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You will notice from my surname that I have foreign roots. Lehtinen is a Finnish name which is as common there as Müller or Meier in Switzerland. I was born in Finland and both my parents come from the southern part of this northern country.

The small things in life often remind me of this. I have lost count of how many times I have had to spell my surname in my lifetime. When asked, I also explain

that the correct pronunciation of Lehtinen is with a soft "h" and not a "kh" sound.

During childhood, it was not just my name that reminded me that I am not actually Swiss. I can vividly recall being the only person dressed as a cowboy at the Basel carnival, which was sacrilege as far as the locals were concerned. I was also the worst skier in my group of friends as a child. On the playground I would occasionally hear the words: "Die spinnen, die Finnen!" (The Finns are crazy).

My parents once told me that they had lost their language and therefore part of their identity by living abroad – they were quite literally "lost for words". Their Finnish became rusty as the years went by and they never perfected German either. This is less of a problem for me. I arrived in Switzerland at such a young age that nobody detects any Finnish accent. I speak German perfectly and Finnish well.

However, what I can empathise with is the feeling of inner conflict and a life between two places. You feel like a foreigner in your old home country but also in the new one. Many people still consider me Finnish despite the fact I am completely integrated and hold a Swiss passport. "You don't say much up there, do you?" "You're bound to be a big drinker!" And whenever I visit my old homeland, I am always considered Swiss. Of course, I have a big bank account and never talk to anyone about it!

When I was young I felt as though I did not have a native country. Today, I see things differently – I have two, not none. This is also a blessing rather than a curse. My two identities have widened my horizons and made me more open-minded and flexible. I can see the bigger picture from two perspectives today and feel an equal bond with both countries.

MARKO LEHTINEN, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Cover photo:
The singer and presenter Francine Jordi.
Photo: Thomas Buchwalder