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Editorial

What's in a name....?

Walking through a cemetery in central Switzerland some years ago I came upon some beautifully carved 'head-stone-monuments', a few with short verses from the Bible inscribed in bold letters. One of them simply read "*I have called you by name; you are mine.*"

Would you agree, that for Swiss/Kiwis like most of us, with relatives 'back home' in Switzerland it used to be quite a challenge to find a suitable name for the newly born child in our English speaking country of adoption? - Choosing a name from past family-history or from the Bible was one way to make the choice

acceptable to family members at 'both ends of the world'.

- Today our people in 'the old country' have long learned to accept some very exotic names amongst family and relations. - I well remember the 'lucky compromise my Wife and I decided on when we picked the name **Heidi** for our third daughter some thirty years ago. How grateful we felt towards the famous Swiss novelist Johanna Spyri for the creation of the fictional character Heidi in her books, a century ago, since almost everybody in New Zealand knew about the story of the orphaned Heidi living high up in the mountains of Switzerland with her grumpy but kindhearted old Grandfather 'Almöhi'.

- With the 'Heidi-story' well known

around the world for so long, we might find it odd, that despite it's world wide fame, and the films it has inspired, it has failed to become a tourist attraction. But that's about to change.(according to a recent documentary from Swiss Radio International). A number of tourist organisations from the eastern Cantons Graubünden and St. Gallen have for the first time joined forces to promote '**Heidiland**' as a tourist destination.

- One of the attractions of the Heidiland-holiday is the opportunity to experience life as it might have been lived by the local 19th century orphan girl, and what better way than to travel through the area of Maienfeld (in a horse drawn carriage,) , where Heidi lived with her Grandfather. The destination of course is Heidi's house in Maienfeld, the village or at least her winter-residence. This is as good a place as any to begin the tour of the region that inspired Johanna Spyri to begin her novel there. Here the children can feed the resident goats. A lot of Japanese tourists have already come as they seem to know the story just about better than the Swiss themselves. Watching them enjoying themselves in the environment of their imagination, it appears that they think they are in heaven. It is claimed that 'Heidi' is the second most read book after the bible, so the Graubünden and St.Gallen tourist offices are hoping that there is a massive band of disciples 'out-there' desperate to make a 'pilgrimage' to this particular 'temple'.

- Leading on from Maienfeld we cross the river Rhine to another place mentioned in the novel, the famous spa resort of Bad Ragaz where Heidi's wheel-chair-bound friend Clara came to be cured. And people still come to this town in the hope that the thermal waters will help them too. The baths are open to the public. The source of the healing waters is a place called Pfäfers, some 5 km away and to reach it we have to travel along the breathtaking and at times precarious Tamina gorge. This gorge is (by the way) on the Federal Government's list of important natural sights. Now that the waters have been diverted to Bad Ragaz, nobody comes to be cured at Pfäfers any more. With more people coming to the region for the 'Heidi-experience', many will be drawn to the region to witness the natural wonder. -From Bad Ragaz the tourist can take a cable car trip up the mountain to the

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area of 'Heidi's hut'. Along the route to the alpine hut, which has been lovingly restored, and gives a good insight into the simple and often difficult life, Swiss mountain folk must have endured 100 years ago, there are alpine flowers, bubbling streams and a series of 14 tableaux telling the 'Heidi-story', giving children an incentive to reach 'Heidi's mountain hut'. Once at the top the tourists can tuck into a simple meal Heidi herself might have enjoyed, local alpine cheese and venison salami.

It took 4 years of working until tourist organisations in the two Cantons (Maienfeld/**Graubünden**) and Heidi's-mountain/**St.Gallen**) wanted to co-operate in order to bring about a 'Heidiland'. For tourists of course there are no Cantonal boundaries and all they know is the fascination of Heidi and her mountain homeland. -

Are you about to take a holiday in Switzerland? And what about bringing us back a first-hand report of 'Heidiland' !?

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Over the past year, a lot of correspondence has been sent out by the Swiss Abroad Organisation (ASO) in the form of a regular newsletter, so we are now able to keep well up-to-date with events....

The May newsletter contained an article about a recent meeting of the Swiss Abroad Council, with the heading, "Recognition of the Needs of the *Fifth Switzerland* * by Parties". Translated (from very long-winded German!!) it reads:

In regards to the upcoming National Council elections, the Swiss Abroad Council (Auslandschweizer-rat, ASR) would like political parties to pay more attention to the needs of Swiss citizens abroad. The *Fifth Switzerland* (Fünfte Schweiz) is officially represented by about 150 ASR members. It plays an important part in our state affairs and contains a large segment of voters, according to the ASO President and National Councillor, Mr Georg Stucky.

In his President's report, he stressed that the Swiss public must become more responsive to the role, significance, and requirements of

the 70,000 Swiss citizens residing abroad who have registered their political rights in Switzerland. It is therefore reasonable that the ASR be able to express its specific concerns and interests.

At the meeting, the ASR unanimously rejected a list of conditions put by the Parties: Firstly, the ASR is mindful of increasing international movements and the high number of people leaving the country. To this end it is seeking more support for the education of young Swiss citizens, as well as guaranteed social securities during periods spent overseas. To ease the return of Swiss citizens from abroad, the implementation of a job-specific employment vacancy site on the Internet was suggested. As well, the ASR believes that promoting Switzerland's standing overseas is vital. In this regard, stronger co-operation with Swiss institutions (eg trade associations, Swiss schools or Swiss Clubs) is to be aimed for.

Secondly, to strengthen the relationship with the 'Homeland', the ASR believes it is necessary to simplify the process of exercising political rights, in particular to eliminate the need to re-register for continued voting rights. It supports further encouragement of contact between overseas Swiss organisations and the Swiss political parties. The ASR would like to see 'overseas members' regularly taking part in internal Party decision-making, as well as increased participation from citizens residing abroad. Precisely these 'international branches' of the major Swiss parties could in this respect promote much goodwill for the *Fifth Switzerland*.

* *Fifth Switzerland* refers to Swiss Abroad, the other four being the German, French, Italian and Romansh speaking parts of Switzerland.

And now, some news from closer to home: I recently received a note from a Society member informing me of some local activities taking place in the 'deep South'. On 13 March, their Swiss picnic attracted 18 adults and 12 children. And to celebrate this year's National Day, about 40 people gathered to enjoy a delicious Swiss Buffet at the Dunedin Polytech. As well, families in the area occasionally meet and sing Swiss

songs. It is really encouraging to hear of such events taking place in areas where no formal Club exists. Thank you for your letter, Elisabeth, and I look forward to hearing from you again soon. Perhaps people in other areas could also let us know of any local activities and gatherings.

This month, the *Helvetia* contains a large amount of annual sport results and my congratulations to all medal winners, most especially the large number of junior members. To compensate however, we have added four extra pages to this issue.

It was with great sadness that we received news of the passing of both Michelle Koeppel-Schneider on 9 July, and Dagmar Graf on 20 June. I have sent condolence messages to their respective families on behalf of the Swiss Society. Our thoughts are with them at this sad time. Contact addresses have been published for anyone wishing to contact Franz Schneider or Peter Graf directly.

A big 'Thank you' to Society members who have so far paid their annual subscription in response to last month's request, and I look forward to receiving the remainder shortly. With kind regards to all Beatrice

BEREAVEMENT NOTICE

Sadly, I must advise of the death of **Dagmar Graf**, wife of Peter Graf, a former First Secretary of the Embassy and well known to the Swiss Community in New Zealand. Mrs Graf passed away after a long illness on 20 June 1999, at the age of 56 years.

On behalf of the members of the Swiss Society, I would like to send our deepest sympathy and condolences to Peter and family.

After spending several years in New Zealand, Dagmar was known especially to members of the Wellington Club, and their thoughts will be with Peter in his sad loss.

May she rest in eternal peace.

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