# The Bilingual Family Newsletter

MULTILINGUAL MATTERS

*Editor:*
George Saunders **DECEMBER 1989** **VOLUME 6** **No. 4**


## EDITORIAL

In this issue we have two contributions on adjustment and a review of a new book, *The Moving Experience,* which also deals extensively with this subject. The pains and pleasures of adjusting to a new culture and language will be very familiar to many of our readers. Partners in mixed marriages usually live in the country of one of the partners, so that the other partner has to adjust. But it is not unusual for the family to go to the other partner's country for shorter or longer periods of time; this means adjustment for the non-native partner and perhaps readjustment for the returning native. And of course there are often children involved, and they will have their own particular problems of adjustment. We hope that these contributions on adjustment provide food for thought and perhaps help some readers to better understand what has happened, is happening or may happen in their own families. We would also be very interested in hearing of your own experiences with adjustment.

I would like to take this opportunity, on behalf of our Advisory Board, our Publishers and my own family, to wish all our readers a very happy New Year and every success in their bilingual endeavours.

**George Saunders**



## HOLDING UP THE BRIDGE:
## Moving between two cultures

### Georgia Koumandari

**Georgia Koumandari is a psycho-educational specialist at the Athens College elementary schools. This article is based on a talk she gave to the Cross-Cultural Association of Athens in February 1989. Many thanks to that Association for permission to reproduce this article from their quarterly Newsletter No. 35.**

The above title suggests that there may be an easy way to make the transition from one culture to another. However, based on my personal experiences and those I have discussed with others, I believe that such a transition can be a complicated process.

I think it is fair to say that we have all experienced the fear, the disappointment, as well as the courage and the excitement that we face when moving to another culture. Certainly, as individuals of different backgrounds, each of us may react uniquely in a given situation. Therefore, before I continue, I feel it is necessary to briefly discuss my personal background and present situation.

> "I did not expect to feel more and more like a visitor upon each return to the US – feeling more Greek in the US and more American in Greece."

I was raised in a bicultural, bilingual home in New York and grew up in a neighbourhood where being "Greek" was very much respected. I have always been very proud of my Greek heritage and consider myself fortunate to have been born and raised in the US where one is exposed to much "variety" and opportunity.

As with most Greek-Americans, our church community played a major role in my development. I attended Greek school twice a week for six years, taught Sunday school to kindergarten-aged children and was involved in various youth organisations as well. I also spent several summers in Greece as a child where we have many relatives.

Therefore, it was not odd that I then chose to spend my Junior Year in college in Athens.

However, my decision to return to Greece, after I completed a Master's programme in Psychology and Education,

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was a rather spontaneous one. I only knew that I wanted a challenge in my career and I believed working in Greece (for a year or two) would offer me that challenge.

After working and living in Greece for four years, I am now engaged to be married and realise that I am here to stay.

Upon hearing this description most of you are probably thinking that it was relatively easy for me to adjust to the "change". In some ways it was, as I knew the language. However, I was not aware of the vast difference in mentality between that of a Greek and a Greek-American, and I was certainly not prepared for DEH strikes, taxi strikes, teacher strikes, pushing and shoving in supermarkets, and Dimitra Liani. Further, I did not expect to feel more and more like a visitor upon each return to the US – feeling more Greek in the US and more American in Greece.

I know how it feels to be confused, vulnerable, angry, anxious, insecure and mentally exhausted by it all!

Although it would be easy to elaborate on these negative and uncomfortable feelings, I believe it is important that we look at things from a slightly different perspective – to focus on what we, as individuals, have gained from our unique and often trying experiences.

> "... I do not have to cross any bridges to belong, for I am the bridge, as are each and every one of you."

No matter where we are, we are constantly changing and growing as individuals. This is a natural process which cannot be altered. A major transition such as moving from one culture to another only makes our personal changes more pronounced. For, in the struggle to understand those around us, we are immediately forced to become more aware of who we are and how we "fit in".

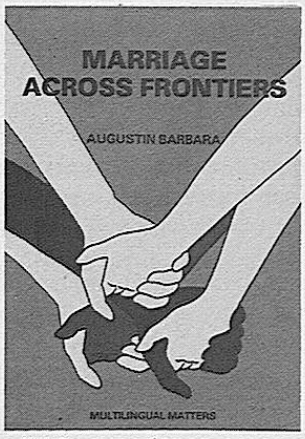
This process of self-evaluation, no matter how painful at times, can allow us to become more sensitive and flexible as individuals.

New experiences create new understandings and new understandings create new perspectives. New perspectives, however, can be confusing and frightening. For example: when I go home to New York and feel like an outsider, all sorts of questions pop into my head, the major one being: Where do I belong?

It is important for us to realise, however, that we can belong anywhere, for belonging simply means creating a niche for ourselves without always having to understand and accept all that goes on around us.

It is only recently that I have come to realise that I do not have to cross any bridges to belong, for I am the bridge, as are each and every one of you.

## MARRIAGE ACROSS FRONTIERS




*Augustin Barbara*

This book is a full and frank discussion of the extra problems and benefits a 'mixed' marriage brings, even when the differences between the countries seem to be very small.

A study of this phenomenon is long overdue. Augustin Barbara has filled this gap admirably having devoted many years to this work with all his experience as a sociologist and all the human warmth which was necessary to seek out, meet and listen to hundreds of 'mixed' couples.

April 1989 1-85359-041-X £8.95

## ACCESS

**ACCESS** is an independent non-profit organisation for people who use English to communicate in the Netherlands.

It is staffed by a team of international volunteers, themselves familiar with expatriate queries and expectations.

It provides:

- **A telephone information service – a research team is continually up-dating the information on file.**
- **Education workshops that provide help with cultural adaptation, personal development and family life.**
- **A referral service to professional English speaking counsellors who can help people to handle the stresses and strains of life that occur in whatever country.**

Basically the aims of **ACCESS** are to make living in the Netherlands an easy and happy experience.

**ACCESS** was developed in response to needs first identified within the American community in the Hague, and then more broadly in the International English-speaking communities in the Netherlands.

It was found that numerous families and individuals were experiencing stress and personal problems during their adaptation to relocation to a foreign culture. In addition to this there were extreme difficulties finding trained counsellors who could communicate in adequate English and with cultural awareness and sensitivity to these problems.

A needs assessment team from a US funded State Department mental health and community services project in Cairo, Egypt, were brought to the Hague.

A formal report submitting their findings substantiated the need for a community service and guidelines for the formation of such.

In 1986 **ACCESS** was established as a non-profit Dutch foundation with a board of directors. A US seed or start up grant was awarded and the first Executive Director assumed responsibilities.

The three main service areas were developed and gradually feeling its way **ACCESS** came into being.

**ACCESS**
**Rotterdamestraat 66**
**2586 GN Den Haag**
**Netherlands.**

**Tel. (070) 55 85 51**

*Readers – Please let us know if you are aware of similar organisations in other countries.*

# ADJUSTMENT AND FAILURE

**Andrea Georgiou**

I become very familiar with the feeling of failure when I moved to Greece. Obviously, I couldn't do anything right. I had studied Greek in the States for three years before I came. I was astonished to discover when I arrived that I couldn't understand a single spoken word. That's true – I remember sitting in a cinema at intermission. A boy came in selling refreshments. "Lemonada!" I turned to the person next to me and asked, "What did he say?" There was something about the setting, being here, that wiped every word out of my head.

Like all foreigners, I suffered through the daily drama of trying to do the simplest things – shop, work, keep house, go places – in Greek, among Greeks. I made an awful mess of it. It was agony for me because I'm a perfectionist. I hate making mistakes.

> "No matter how much I learned, there was always more I hadn't learned yet."

My goal was to "become Greek". When I was Greek, I reasoned, I'd know how to do everything right and I'd always feel right. Wrong! No matter how long I live, I'll never become Greek (you have to be born Greek). Even if I could be Greek, it's doubtful that I'd do everything right. And no one, anywhere, ever feels "right" all the time.

It took me years to discover these simple truths! In the meantime, I felt a failure. No matter how much I learned, there was always more I hadn't learned yet. If I did one thing well, I did ten badly. Although I was coping, I felt awful.

Besides failure, there was the question of adjustment. Everyone seems to know how long adjustment takes – a year, two, three – depends on who you ask. There's supposed to be some magical moment when it's done – you're adjusted. You'll feel right, live well, be happy in Greece.

I might as well have waited for my fairy godmother, instead – there was no magical moment.

> "I'd like to suggest that we stop thinking of adjusting as a task that can be completed."

I believe that we're all, continually, involved in the process of learning to live in another culture. It may be useful to talk about stages of adjustment – but it may not. Certainly we can forget about that mythical state of "being adjusted". It just won't happen. If it does, it won't last – I'm not just being cynical. As our lives change, new situations usually bring the need to re-adjust.

It was very reassuring for me to read recently a book called *Survival Kit for Overseas Living* by L. Robert Kohl. It was written to prepare Americans to live abroad. At one point Kohl talks about the most important traits a person should have for successful adjustment to living abroad. He lists the usual: empathy, motivation, curiosity, perceptiveness, adaptability, flexibility and – surprise – the ability to fail.

The ability to fail, or to tolerate failure! Finally, someone is talking about adjustment in terms of failure! Kohl singles out the three most important qualities for successful adjustment: 1. a sense of humour; 2. a low goal–task orientation (i.e. you can accept not being able to accomplish); 3. the ability to fail.

Kohl states that the ability to fail is absolutely critical, since everyone fails at something overseas – in his words, failure is "absolutely built in". He points out that many people who go abroad are especially successful at home – people who don't expect to fail.

With these thoughts in mind, I'd like to suggest that we stop thinking of adjusting as a task that can be completed. Why not think of it as an on-going process of doing, learning and enjoying – like a hobby or sport? We can stop thinking of our efforts in terms of failure. We can make the decision to think of our efforts in terms of success.

Another point I want to make is that what we do – objectively speaking – is often very different from what we feel. We may be coping very well, getting along in the new culture, making progress – and yet feel ill at ease. (This is part of why everyone else appears to be happier, better adjusted. Often we can see what others are doing, but not how they feel.) We can congratulate ourselves on our progress and try to see ourselves objectively, rather than focusing on our uncomfortable feelings.

> ". . . Communication is a two-way street. And so is living cross-culturally."

So often, we forget that the outcome of our efforts isn't dependent just on us. The classic difference is the difference between learning the language and being understood. All of us have had this experience. We struggle to learn the language, get up the courage to speak and – zilch. We're not heard (no one is listening) or not understood (maybe people don't want to understand what we're saying, or maybe we're not saying what people want to hear). I speak fluent Greek, but I've been in situations where people are so convinced that I'm foreign, they can't hear that I'm speaking Greek . . . Communication is a two-way street. And so is living cross-culturally. We can think past our own supposed failings, to see the wider picture.

*(Many thanks to the Cross-Cultural Association of Athens for permission to reproduce this article from their quarterly Newsletter No. 35. More details of the Association was published in* BFN *vol. 6:3. If you are interested in joining the address is: Gripari 122, Kallithea 17673, Athens, Greece.)*

## *CONTRIBUTIONS*

Please continue to send us your 'stories', anecdotes, jokes, useful hints or any other contributions you think might interest our readers.

Remember, this Newsletter is for you, but above all, by you.

# BOOK REVIEW

**Gail Meltzer and Elaine Grandjean: *The Moving Experience. A Practical Guide to Psychological Survival.* Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1989, x + 146 pages. Price: (Paperback) £6.95, US$14.50.**

**Reviewed by George Saunders**

*The Moving Experience* is a book which will be of interest and assistance to many readers of the *Bilingual Family Newsletter,* for it is, as its subtitle indicates a practical guide to how people moving from one country, culture and language to another can cope psychologically with this change in their life. In most bilingual families usually at least one of the spouses will have already made such a move, and it is very likely that at least a temporary move to the other spouse's homeland will at some time be contemplated. Knowing what difficulties to expect and how to overcome or reduce them can obviously take much of the stress out of such a move.

The book is written by two American women who are both personally and professionally well-qualified to offer advice on this matter. Both were educated in the United States and both married Danes and now live in Denmark. In the past 20 years they have moved a total of 26 times – including once while actually writing the book! Gail Meltzer, who has a Master's Degree in Clinical Psychiatric Social Work, has a private practice in psychotherapy in Copenhagen and also works in the Department of Psychiatry at the University Hospital. Elaine Grandjean, who has a Master's Degree in Psychology, also works in Copenhagen as an editor for an international organisation. The authors write, therefore, from both personal and professional experience. As they say in the Introduction, during their own many moves they made a lot of mistakes because they didn't know how to prepare and protect themselves emotionally for moving – before, during and after.

The book is attractively set out and is written in a clear, non-technical style. It has eight chapters: 1. So You're Moving; 2. Your Key to Adjustment; 3. Staying Put or Just Passing Through?; 4. On Foreign Soil; 5. The Question of a Job; 6. The Movable Marriage; 7. The Portable Child; 8. Now It's Your Move.

In chapter 1 the authors make the point that any move means adjustment, and that emotional adjustment takes time. Whilst the physical part of moving has a distinct beginning and end, the emotional process of moving has no clear endpoint (p. 4):

> *It often continues long after the boxes are unpacked. The sadness and sense of loss you felt when saying goodbye to loved ones can linger for years. These feelings can, if ignored, create a strong sense of isolation and may even progress into depression. At first you may have felt excited and optimistic, but now you feel these positive emotions giving way to frustration, anger or other negative, energy-consuming emotions. Negative emotions are an unavoidable part of life, but they can slow down, hinder or outright block your emotional adjustment. Emotional adjustment to a move is a process that is completed when you feel "at home", however long that may take and whatever that means to you.*

The authors provide a checklist of physical things which may have to be done in preparation for a move, e.g. selling the house, hiring a moving company, enrolling the children in a new school, since proper organisation of this side of a move will make it emotionally much less demanding.

There is also a checklist of known stress situations and a point system for ascertaining the degree of stress involved. The authors believe that once people can recognise potentialy stressful events associated with moving, they can anticipate them and plan accordingly. Chapter 2 deals with adjustment, a highly personal and subjective state in which people feel content and in balance with themselves and their surroundings and their needs are being reasonably fulfilled. The authors point out that adjustment means compromising, perhaps a little, perhaps a lot. Some moves require little readjustment, others can have a marked effect on people, e.g. if they have left all their relations, friends and colleagues behind and feel they no longer have anyone to talk to. The amount of re-adjustment will depend on how well the new set of circumstances fulfills their needs. And re-adjustment may take quite some time, e.g. to establish a new network of friends.

The authors suggest that people intending to move should make a list of their needs in order of priority, and then rank them again on how well they have been able to satisfy these needs in the past, in the present, and how well they think they will be able to meet them after their move. An important need (e.g. visiting relatives frequently) may be being satisfactorily met at present, but most likely will not be after the move. In such cases, people may need to concentrate on improving the chances (e.g. budgeting for and planning air trips), or deciding that fulfilment of other needs offsets this loss.

The authors also recommend that partners and/or children draw up their own lists of needs and that family members see each other's lists (p. 24):

> *Comparing lists can be a real eye opener. What is vital to you may not even make the list of your partner, and vice versa. And the priorities of your children probably bear little resemblance to your own. The point is not to change one another's priorities for happiness, but to make each of you aware of their importance to the well-being of the family. Comparing these lists may also help each person be more tolerant and understanding when another's needs are not being met.*

Meeting these needs may mean facing unpleasant choices or situations which are often supported by the following basic fears: fear of injury (verbal or physical), fear of failure, fear of hurting someone's feelings, fear of rejection, fear of financial insecurity. One or more of these basic fears may interfere with or block a person's successful adjustment after moving. But the more one is aware of these fears, the more one can control one's reactions to them. If a particular fear seems particularly relevant, one should discuss it openly with the people affected.

The authors say that reactions to adjustment commonly follow the following pattern (p. 31):

> *You begin with a generally positive attitude ("Isn't it great?") . . . This stage gives way to frustration and perhaps hostility because individual expectations are not being met ("I hate it!"). This is really the turning point that leads to an upswing. You start to make changes ("I'm really trying!"). Now you feel more confident and independent; you adjust your expectations to fit reality. Finally, you achieve adjustment when you can function*

*adequately and without undue feelings of anxiety ("This feels good.").*

The order of the reactions may vary for different people, and once a certain reaction has occurred once it does not mean that it will not recur. The time spent in each type of reaction may vary from days to years. The authors advise movers not to try to adjust too quickly, since this can overload their ability to cope and lead to depression and withdrawal (p. 40):

*Slowing down is essential in these situations. You need time to maintain – or regain – control of the situation.*

Chapter 4, entitled "On Foreign Soil", looks at the pros and cons of life in a foreign country and suggests ways to get the most out of living abroad. Four major groups of people move abroad: those married to foreign nationals, those employed by companies with foreign offices (and their families), those employed by their government such as the military and foreign service (and their families), and those who emigrate because of unsatisfactory economic or political conditions and who usually intend to change citizenship.

The authors advise intending movers to find out as much as possible about their new country before they move, as this will make it more likely that they can adjust to living there with a minimum of difficulty, e.g. who is the head of government, what party has power, what legal rights do women have, do small boys and girls play together? etc. A constructive pre-move reconnaissance visit to the new country is recommended, during which answers are obtained to questions still unanswered.

According to the authors, one of the greatest challenges in moving to a foreign country will be language. Whilst it is up to an individual to decide how much of a new language should be learned, it is pointed out that becoming fluent in a new language is usually a prerequisite for full integration within the new culture (pp. 72–3):

*You know what is going on around you because you can read the newspaper, listen to the radio and participate fully in discussion . . . Learning the language may mean the difference between getting a job and being unemployed, making friends or being isolated, and being master of your situation or its victim.*

*Just as you would probably expect foreigners to learn your language when they move to your country, they expect you to learn their language when you live in their country. You have become the foreigner. The longer you stay in their country, the more likely the nationals will expect you to learn their language.*

The authors do not gloss over the difficulties in acquiring a new language (p. 68):

*Learning a new language is probably different from work you are used to. Don't underestimate it; it can be a lot more tiring than cleaning house, keeping up with a two-year old or working an eight-to-five job . . . One reason why learning a new language is a strain is because it brings out personal inadequacies. You may feel frustrated and stupid when fumbling for words. It is like going back to childhood when the teacher had all the answers and you had to learn them. You suddenly go from being your confident, competent self to being a tongue-tied foreigner.*

Activities which were carried out without a second thought in one's own language (e.g. going to the doctor, using public transport) now take on added importance and perhaps give added stress in one's life.

However, the potentially traumatic and time-consuming task of learning a new language can have many benefits. For instance, for people married to a foreign national it is often the only way of really getting to know their partner's family. Although the authors do not mention it, it would seem advisable for people planning a long-term stay in a new country, if at all possible, to prepare themselves linguistically before moving, so that they have at least a rudimentary knowledge of the language.

The authors discuss some of the advantages and disadvantages of being a foreigner: a foreigner may recognise at a superficial level that differences must be expected in the new country, but at a deeper level, he or she may react as though many things should be just the same as they are at home; depending on one's nationality, one may be met with varying degrees of friendship or hostility on the part of nationals of the country; a foreigner may be allowed more freedom from convention than a local, not being expected to know the nuances of customs and traditions, so that *faux pas* are more easily accepted and forgiven – used with discretion, this extra flexibility can work to the foreigner's advantage.

The authors give advice on what one can expect and not expect from one's embassy and give tips on dealing with the problem of loneliness in a foreign country and making new friends. A chapter is devoted to the question of jobs. Changing jobs is a major reason why people move. But when both partners have a job, the move is often considered because *one* of them has a chance of advancement. This can create problems within the relationship, whether the decision is to stay or move. If the move is made, the other partner may have difficulty finding a job, which can lead to loss of self esteem and depression. Advice is given on how to tackle these difficult matters, including in some cases the two-residence solution, the long-distance commuter marriage: one partner stays in the old community and the other moves to the new one, usually with the hope of becoming a one-residence family at some time in the future, perhaps in one, three or even five years.

Another chapter discusses in some detail the strains which a move can put on a marriage and suggests ways of avoiding or lessening the effect of such pressures. The cross-cultural marriage is given particular attention. In such cases the move is often from one partner's country to the other partner's country. Such a move can change a couple's relationship by altering the roles each partner plays. Some of the changes may be temporary, others may last for years (p. 112):

*Living in your own country usually means that you have an advantage over your partner for the simple reason that it is your country. There you may have been the one to handle the family accounts or deal with legal and tax matters. In your own country, you have your own friends, family, and colleagues. Moving to your partner's home ground changes all this. You may find yourself going from an equal or "in charge" role to one of dependence. This type of situation is accentuated if the*

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## INFORMATION

**Bilingual Books**
Harmony Publishing Ltd
14 Silverston Way, Stanmore, Middlesex HA7 4HR.
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Their latest book *Tanya Moves House* and accompanying cassette is published in Arabic, French, German, Urdu, Punjabi, Bengali and Gujarati with English.

***Children's Books in Foreign Languages Catalogue***
published by Baker Books now available from:
Children's Book Centre
237 Kensington High Street, London W1.

*Continued from page five*

> *language isn't your own and the customs differ from what you are comfortable with. Suddenly, your partner is the one with the answers and you must turn to him/her for help and explanations. No matter how helpful and understanding your partner is about these changes in your respective roles, the shift can nonetheless upset your self-esteem, self-confidence and even identity.*

However, as the authors point out, most people will probably adjust to living in a foreign country if they can both enjoy being different and try to accept some new ways of doing things.

The seventh chapter, entitled "The Portable Child", deals with the various problems which may arise when children are involved in a move. In many ways infants and toddlers are easier to move: "As long as the parents provide a stable environment, these children can go nearly anywhere." (p. 118). However, it is acknowledged that even young children can sense the stress generated by a move and be initially upset by the change of home. Parents who themselves are preoccupied or tense with the demands of moving, may find it difficult at first to give the extra security a child is seeking. A definite advantage of moving with small children is that they can be useful for getting to know people in the new community: "Strangers who would never dream of talking to you when you are alone often have no hesitation in striking up a conversation when you have a small child with you." However, some stress could also be caused if the new community has very different cultural expectations about how small children should be cared for.

School-age children are more difficult to move, since they will already have needs which extend beyond the family into the community. They also have an increasing sense of identity, and of where and how they fit into the world: "To a child, a move can mean the loss of the 'known' world. Friends are left behind, as are the familiar neighbourhood and school. This can shake the child's sense of identity." (p. 120). In contrast to adults, most children are not in a position to say no to a move.

It is suggested that parents try to involve the children as much as possible in the decision-making of the move. The extent of this involvement will obviously vary with the age of the children. The children should be given as much information as possible about the place they are moving to, and the positive aspects of the move should be pointed out to them. To retain a sense of the past, a need felt by both children and adults, the children could be helped to compile a memory book with photos etc. of their old home, neighbourhood, friends and family. The children should be encouraged to keep in touch with those left behind, as this will make the transition to the new environment easier.

After the move children will need time to re-establish the social web they have left behind, and during this time will probably require additional support and attention from their parents. Recognising the children's needs and helping in this way will help alleviate any feelings of guilt the parents may have about the negative effect the move could have on the children. A very sensible suggestion is that, if at all possible, the move be made at the beginning of a new school year, as this will make it easier academically and also socially – new social groups will probably not yet have formed.

There is quite a detailed discussion of the role grandparents play in a move. They may be upset if their children and grandchildren are moving far away and visits are to be less frequent. They should be reassured that their grandchildren will not forget them and that they as grandparents will still very much be part of the family. Close contact can still be maintained by phone, letter, audio and video cassette; these are also an invaluable aid to maintaining the children's proficiency in their grandparents' language. Sending children for visits alone can also be a valuable experience, as it can create "very special, close ties that cannot be duplicated. Without you in the middle, these two generations can develop their own relationships." (p. 125).

The authors discuss the cultural and linguistic implications of a move abroad for children of binational parents who are moving to the country of one of them and for children of uninational parents who are moving because of work. They consider that it can have distinct advantages for both types of children: "Early exposure to different cultures can increase their acceptance of new ideas and their tolerance for things done in a different way . . . They usually develop an expanded view of the world and tend to pay greater attention to news beyond their doorstep." (p. 126). Because their stay is often limited, uninational children usually remain "outsiders" in the new culture, but they can still absorb new ideas or attitudes and acquire some of the language. Conflicts between children and parents may arise when the children wish to do things according to the new culture and the parents want to retain their own values and traditions. This calls for open and frank discussion and some compromise on both sides.

Binational children will, before moving, usually already have experience with both their parents' cultures and, it is to be hoped, also with their two languages. The authors highlight the advantages of binational parents raising their children bilingually by each speaking their own language to the children. Such family bilingualism makes any move between the homelands of the parents so much easier for the children (and, incidentally, for each parent, since they will be constantly hearing their partner's language in the home wherever they are living at a particular time). Communication with family members on both sides is given as another strong reason for binational parents to bring up their children in both languages. "If you children learn both languages their relationship with their grandparents, aunts and uncles and cousins can develop and flourish." (p. 129).

The authors then go on to discuss the question of deciding what sort of school children should attend in a new country: boarding schools, international schools or local schools. The decision will obviously depend on each family's particular situation. Uninational families on a relatively short stay may, for instance, opt for an international or boarding school if their children's language is the language of instruction; this will make re-entry into school on their return to their homeland relatively easy. On the other hand families whose stay is long-term or permanent will most likely prefer a local school where instruction is in the language of the country, since this will result in better integration of the children into the community and better language development. This section of the book would have been improved if there had also been some discussion, even if a move is seen as more or less permanent and the children are going to a local school, of the advisability and ways of maintaining what was once the children's main language at a reasonable level (e.g. literacy) in the new country.

The book provides much food for thought and will undoubtedly be of much assistance to anyone thinking about

## BILINGUAL HUMOUR

**Christiane Wilkins, Solihull, England**

One day in winter we went to the park. Nina (age 2½ years) said to me "Mama, ich bin kalt!". While I was putting her mittens on I tried to correct her by saying "*Mir* ist kalt, Nina". She replied: "Mich auch, Mama!"

moving. It would also be useful for people who have already moved to put their reactions to their move into perspective, particularly if these reactions have been negative. The book encourages readers to look on their move as a challenge (i.e. a positive experience) rather than a problem (something negative). I myself have a little experience with moving, having moved 14 times in the last 20 years, including three international moves (admittedly rather a modest effort compared with that of the authors of this book!) and can see that the book would have helped me to avoid, reduce or at least better understand some of the difficulties the moves presented. I recommend it to any mover.

## LETTERS FROM READERS

### HOME?

It has been two years since my return to the United States, and hardly a week passes that I don't miss Europe. I left for Madrid, Spain in August 1982 to teach preschoolers at The American School of Madrid. I returned to the United States in August of 1987 with a French husband and two preschoolers of my own – both born in Madrid. While naturally happy to be in my native country I miss the international environment that was available to my family in Madrid.

Our apartment complex of 15 units was comprised of families from all over the world: Mexico, China, Peru, Brazil, France, Germany, USA and naturally Spain. It was not at all unusual to hear two or three languages spoken around the pool on a summer afternoon. Although only three years of age, our oldest son Shaun spoke French, Spanish and English with a fair amount of proficiency. Spanish was perhaps his first language as he strived to play with his young schoolmates in Spanish. He spoke English fluently with me and used many French words and phrases with his father. My husband and I shared a strong commitment to offer our children the opportunity to learn three languages.

As a teacher in a bilingual pre-kindergarten I was aware of the possibilities to develop multilingualism in young children and feverishly read all the research and books available to me with respect to bilingualism. I questioned parents and teachers regarding proper expectations and problems to anticipate. We were confident that Shaun would find multilingualism a natural and enjoyable experience. And we were correct for the duration of time that we lived overseas. Once back in the United States though, our efforts to support multilingualism were forever challenged.

My first effort was to join the international house where I could practise my Spanish on wednesdays for one hour. I ran two ads in their newsletter trying to form a playgroup in Spanish or French. No-one replied. I secured a Peruvian friend to watch the children two afternoons while I worked, hoping that our boys would maintain their interest in Spanish through stories and conversation with Ana Maria. I found that although they liked to listen to stories and would even select Tao Tao as a favourite book, they quickly became most reluctant to speak any Spanish with me or Ana Maria. Last month she moved to another state.

We joined Alliance Française but the group is small and the few children that attend speak English. We were fortunate to secure cartoon videos in French and the children are motivated to watch the tapes. We try to restrict their TV viewing to French in an effort to reinforce their interest. As more and more friends "come to play" at our house I find that my husband often "forgets" to use French with the children. In short, it has been a much greater challenge than we anticipated.

That is not to say we have given up hope. Just last week we "found" two French families who recently arrived in Charlotte. They have young children who thus far only speak French and we intend to capitalise on this opportunity to make our children aware that French is spoken by someone besides "Papa".

**Cynthia Holley, Charlotte, USA**

## SUPPORT GROUPS FOR INTERNATIONAL LIVING

**IAF = A Lobby for Multi-National Partners and Families in the Federal Republic of Germany**
IAF
Mainzer Landstr. 147, 6000 Frankfurt am Main,
West Germany.
Tel. 069-737898.

The organisation helps multinational/cultural families to overcome problems of prejudice from the society at large by organising lectures, lobbying on their behalf and providing counselling and general support by people living in similar situations.

**International Women's Club: South Limburg**
Nelleke Bertrand
Wilhelminasingel 127c
Maastricht, Holland.

**Association of American Wives of Europeans**
49 Rue Pierre Charron
F-75008 Paris
France.

# CONTACTS

**If you wish your name and address to be included in the Contacts section, please send us the following information:**

**Name, address, languages spoken in the family, children's birth dates and specification of the type of families with whom you would like to get in touch.**

**Please send your queries, answers and/or contributions to George Saunders at either of the two addresses below:**

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