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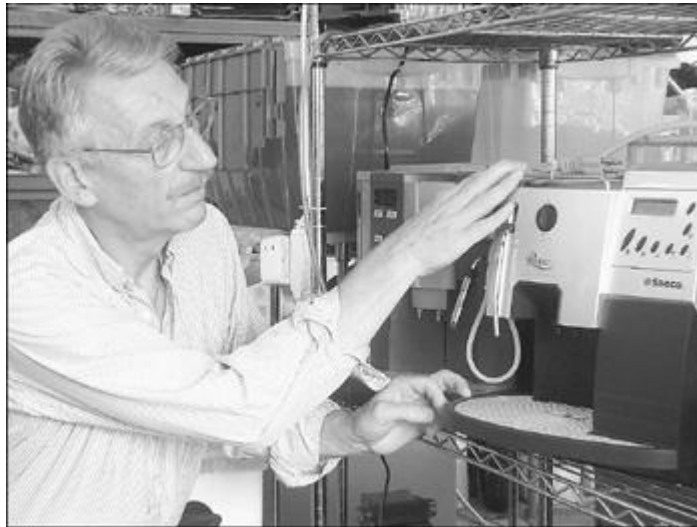
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Coming to America: 'we are living our dream'

By Tucker Mitchell

The Boss family had to win the lottery to get into America, which they are sure is the best place on Earth. An Independence Day tale from some of our newest Americans

Ask Huntersville's Heinz Boss what he likes about America and he points out the window of his modest, Tanners Creek home and starts talking about fences. "Here, my neighbor has a small fence because he has a dog which he does not want to bother us," says Boss. "In Switzerland (where Boss used to live), in all of Europe for that matter, they have great big fences because they do not want the eyes looking in. ... They know that people will see you have something, maybe your are cooking steaks or something, and they will say, 'oh, look at that. They can't afford steaks. They must have stolen some money.' Here, they see you cooking a steak or driving a nice car and they say, 'hey, good for you. Maybe I'll have a steak someday, too.' It's completely different." And, as far as Boss and his family are concerned, it is completely clear that America is the better place and the place they want to



Heinz Boss works on an espresso maker in his garage.

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be. Just how much of a minority that would make them in Europe these days isn't clear. The Bosses suggest that anti-Americanism is mostly about politics or jealousy, and that people in the know in Europe know America is very desirable. The Bosses know this to be true to some extent because for them to get to America they had to win the lottery. There are several ways to get green cards — U.S. immigration visas — but if you have no special skills or family connections, the most likely way is by entering to the U.S. Immigration Department's annual "Diversity Lottery." The U.S. sets aside 55,000 slots each year for "diversity immigrants" which are immigrants from "low-admission" countries. The number of slots available depends upon the number of immigrants from a particular country who already in the U.S. and how many have been admitted in recent years. When the Boss family applied in 2001, they were among 11 million lottery applicants worldwide. When they won, it was big enough news to merit a story on Swiss TV and on the front page of a section of their local paper, the Thuner Tadblatt (Daily News). "Our 15 minutes of fame," says Erika Boss. And now, they get 15 minutes more because, on America's birthday they have a message Americans ought to hear. This country, the one that gets slammed around the world every day, the one whose flag is burned and soldiers killed, is really the very best place on Earth. The trouble is, say the Bosses, most Americans have never lived anywhere else, and so they don't know it. "You Americans," Heinz Boss says, "you don't know how good you have it."

Chicks dig the Caprice

It would be wrong to cast the Swiss-born Boss family as your typical immigrants. They come from Switzerland for one thing, which is not a big exporter of potential U.S. citizens. The country famous for chocolate, watches and neutrality usually gets less than 100 slots in the diversity lottery each year. And both Heinz and Erika are free spirits who lived in America for several years before meeting each other, and before coming over on the lottery ticket in early 2002. So they knew, first-hand, what America was all about. And they knew it was where they wanted to be. In fact, the reason they met in Switzerland was because Erika was attracted to Heinz' sexy American car. He owned a mid-1980s Chevrolet Caprice. "What a car!" Erika says, a gleam still in her eyes. "He even let me drive it!" "See," says Heinz, "the car thing. It works." But a Caprice? "Well," says Heinz, "it was just a great car. All the people in Switzerland have these little cars that fit on the little tiny streets, and then when I saw it I had to have it. It really looked impressive over there. People always stopped to make comments about it." Many even waved their fingers at it. "Yes," says Boss, "they knew it was American and some of them did not like it. But we found out later that they are all kinds of American car clubs all over Switzerland. So our idea is popular." After they married, the Bosses always dreamed of coming to America. They talked about it all the time, regularly made trips to the States, and flew an American flag at their house year-round. "It's where we knew we wanted to be," says Erika. So, four years ago, the Bosses put together their application, paid a private company to handle the paperwork and then, after the computer had done its work, they found out they won. They sold almost everything they had, including Heinz' prospering machine tool business, packed up the boys Phillippe and Marcel, and moved to the U.S. They chose Charlotte because Heinz fell in love with it during one his annual travel vacations to the

U.S. Erika remembers him calling and saying, "This is the most beautiful place I have ever seen. We have got to move here."

'Welcome home'

In three years in the U.S., the Bosses have not been disappointed. The family had no precise plan of action, but stumbled onto a vocation while shopping for a coffee pot. To be exact, they were looking for an in-home espresso machine, a staple in most Swiss, and many European homes. "But we couldn't find one anywhere," says Heinz. So he came up with the idea of importing them and becoming a distributor/contractor for their manufacturers. Today, Heinz is "The CoffeeBoss" and services espresso machines at a number of Charlotte-area businesses. He also is the authorized repair outlet for two machine makers, Swiss-based Jura and Italy's Saeco. Boss receives broken machines from across North America — "we got one from Fairbanks (Alaska) last week," says Heinz — fixes them and ships them back out. His garage is almost certainly the largest repository of espresso machines in the greater Huntersville area. Erika Boss spent years in the hospitality industry, and she dreams of opening a coffee shop with her husband. They would sell and repair machines there and offer advice on home coffee brewing. They'd also sell European treats — pastries, treats ... Swiss chocolate? "Of course," says Erika. That is in the future. For now, the family is enjoying their new country, getting used to life in these United States. Most of that experience is very positive, says Erika. "It's just the way of life here," she says. "It is so open. The people are so ... well, it is really more than friendly. You are just accepted in a way that you are" She stops. She'd rather dwell on the positives of America than the negatives of the old country. Heinz, however, is less inhibited. "You figure all the things: the climate, the fact that it is cheaper to live here, the very size of it all. ... People in Switzerland, many of them anyway, just could not imagine the size, the scope of this place. It would simply be too much for many of them. The very freedom of it, it would overwhelm them. "But that is what makes it great," Heinz Boss. "You can pick up everything tomorrow and just go to California. In Europe, it is really not that way." And, in his estimation, it is getting worse. Europe is old, is closed, is tired. And no one is really happy to be there. Two examples pop into Heinz' mind. "When I was working here before, I came back to the States one time from a vacation and the man at customs, when he handed my passport back to me, said, 'welcome home,'" Boss says. "He saw where I was from. He knew I wasn't an American and he still welcomed me back. In Switzerland, you return and they say, 'do you have anything to declare?'" The other example comes from Boss' business experience. Though he had a thriving business in Switzerland, he struggled for years to expand his line of credit with the local bank, with any bank. He'd been in business in the United States barely a year when the branch manager at his bank (First Citizens) approached him about opening a line of credit. "He came up to me and said, 'you know someone with a business like yours needs a line of credit,'" Boss says. "And he filled out the paper work and got us one. "It's just a different attitude here," he says. "People are trying to help, trying to grow, to do more. In Europe, they're just holding on to what they have." He clasps his chest in a possessive motion, and shakes his head.

'Here honey'

The openness of Americans is perhaps the most startling aspect. The Bosses were amazed at how easily the boys were welcomed into school (Hornets Nest) and boy scouts. Phillippe was embarrassed early on when, while trying out his newly polished English language skills, a female store clerk handed him his change and said, 'there you go, honey.'" "His (Phillippe's) cheeks were red," says Erika Boss. "Honey, sweetheart, sweetie ... you do not hear those words in a store in Switzerland." Adds Heinz, "In Switzerland, they are doing you a favor (in a store) if they notice you are there at all." The Bosses have also found America's infatuation with its flag and colors interesting. Erika admits that she still doesn't quite know what to do when the Pledge of Allegiance is said. Part of that is because she is "still a foreigner" and isn't sure if she should take part. Part is because the concept itself is foreign. "We don't pledge allegiance to flags or anything else," she says. Heinz Boss says that's why the European Union is "working." "They'll give up their money, their name, their flag," he says. "The people say, 'okay, fine. Just don't take away what I have. Leave me alone.' No one cares. "But can you imagine that in the United States?" he asks. "Of course not. The people are proud to be here." Says Erika, "I'm telling you, we are living our dream here. This house? Impossible for us in Switzerland. And the people ... we have been so welcomed. It is just perfect." Well, not quite. That moment will happen in a couple of years after the Bosses have been here long enough (five years) to apply for U.S. citizenship. "We're going to get it," says Heinz Boss. "Come back then. It will be a real party

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