

Readers' Letters

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READERS' LETTERS

● **Letters from readers are welcomed Send them to: The Editor, Swiss Observer, Europa House, 68 Chester Road, Hazel Grove, Stockport SK7 5NY.**

I HAVE found that talking to our children in our dialect is almost a "must" if you have parents living in Switzerland. How is a child to cope with all the strangeness of language, food, environment, people unknown to him or her otherwise?

From the very start I spoke to my son in Bärndütsch when we were alone together, but soon my late husband, who had picked up a considerable knowledge of Schwyzerdütsch on holidays in Switzerland, spoke to the child in Swiss dialect as well and always encouraged me to keep it up.

Our son had no problems communicating with his cousins in Switzerland when we eventually went there again after the war.

I had a few friends who did not bother and regretted it. In the end the children did not

want to go and visit their Swiss grandparents, because they could not talk to them.

I must admit when school started it was getting more difficult to keep up our Schwyzerdütsch, but I persevered, even if I got back an answer in English.

When my son — now married and with children of his own, to whom he talks in English only — takes me to the airport on my way to Switzerland, he always says: "I wish I could come with you; we had some lovely times there".

Even now when he sneezes and I say, "Gsundheit", he answers, "Merci".

Knowing the language gives our children a closer link to Switzerland. So please, if your husband agrees, carry on. I wish you the best of luck with it. — **Elisabeth Haydock.**

FROM my experience and observation of friends' children it will not be easy to teach a child a Swiss dialect and it will not be the same with every child.

I spoke only Schwyzerdütsch

to my two boys (my husband speaks fluent German) until the older one started school. My husband and I spoke English at every mealtime so that the children should hear it every day.

Although the five-year-old learnt English very quickly he stuttered badly. This made the younger one laugh, which then infuriated and embarrassed the older one. So we gave up and switched to English only.

We have a circle of 10 Swiss wives in this area and we meet for coffee once a month. Between us we have 18 children, aged six to 35. Not one of them speaks the mother's dialect properly.

If your son has Swiss grandparents who are willing to have him, let him stay with them for long holidays. That could be the answer, especially if he is an extrovert. — **Marta Walters.**

THE best way for a correct accent and easy, simple grammar is to learn two languages as soon as possible.

I should like to give my experience of speaking "Zürdütsch" and English early to my children.

My late husband was British; I am from Zürich. We used to spend the winter at Zürich with my dear mother and the summer in Folkestone. Walter

and Beatrice spoke fluently "Zürdütsch" and English. I spoke always Swiss dialect with them and my husband English.

He spoke French to my mother. His "Müli, Händli wäsche" und "Chum bald wieder" amused us.

During the war both went to boarding school in England and refused to answer in "Zürdütsch", saying "They think we are Germans!" After the war we visited by mother every year and the "Zürdütsch" came back again.

Now at 80, I wished to strengthen the ties with Zürich and showed Walter and Beatrice my wonderful hometown. They enjoyed speaking "Zürdütsch" to my friends and did the shopping for me and loved to settle the bills.

I was teaching German at the International School at Naples. With my Fröbel system I had the kindergarten every morning for two hours. The little ones knew more German in six months than the upper classes after three years.

"Was Hänschen nicht lernt, lernt Hans nimmer mehr!"

My kindergarten at Naples was a pleasure, great joy and most rewarding.

It is a capital, a gift for our children to learn two languages when young, without tears and no hard work. — **Hedy Blessley-Lempp.**

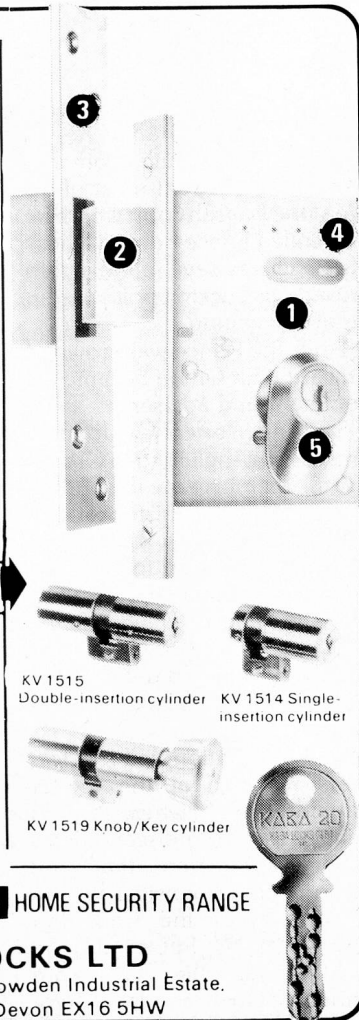
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