

Zeitschrift: Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad
Herausgeber: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad
Band: 13 (1986)
Heft: 1

Artikel: Swiss celebrities abroad : Governor of Vermont/USA
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-907859>

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Swiss Celebrities Abroad:

Governor of Vermont/USA

Madeleine Kunin is not just 'only a woman', on top of that she is also a Liberal Democrat, belongs to the Jewish faith and hails from abroad. Despite all that, she has been elected as the Governor of the American State of Vermont, and this, of all times in November 1984, just during the upsurge of conservative Republicanism.



Vermont is a sparsely-settled, thickly-wooded hilly and mountainous region, besides being the least populated U.S. State. The Vermontians early knew that the scenery of their countryside is one of their most precious assets. Green is the countryside, green in the political sense is also their traditional stance. 'It is a combination of traditional environ-

mental awareness and the constantly modernised governmental Laws, which have led to this special Vermontian relationship to Nature and the landscape. Laws and Prohibitions alone would not function', says Madeleine Kunin. In spite of the basic conservative attitude with a tendency towards non-conformism, the respect for all that is individualistic has surely

contributed to the fact that today Madeleine Kunin is Governor of the State. At any rate: That the wave of conservative Republicanism in the autumn of 1984 was brought to a halt at the border of Vermont, this, according to the «Boston Globe», can justly be attributed to Madeleine Kunin: «Only she could accomplish such a thing».

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Madeleine Kunin was born in 1933 in Zurich. Her father met with a fatal accident when she was three years old. The family was Jewish and afraid of a German invasion. In 1940 her mother, Renée May, decided to emigrate with Madeleine and her brother to the USA. «Furthermore, my very idealistically minded mother», so narrates Madeleine Kunin today, «was convinced that America would offer her and us more possibilities than Switzerland. My mother firmly believed in the 'American Dream', an America that is a land of unlimited opportunities for all.» With the last refugee-ship, the SS. S. Manhattan, that left Genoa for New York, the family emigrated to the USA. Further dates in the life of Madeleine Kunin: schooling in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, later a study of History and a Post-Graduate study in the field of Journalism. Since then, she has lived as a journalist, with some interruptions, in Vermont. Then she got married in 1955. There followed «a rather mixed-up decade». Her four children were born, she tried not only to be a house-wife but she also continued writing as a free-lance journalist, moreover, she concluded a further Post-Graduate study in English Literature in Boston.

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In 1970 her husband was granted a Sabbatical Year from the Harvard University, where he had a teaching assignment. The Kunin family decided to spend this year in Switzerland. And it was this year, which spurred on Madeleine Kunin towards Politics. She was greatly impressed by the combat of the Swiss woman for the right to vote: «1970/71 in Bern, that was a year, in which I refuelled my energy and because of this 'struggle for the woman's Vote, it became for me a political energy. Many women were taking a stand for something, that we in the USA have for long taken for granted. Their political engagement ignited my enthusiasm and I decided to enter into Politics after my return to the USA.»

Madeleine Kunin knows the USA as well as Switzerland but she is averse to drawing comparisons. For example, in the educational system, in her view, comparisons are hardly possible. The Swiss society is homogeneous, the American, on the contrary, is so mixed, that enormous obstacles stand in the way of any chance similarities. For all that, on one point Kunin makes a clear comparison: «The American society is, to be sure, somewhat opener than the Swiss. That goes especially for the possibilities for woman: the many combinations of a 'mixed existence', part-time mother and house-wife, part-time professionally employed, which, many women have during a part of their lives, as I also personally know, is somewhat easier to organise in the USA than in Switzerland. This situation is also more likely to be accepted here. In many things, Switzerland is still very archaic and incrustated. My career, in such a form, would hardly have been possible in Switzerland.»

Toni Lienhard/summarised from Tages-Anzeiger

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