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In 1979 the International Association for Bridge and Structural Engineering (IABSE) organized in Zurich a symposium on bridges to mark the occasion of its fiftieth anniversary. There were over 900 participants from all over the world to the symposium's technical and social programmes. The symposium produced a surplus income of around 90 000 Swiss Francs. The Swiss group of IABSE acting as organizing committee decided to use this money including interest for the purpose of furthering the education of young people entering the profession.

In the period from 1982 to 1986 six graduates from foreign technical universities in the field of bridge and structural engineering – i.e. in the fields of activity of IABSE (structural analysis and design, project planning / construction management construction materials and building physics) – were awarded grants for two semesters or more pursue further studies in Switzerland at the Federal Institute of Technology (ETH), either in Zurich (for German speaking students) or in Lausanne (for French speaking students). The grant amounted at first to 1000 Swiss Francs a month, but was increased later to 1250 Swiss Francs, which enabled the school fees and basic cost of living to be covered. The recipients of the grants were assisted by the responsible university professors in selecting courses (lectures, colloquia, seminars and tutorials). Representatives of the ETH in Zurich or Lausanne acted as personal advisers. During vacation periods these postgraduate students were given the opportunity to gain practical experience (and earn extra money) by working for firms of consultants or contractors.

The candidates had to be already in possession of a degree from a technical university one to two years before applying for the educational stay in Switzerland. A working knowledge of German or French was expected, so that the students could profit from the courses.

The students came from Finland (2), Portugal, Columbia, the Dominican Republic and China. In 1985 a Swiss colleague and his wife, who wish to remain anonymous, surprised the Swiss group of IABSE with an offer to meet the costs of an additional grant for a lady candidate from Finland. Here and also in the name of the Finnish colleague, who was able to spend two semesters at the ETH Zurich, we would like to acknowledge the generosity displayed.

At common annual visits to building sites the members of the committee responsible for grants to foreign candidates have always been happy to hear that the grant holders without exception have felt well looked after. They were grateful for that from which they could profit technically and for all their new experiences and contacts in the host country.

By means of these seven young professionals, bridges have been established between one country and the rest of the world. To those who have assisted, especially the association's committees, members and secretariat together with the civil engineering contractors and firms in related areas, the consulting firms, banks and insurances, we extend our thanks: We did not spend your money, we invested it.

The Board of the Swiss Group of IABSE

