every night. I know they do it at night because the machines don't operate during the day and at 3.30 am I usually get woken by the piste machine parking very close to my window. Our house is the last one up on the hill.



Today has been by far the best day for skiing for me. I've got all my confidence and strength back, the snow was sensational (nice and light) and the weekend crowds have now gone. I often get to have the whole piste to myself. Yesterday was a bummer. It started with me slipping really badly on the ice on the road up to the house. The skis I was carrying on my back landed on my head and my lower back ached all day, making skiing very uncomfortable. The council doesn't seem to care much about the ice. This isn't like it was in Russia where every man and his dog were out clearing up the ice!

So yesterday morning I decided to take it easy and skied up to Davos. I had packed my woolly walking boots in the rucksack and took the Parsenn-Bahn down past the last bad bit of piste down to the Dorf. I heard there was an internet café associated with an electrical store. I eventually found it, dragging my ski boots all the way there. But I had to stop myself from hurling my boots through the shop window in an unusual fit of rage when I saw that they were closed on Monday mornings and only opened from 2pm onwards. So I gathered my stuff and took the Parsenn Bahn back up the mountain. But after a few hours of skiing, my back got the better of me and I quit for the day and returned to the only internet café in Klosters/Davos. This meant I couldn't ski back to Klosters and had to take a train back.

When I got back at about 17h00 I got to bed and couldn't get myself to move out of it till this morning. I was really sore and feeling quite sick with it.

But today has been great. The pain in my back has almost gone and I had a fantastic day of skiing. I did all my favourite runs over and over again.

The social scene is quiet as usual. Apart from a very nice young German lady who asked if I minded if she shared my T-bar with me, (did I mind!!!!!!) things are very bleak and quiet. There are few people left up here having been put off by the reports of poor snow. That means you don't get to share rides very often and that means you don't get to talk to people. So I decided to do something about my social life and headed for the nearest bar where Shanade, a very intelligent Irish girl with a degree in languages, has been chatting to me for the few times I've been there. She has the time because there's no one else ever in the bar. However, as fate would have it, having taken my life into my hands again in walking down that iced up road at night with a tiny torch, there was a sign up saying the bar was closed on Mondays and Tuesdays.

So I decided to walk up to Klosters Platz in spite of not really being dressed for such a long journey in the cold, when I saw along the way that the Hotel "Sport" had a bar. It is a really lovely hotel, but when I'd gotten past reception, hung up my coat and walked into the bar I found it deserted. One of the ladies at the front desk, who doubles as bar maid, poured me a beer and made me a snack. I asked when it all happens. She said "much later" but later admitted that she was actually **hoping** it would all happen later. Things were apparently very quiet for everyone even though the hotel was full. It was already 8 o'clock. How the hell can people ski all day and then come to the pub so late? During this time three guys from the hotel walked in, found there were no chicks and then walked out again.

So I risked my life again coming home on the slippery road, and here I am writing this letter instead of socializing.

My Russian has actually come it quite useful in Switzerland. I quite often hear it spoken up here, and of course it means I get a chance to exchange pleasantries with these people. It's also led to some interesting discussions on the chair lifts.

Thursday, 13 January 2005

It's 2h30 and I can't sleep so I'll just finish off my last letter for this season and prepare a little for the Asthma doctor I'm seeing tomorrow in Davos. I'll send it off when I'm up there and check my latest mail.

Yesterday was a carbon copy of the day before, again with sensational skiing. Those runs that troubled me greatly when I first got here, I'm now taking in my stride. No longer are young girls overtaking me. Probably a contributory factor to this is that they're all back at school. It turns out that my main obstacle to skiing like I used to was not old age, but lack of condition. That's all come back now.

I have to say that the skis are much wilder than they used to be. Because these *carvers* are designed for mogul-hopping and are therefore very responsive, they can be scarily unstable on the faster runs. You don't want to be doing anything stupid while you're on one of those really fast dip-runs, where you're trying to get up enough speed to make it up the hill on the other side.

Shenade was back at the pub last night. I also got to meet her boyfriend, a Swede who followed her out here and like her is just messing around for the year. He's acting as a guide for tiny tots on snowboards. He told me something I've heard before, that the young boys are returning to skiing and moving away from snowboarding, although this is not the case with girls. Watching the youngsters on their boards makes me realize just how powerful this "kool" drive is in the psycho-social world of the youth. They sit around in the snow most of the time, while the skiers are whizzing past them. They struggle if there is any place you have to walk a little, even if it's just for a meter or so, where we skiers just push a bit with our sticks. It also takes a lot longer to become good at snowboarding than it does skiing. Since your skill level determines how much enjoyment you get out of it, it takes a lot longer before you get to actually enjoy the sport. But then, hey, who cares, as long as you have that cool image!

I saw this great little Aussie kid while I was going up the ski lift. She was about 7 or 8 and had a private ski instructor. She was standing on the edge of the pist, arms stretched out, yelling at the top of her voice "I DON'T UNDERSTAND ANYTHING!!!! I'M FROM AUSTRALIA AND I'M STUCK HERE IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE!!!" It's a wonderful picture I'll keep with me forever!

Although I'm not looking forward to going back to work (I have some shitty stuff lined up ahead of me) I'm actually looking forward to getting back to my own home. I have a huge amount of work to do sorting through all the stuff I've accumulated. I tried to do as little as possible on holiday, because I needed the break from everything, as much as possible.

Back Home

Before I close this last chapter, I need to say something about Friday. My appointment with the Asthma doctor at the Children's clinic in Davos was postponed till Friday, notwithstanding my protestations that this would leave no opportunity for follow up or demonstrations.

When I sat down opposite the doctor, he told me he had no idea why I was there and absolutely no idea what this was all about. But he continued reading the letter and booklet I had sent him and listened patiently. He also set about immediately downloading references off the internet, then introduced me to his two physiotherapists.

At seven o'clock that evening I reappeared at the clinic with my seminar materials and translated most of it into Swiss, on the fly, for the two physiotherapists.

I don't know if anything will come out of this, but an extra day would have been very useful. Unfortunately I had to leave the next day. But it was good to end the holiday on a positive Buteyko note.
