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 is 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-makers\textsuperscript{1}.
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 Basel\textsuperscript{2}.
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 Erika\textsuperscript{3}, 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

\textsuperscript{1} An allusion to the “Boilermakers”, a nickname for Purdue University.
\textsuperscript{2} Walter’s birthplace.
\textsuperscript{3} Walter’s wife.