

# Hope for the children of Kantha Bopha [Beat Richner]

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### "Army seeks new enemies", "Swiss Review" 4/05

As a Swiss Abroad and regular reader of the "Swiss Review", I would like to congratulate you on the new look, but unfortunately I also have a criticism.

The presentation is very good, but the first title is nothing short of a catastrophe. Since when did the Swiss army, in other words Switzerland, need enemies? Is not the army, and indeed all Swiss, strictly committed to peace?

Generally speaking, the media are unaware of the forces they can unleash with negative headlines. The "Swiss Review" in particular should set an example and exercise more caution. Good reporting of any given issue can have a positive impact or at least lessen the negative impact. Please ask your editorial staff to take more care in future, to avoid any repetition of such faux pas.

PETER H. KOLB-SCHMID,  
BY E-MAIL

### Pride of place for the "Swiss Review"

Firstly, many congratulations on your magazine which we have known virtually since its inception. Among the newspapers and magazines which we read (French, German or English) the "Swiss Review" takes pride of place. Even though we live near Switzerland and visit our children and relatives there two or three times a year, the "Review" is a welcome link and, above all, a way to keep up with all the interesting news about Switzerland. Even here on the borders of France, it's rare to see articles on this or that referendum. As a final point, the articles themselves offer a fine example of unbiased reporting.

That said, my wife (from Geneva) and I (from Fribourg) would like to express publicly the shame we felt at the start of the Switzerland/France football match. We were profoundly shocked at way the Swiss fans behaved. When the Marseillaise was played, a packed stadium



filled with Swiss flags drowned the French anthem with deafening whistles! What a degrading spectacle! Having lived abroad for fifty years, we had an idealised image of Switzerland but that has now been tarnished. Naturally it would be wrong to generalise, but these people have lost any scrap of respect for others! And ultimately, all this vulgarity was for nothing!

Switzerland, you have scored an own goal. Don't forget that the match was broadcast widely throughout Europe and beyond.  
HILDA AND ROGER KIRSCHER,  
CLERMONT L'HÉRAULT, FRANCE

### "Swiss Review": A nice surprise

It is always a nice surprise to receive the "Swiss Review" with its varied subject matter. It helps us to maintain strong ties with the Swiss back home, and helps my son in particular to stay close to his roots. We feel very close to the other Swiss expatriots who make up the so-called Fifth Switzerland. I was moved to read about the aid which Switzerland contributed in response to the Tsunami on 26 December and Micheline Calmy-Rey's visit to Thailand and Sri Lanka. I have a great deal of admiration for her and read her article with great interest.

CLAUDE PFUND AND SON JULIEN,  
VENISSIEUX, FRANCE

### New look for the "Swiss Review"

Congratulations on the new look of the "Swiss Review." It's very appealing. I like it so much that I would like to ask you for the names of the fonts used, especially for the one used in titles and subtitles. (*The font is ITC Officina Serif. Editor*)

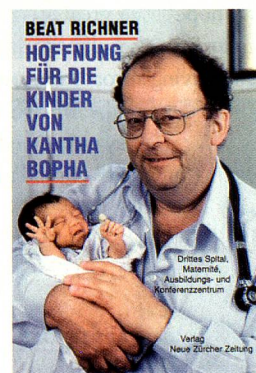
Who is the best-known living personality in Switzerland? Tennis ace Roger Federer? Federal Councillor Christoph Blocher? Architect Mario Botta? Or someone who lives far from his home country, working as a children's doctor in Cambodia? Virtually everyone in Switzerland knows paediatrician Beat Richner. In 2003, when Swiss TV ran their first live "Swiss of the Year" programme asking viewers to send in their votes, this physician to the poor and holder of two honorary doctorates won the title. Whenever he performs as "Beatocello", playing his cello in the monastery church of Einsiedeln or in Lausanne Cathedral, his concerts are a sell-out.

Born in 1947, Richner is a much admired as well as much criticised personality. In 1992 he abandoned his paediatric practice in Zurich and, at the request of the King of Cambodia, travelled to Phnom Penh to begin rebuilding the Kantha Bopha children's hospital which had been destroyed in the civil war. Since then he has selflessly devoted his life to this cause. The first hospital was opened in autumn 1992, followed four years later by Kantha Bopha 2 and, in 1999, the Jayavarman VII Clinic in Angkor complete with maternity unit and training centre. Every year more than 600 000 sick children receive ambulatory treatment and more than 67 000 are given stationary treatment. Almost 90 percent of all Cambodian children who ever need to see a doctor are treated free of charge in these hospitals. "Without our three hospitals, 60 000 children would die every year", says Richner, adding that 95 percent of all donations go directly towards hospital treatment.

The Swiss paediatrician fights his battle on many fronts. He accuses our rich confederation of contributing a mere CHF 2.75 million a year towards the annual costs of CHF 20 million. "My reserves are never sufficient for more than four months." In Richner's opinion, Cambodia is not a constitutional state and its Ministry of Health is incompetent and corrupt. He is highly critical of the World Health Organisation and its strategy, which he characterises as "poor medicine for poor people in poor countries", and he believes non-governmental organisations such as UNICEF have also failed to promote healthcare in Cambodia. Anyone who questions Richner's methods (for instance, the use of computer tomographs), can expect a passionate response.

In the opinion of many Swiss, Beat Richner is a great friend of humanity as well as a courageous and tireless fighter for a good cause. For his part, he sees himself as a "prisoner of his conscience", because "every child has only one life". His attitude to life is to stick to his guns and refuse to become embittered. By way of illustration he cites his hospitals' logo: a palm tree, a lotus and a star. The palm tree symbolises shelter, the lotus love, and the star hope.

ROLF RIBI



Beat Richner: Hope for the Children of Kantha Bopha. Pub. Neue Zürcher Zeitung, Zurich 2004. CHF 28, EUR 19.

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Also: Beat Richner: Le médecin au violoncelle. Edition Favre, Lausanne 2005, CHF 29, EUR 18.

www.beatrichner.com