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Another Swiss Emigré Down South

by Dr. Roger R. Varin

In June of 1951, a few days after our wedding, my wife Annemarie and I left Bern for our honeymoon in the USA. Today, 59 years later, we are still here, on our seemingly everlasting honeymoon.

This is oversimplifying our history. The reason we came here was my being awarded a postdoctoral fellowship at Harvard by the American Cancer Society. The objective was to prepare DNA samples using the new method developed in Bern by Prof. Rudolf Signer and Dr. Hans Schwander. This technique produced specimens that did not show the high degree of degradation found in earlier work. By the way, the Bernese samples were the ones used by Watson and Crick in the double helix-structure work, and this is unfortunately not widely known.

After a year at Harvard, we moved to Wilmington, Delaware, where I did high-polymer chemistry and physics on fibers for DuPont. In 1962 we moved again, to Greenville, South Carolina. First, I took a job as Director of Research and Development for Riegel Textile Corporation and then, ten years later, I started my own business, Varinit Corporation, a developer and manufacturer of high-tech fiber products for the health-care and electronics industries, for aero-space, marine and environmental industry applications.

So much for background. Now, the main topic: My education in Switzerland.

Before my mother died, she sent me a big box full of papers. The complete record of my education! She had saved every scrap of paper relating to my schools, all notebooks, report cards, drawings, essays, annual school reports and many other things.

What a treasure! I re-lived my youth, leafing through these pages, reading an essay on the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, an "Aufsatz" on Swiss

neutrality in 1942, re-doing an algebra problem, a review of Steinbeck's "The Moon is Down" in English, arithmetic of equity markets without calculators, athletic records and body measurements and so on.

This collection is now at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill's Davis Library. The reference website is:

http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/v/Varin,Roger_R.html

That was the education I got. It was fun going to school, much more fun than staying home. Maybe not for everyone, but for me it was. How does it compare with the education our kids are getting today? This collection should make it easier to answer the question. I invite all historians of education to visit and take a look.

31 March 2010

Greenville, South Carolina