

THE MARTIN FAMILY

ZÜRICH - WHERE THE WEATHER IS STEAMY

SWITZERLAND

August 28 2011

Dear Reader,

I hope that you are well and happy as summer begins to (hopefully) fade into autumn. I say "hopefully" because this year the weather has been more unusually unusual than usual. Nazy and I discussed the situation:

"It is too hot," Nazy began.

"And too humid," I concluded.

"Weather like this is why we left Houston."

"Weather and an oil price crash. At least in Houston they kept the weather where it belonged - outside."

In Zurich, hot, sticky and uncomfortable weather occurs so infrequently that air conditioning is rare - especially in old buildings.

"Our building was constructed by Hannibal, Nazy. His elephants grazed along the Carmenstrasse. The walls, two millennia old, are solid and thick. We'd need a Tunnel Boring Machine to create air conditioning ducts. We'll just have to survive with a simple fan."

Readers recalling my frequent complaints about the cold, wet and dreary weather of June and July may be baffled by new complaints about hot, humid and sticky weather in August. They may conclude that I like to complain. However, my plea for warm and sunny weather was deliberately misinterpreted by the Weather Bureau (appropriately named for the bureaucrats working there). For me, warm and sunny meant Hawaii, not Calcutta.

Flashback: Memphis, Tennessee

"*I never should have volunteered for this*", I thought, sitting on the floor, trying, once again, to wrestle a heavy garbage disposal unit into place under the sink. I thought about my initial effort - the one that failed Nazy's Quality Assurance check:

"That looks like a water-slide for mice," Nazy had asserted as she examined a maze of drain pipes.

"Nazy dear," I sighed. "I need to direct the outflow of two sinks and a dishwasher into one pipe that exits the house. It may look complex, but believe me, there is no other way."

"How does water from the garbage disposal drain?"

"*There is nothing wrong with having two "U" traps in a row*," I thought. "*And I don't want to go back to the hardware store.*" "Let me explain," I said haughtily. "The water enters the drainage system here, it turns right at this junction, flows into the first U-trap, then into the second.."

“Dan,” Nazy interrupted. “How does the water know to turn right instead of going straight down. Doesn’t gravity..”

“I’ll see if I can’t simplify things.”

After pinching my fingers in the vice grips and bashing my head on the stainless steel sink, I tightened the last connection. This effort passed Nazy’s functionality inspection but..

“It would be nicer if I could fit a garbage can under the sink.” Nazy noted as she surveyed the labyrinth of aluminum pipes that I’d connected.

“You don’t need a garbage can. I just installed a garbage disposal. Give it a try.”

“I’ve never seen drain pipes shaped like a Möbius strip.”

“Hmrrmph,” I muttered as I triumphantly left the kitchen. I was in the living room when Nazy turned the disposal on. I heard the mechanism engage and imagined the shredded future that was in store for the test potato peelings. And then..

The Whole House Began to Shake

“Turn that thing off!” I shouted as I grabbed a glass that was drifting off the coffee table.

My installation was, in fact, faultless. The shaking was caused by a small earthquake.

End Flashback

I have recounted the story in honor of recent events:

“There’s been an earthquake in Washington, DC.” Nazy, watching CNN, shouted

“Really? Did some senator say something reasonable?”

My brother, who lives in the DC area, survived the earthquake and sent a photo that may convey something of the indomitable American spirit to our European readers.



And, speaking of Europe: While visiting Salzburg a few years ago, Nazy found a store that sold Authentic Austrian Clothing. You can undoubtedly imagine our discussion.

“I need a dirndl, Dan.” Nazy implored. [Note: It is possible that some readers would not have imagined the use of the word ‘dirndl’ in Nazy’s sentence.]

“A what?” I replied. (I was one of the vocabulary-challenged.)

“A dirndl. It’s traditional.”

“Where would you wear a dirndl?”

“Well..”



Dirndl

“Lederhosen are traditional, but I wouldn’t want a pair for the office,” I said. “*But some of those Tyrollean hats look kind of cool,*” I thought.

In the end, Nazy did not buy a Dirndl, but she did get a special and very expensive white linen blouse with lots of intricate embroidery and other artistic touches. The blouse was so special that she didn’t wear it for several years. Then, a couple of months ago, it came out of hiding. Nazy, looking great, wore it to a business lunch where an unfortunate incident involving a glass of wine created a cleaning challenge.

“And you cannot take my blouse to your cleaners, Dan. This blouse needs *Angela*.”

“*Hmm,*” I thought. “*My shirts get shafted while your blouse get beautified.*”

It is my job to deal with external laundry and dry cleaning providers. Naturally, I used my vast managerial experience to get the best deals. Accordingly, I took my shirts and sport jacket to the company that won the electronic auction (“Just Okay Cleaners, GmbH”.) Then I drove to “*Angela’s* ★★★★★ Imperial Apparel Service Center” to drop off Nazy’s blouse.

Unfortunately, *Angela* wasn’t around when I arrived. I left “The Blouse” with Arkady, the Croatian father-in-law. In the subsequent weeks, I dropped off and picked up several bundles of laundry. I didn’t get The Blouse because as Nazy concluded:

“You lost it, Dan.”

“I did **not** lose it.”

“You left it at ‘Just Okay’, right? And when you realized that they had messed up my favorite blouse, you dropped it in a dumpster.”

“Nazy,” I replied. “Did you think that I’d recognize your favorite blouse? Do you believe that I’d notice that the cleaners messed it up? Have you forgotten that we live in Switzerland where it’s impossible to drop something in a nearby dumpster?”

At this point a miracle occurred. Nazy said:

“**You are right, Dan.** That is implausible.” [Event occurred at 13:12 on August 22, 2011.]

“Ah..” I was speechless.

“You forgot to collect the blouse from Angela. I will go get it myself.”

“Good luck,” I replied. “*Actually, I forgot that the blouse existed,*” I thought.

After a German language discussion that included a derisive sentence that roughly translates to “What can you expect with Dan and Arkady?”, Angela found Nazy’s blouse. Once again, happiness reigns on the Carmenstrasse.

Take care and Cheers,