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EDITORIAL

We Swiss are certainly a lucky lot. Whilst everyone else in the world has only a place of birth, we Swiss have a place of birth plus a place of origin (Bürgerort). This leads to all sorts of very interesting situations.

For instance when, at a party, someone asks you: "where exactly in Switzerland do you come from?" and you reply: "I was born in Nuglar-St Pantaleon in the canton of Solothurn, yet I am a citizen of Locarno in the canton of Tessin but lived most of my life in Yverdon in the canton of Waadt", this profound announcement is sure to make all conversation at the party stop dead and everybody to look at you in awe as if you were some sort of blue blooded aristocrat.

However not many of us can pool such a high class combination such as Nuglar-St Pantaleon (it exists, look it up on the map), Locarno and Yverdon. Most of us have to be content with a much more prosaic combination like your Editor for instance who can only muster: born in Winterthur, citizen of Schaffhausen and lived in Geneva in that order.

Nevertheless, it is still a formidable asset compared to all those poor people who only have one single place of birth to show for throughout their lives.

Of course there are those unfortunate Swiss who, because of poor planning by their parents, were born in the same place as their place of origin and

so will never be party stoppers when asked where they come from. However, we can give them a piece of advice: Invent a place of birth such as Bümpliz for example, so you can announce that you were born in beautiful Bümpliz, but that you are also a proud citizen of Appenzell Innerhoden. It will do wonders for your ego, for your status amongst Kiwis and your popularity with the opposite sex. It never fails, believe us, we can vouch for it.

The fact that you and all your ancestors are recorded in one place only (your place of origin) makes it also much easier to reconstruct your family tree if you are interested in that sort of thing.

Your Editor for instance discovered many years ago that one of his ancestors had been the guardian of the Munot (the castle high above the city of Schaffhausen). Pity the guy did not buy the place at that time when real estate was still cheap and affordable. If he had, your Editor, as owner of a real medieval castle, could have added the title of "Von Munotshausen" to his surname and thus be allowed to rub shoulders with all the other rich or mostly impoverished European feudal families that still try to survive anachronically in this modern world.

Your Editor is also the proud descendant of the first man in history who climbed the rock in the middle of the Rhine fall near Schaffhausen and planted the Swiss flag at its summit. This was no small feat as no jet boats

existed at that time. He had to row all the way to the rock against the mighty current of the river, dodging the treacherous whirlpools that lay in his path. Pity that there was no Guinness book of records at that time otherwise he would have had a prominent place in it.

If you have not opened it up lately, have another look at your good old Swiss passport. It only shows your place of origin (Bürgerort). Contrary to all other passports in the world, it does not show your place of birth. That fact alone sets all us Swiss aside from anyone else in the world and we should all be very proud of this distinction.

But whenever you have to fill in an arrival of departure form when travelling to various countries, one of the questions on the form is invariably your place of birth. If you fill in this form truthfully, even a half-awake customs officer will spot the discrepancy between your form and your passport and this could lead to lengthy acrimonious arguments. So the Swiss Embassies suggest that to avoid such situations, you simply fill in your place of origin on the relevant form in order to tie in with your passport. Problem solved! Well, not exactly. The situation becomes more complicated when you acquire a double nationality and apply for a second passport (a NZ passport for instance). That passport shows your place of birth.

Since it is slightly bordering on the impossibility for a person to have been born in two different places, the authorities of countries that keep an electronic track of your overseas trips (such as New Zealand and Australia for instance) will soon come to the conclusion that you must be two different persons. Great, so you can now play Dr. Jekyll and Hyde at will with the

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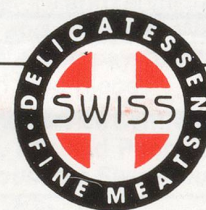
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