

THE MARTIN FAMILY

ZÜRICH AND MABEL IS WORKING

SWITZERLAND

August 21, 2011

Dear Reader,

I hope that you're as happy and healthy as we are here in Zürich. I can report that Mabel, my MacBook Pro, fully recovered from her keyboard transplant, has returned to good health. Mabel wants you to know that this week's letter will feature design *flair* and content consistent with the image of an Apple product. Naturally, as a loyal (former) employee of HP, I contested Miss Mabel's assertion. (Mabel, the MacBook, read The Help and as a result, had adopted a persona straight out of Mississippi domestic help in the 60's.)

"The HP Laptop performed admirably during your absence, Miss Mabel." I began.

"Admirably?" Miss Mabel mocked a Windows PC by using a `courier` font.

"Cut that out, Miss Mabel," I retorted. "You're imitating a typewriter."

"JUST LIKE A WINDOWS PC, MR. DAN."

"Now you're doing a telex machine," I replied. Miss Mabel's view was harsh, but current events lent credence to her position. HP decided to leave the (low-margin) PC business.

"How can that be a low-margin business?" Nazy asked. "HP is the biggest PC supplier. Doesn't HP have the lowest costs since they buy components in bulk?"

"Yes. Costs are even lower because the PC division successfully executed HP's operational efficiency strategy: all employees were fired. No HP PC is ever touched by an HP employee. The machines are built in China and are serviced and delivered by partners."

"So if nothing will change when they sell the PC group, why are they quitting?"

"Consumers weren't enamored by HP's offerings," I replied with a nod in Mabel's direction. More importantly, HP has a new CEO."

"So.."

"A new CEO must make changes, otherwise people will wonder why he was hired. When Mark Hurd arrived several years ago he separated the PC and Printer divisions because his predecessor (Carly) had combined them. He moved from a specialized and distributed sales force to a centralized and generalized sales force."

"Are you sure?"

"Maybe from a generalized, distributed to a specialized, centralized. The structure changed every 18 months so I can't remember exactly."

Although Leo, the new CEO, said that selling the PC division will allow HP to focus on business customers, the stock market was not impressed. HP stock entered free-fall.

“You told me that the fall began when **you** left,” Nazy interrupts.

“Yes. But I’ve always wondered about how that happened. I had a confidentiality protocol in my departure package, so somehow word must have leaked out.”

“Maybe someone actually read one of the letters you posted on www.seat26b.com.”

“Don’t be snide, my dear.”

“And didn’t Mark Hurd, the previous CEO, resign at the same time you left?”

“Of course. He didn’t want to carry on without my assistance.”

“Maybe the stock dropped because Mark left.”

“Don’t worry about details. HP stock is amazing bargain, Nazy. When you combine a rapid decline in HP share price with a meteoric rise in the Franc, I believe that we could be paid to take HP stock.”

“Can I assume you sold your shares before this debacle?”

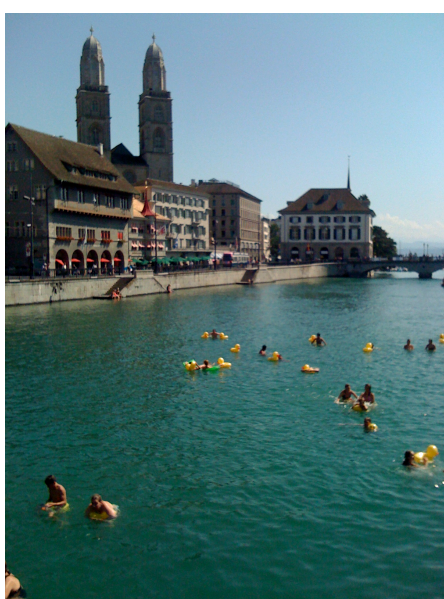
“You can assume whatever you want,” I thought. “Investments are long-term,” I replied.

Enough about HP. A recent International Herald Tribune article described the strategy that Zürich authorities use to discourage driving in the city. Not only do traffic lights favor pedestrians, they are purposely set to annoy drivers. Example: lights that allow only two cars to pass though a pedestrian crossing will permit a full circus parade to march, intact, in the other direction.

I am of two minds about this policy: When I’m walking, I completely support an enlightened approach that rewards my environmentally friendly attitude while simultaneously penalizing air-fouling polluters. Accordingly, I take my time crossing streets. When I’m driving, I rant against sniveling injustice that rewards meandering morons who casually stroll through major thoroughfares with total impunity. Accordingly, I harbor a strong desire to use the bumper to nudge these strolling simpletons out of my way.

Recent experience shows that the city has escalated the anti-car approach. When Nazy asked me to drop her off at the American Women’s Club, the city police mobilized. My probable route was analyzed. As a first step, apprentice traffic police were deployed to the Ramistrasse intersection, where I would have to turn left. Cars that approached this choke-point were herded into queues that oozed through the intersection one-by-one. As soon as I was committed to the left turn lane, Nazy spoke up.

“Go straight Dan. There will be less traffic.”



"*Would have been* less traffic, Nazy. Now it is too late to change our route," I replied surveying the mass of stalled automobiles between me and 'straight'.

"If you had listened to me... what are you doing?"

"I am going to run over that traffic cop." I explained as I aimed the car. My foot hovered over the accelerator pedal as a hardened look congealed on my face. Nazy intervened and we continued our journey. The car trickled in the general direction of Lake Zürich.

"**Every** traffic light is programmed to allow passage of only one car!" I exclaimed.

"That's not true Dan."

"And, in the unlikely event that more than one car passed, the light switched to **red** just in time to stop me."

"Us, Dan, us. And the light was **green** once.."

"Sure. The **one time** that I arrived at a green light, a tram blocked my path. Road construction obstructed alternative routes. An Anti-Assad demonstration moseyed along the Bahnhofstrasse while Pro-Assad sympathizers, parachuting from hovering helicopters, created a mob scene. A sink hole materialized on General-Guisan-Quai just before chimpanzees, escaped from the zoo, arrived at the Bürkliplatz. The biggest boat on the lake was swept onto the street by a rogue wave created by an unprecedented volcano eruption."

"It wasn't quite like that, Dan." Nazy interjected.

".... a swarm of locusts led a migrating herd of wildebeest that.."

"Wildebeest?"

"... teleported from the Serengeti and arrived in the midst of a thunderstorm studded by tornado funnels. Implausibly, geologic activity accelerated to internet speed and Switzerland was ripped from the continent..."

"So, Dan, what you're trying to say is that the drive took a long time. Right?"

"Well.."

"And you weren't patient."

"Mois?"

Finally, this Saturday marked the annual "Swim in the Limmat (with a giant rubber duck) festival. Nazy wanted to buy a rubber duck to go with her collection, but we couldn't find the sales point.

Take Care and Cheers,

