

Walter Gautschi: celebrating 80 years of his life

As part of a belated 80th birthday celebration on September 27, 2008 (instead of December 11, 2007) the following mock interview was read by the undersigned during a dinner party at *Jane's Gourmet Deli & Catering*, Lafayette, Indiana. [I=interviewer, G=Gautschi (supposedly)]

- I: And now our guest of honor, direct from Switzerland, Professor Walter Grouchy. I never forget a face. In your case I can make an exception.
- G: All right, all right. I'm here, but I rather be in Switzerland. What a great place.
- I: Well, since you are in the US, did you get to either of the political conventions?
- G: No, but I am going to the Geneva Convention.
- I: I'm afraid you cannot attend the Geneva Convention.
- G: Why not? Geneva's not in Switzerland?
- I: But let's talk about you. Is it true that you were a precocious child?
- G: Ja, Ja. At the age of two I could already say "Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule".
- I: And you decided to study mathematics?
- G: Ja, Ja. It was either mathematics or making fondue. I love Swiss cheese. But the case for making fondue has too many holes in it. So mathematics won out.
- I: Did you have a mathematical hero?
- G: Euler. He was Swiss, you know.

I: How did you decide to come to Purdue?
 G: I had to. They were the Euler-makers¹.
 I: I heard that at Purdue you worked on numerical analysis. What is numerical analysis?
 G: You know what psychoanalysis is?
 I: Yes.
 G: Well, it's nothing like that.
 I: Let's talk about your taste in food. What is your favorite cuisine?
 G: Italian, anything with Basel².
 I: How about pasta? What kind do you like best? Spaghetti? Linguini? Penne?
 G: Bernoulli. It's Swiss.
 I: I'm told you enjoy music. What is your favorite musical ensemble?
 G: The Swiss wind quintet.
 I: I'm afraid I don't know them. What instruments are in this group?
 G: Flute, clarinet, French horn, English horn, and Matterhorn.
 I: And who is your favorite composer?
 G: Beethoven. He wasn't Swiss, but almost. He wrote three symphonies: the Eroica, the Pastoral, and the Ninth.
 I: Which is your favorite?
 G: The Erika³, of course. Look, it's getting late. I have to run home and wind my cuckoo clocks.
 G: (to himself) I had a good interview. But it wasn't this one.

— *J. J. Price and Robert E. Zink, Purdue University*

¹ An allusion to the “Boilermakers”, a nickname for Purdue University.

² Walter's birthplace.

³ Walter's wife.