

Editorial

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If you are anything like myself you will find childhood memories a real treasure. A short documentary heard recently on Swiss Radio International has brought back to mind some very vivid images of a school trip to the circus. The impression that the performance of the Swiss circus Knie has left in my childhood-memory all those years ago is such that I have never been able to forget it. Maybe you have similar memories or maybe you will be able to arrange an interlude with a Knie-performance during your travels to Switzerland this year. In any case I do hope that you might be interested in the following history of the "Swiss national-circus Knie";

Friedrich Knie was born in Austria in 1784. His Father was the personal physician of Empress Maria Theresia. Young Friedrich was all set to

follow the family tradition of studying medicine. But he had other ideas and ended up establishing a family tradition of a quite different nature. Studying medicine at the age of 19 he got to know a young Austrian woman who was part of a circus troupe at Innsbruck. Initially he joined this circus, but the relationship with his Girlfriend came to an end and so Friedrich left the troupe. Uneasy about returning home he started his own acrobatic act with horses. But the napoleonic war intervened and all the horses were recruited for the army, so he decided to become a high-wire artist becoming quite famous in his new found art. In those days the performances were held by stringing a wire from house to house. Soon he married and together with his new family he toured Austria, the south of Germany, the Elsass and mostly Switzerland. Around 1827 he established himself with his family in Rapperswil, Canton

of St.Gall, acquiring Swiss nationality and performed circus acts in their own arena. In 1919 they borrowed money to buy their first tent, a two pole affair with hundreds of seats, and circus Knie has never looked back. The loan was repaid after the first season. Today circus Knie may not be quite the biggest in Europe but it is considered to be the best. The "tent-show" with a new program every year only tours in Switzerland, but in wintertime the Knie's often perform with horses and elephants in Amsterdam, Paris, Vienna, Berlin etc. A financial income in wintertime is important as the on-going costs for animals and employees have to be met. The "tent-show" never leaves Switzerland. The tent itself has a diameter span of 44 metres with a height of 50 metres and the new seating capacity in 1998 is 2400. The whole circus comprises 100 circus wagons making up two trains on Swiss rail. The length of these trains is 800 metres and they transport approx. 1350 tonnes of material. Beside these trains there are another 60 road-caravans for the transport of the artists and members of the family. In general the Knie circus is known for good acrobats, funny clowns animal acts with horses, elephants and other exotic animals. Knie was the first circus to present rhinoceros in the ring.

The Knie circus is a true family concern. A member of the 5th generation, Fredy Knie senior is still alive and his son Fredy operates the circus with his cousin Franco Knie. Franco is the second son of Rolf Knie who unfortunately died last year. There is every sign that in a few years time the Knie circus will pass on to the 8th. generation. In the meantime Fredy Knie jun. is artistic director. Cousin Franco Knie is responsible for technical details and the daughter of Fredy Knie, Geraldine Knie presents horse acts (the high school of riding). Her mother, the wife of Fredy presents a new act every year. This year with Giraffes, Zebra and water buffaloes.

Small wonder then that the Swiss people are fond of their "Circus Knie" and I'm sure all of us Swiss-Kiwis wish this family dynasty well for the future.

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