

# THE MARTIN FAMILY

CARMENSTRASSE, 48

CH-8032 ZÜRICH

## SWITZERLAND

May 4, 2011

Dear Reader,

I hope that this week finds you healthy and happy. Recall that the 'end' of last week's edition of The Weekly Letter didn't coincide with the 'end' of our trip to Slovakia. When we left off...

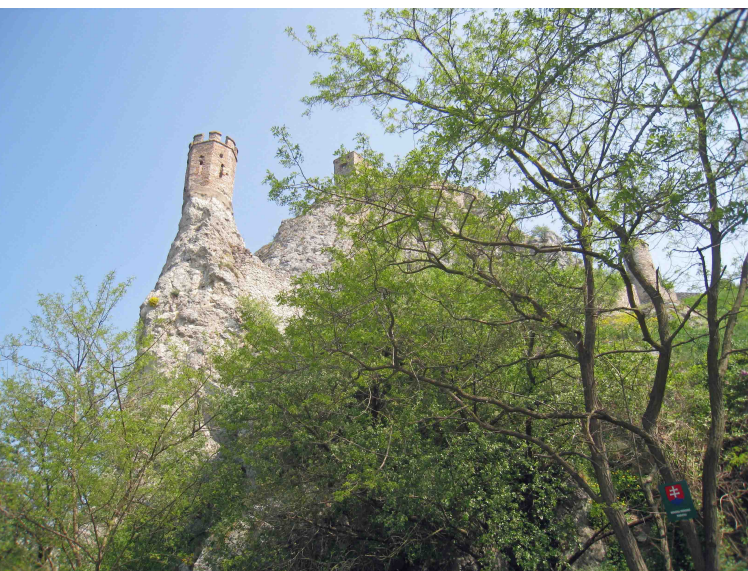
"... and we could drive to Devín," I explained.

"A boat up the Danube is much more romantic," Nazy concluded.

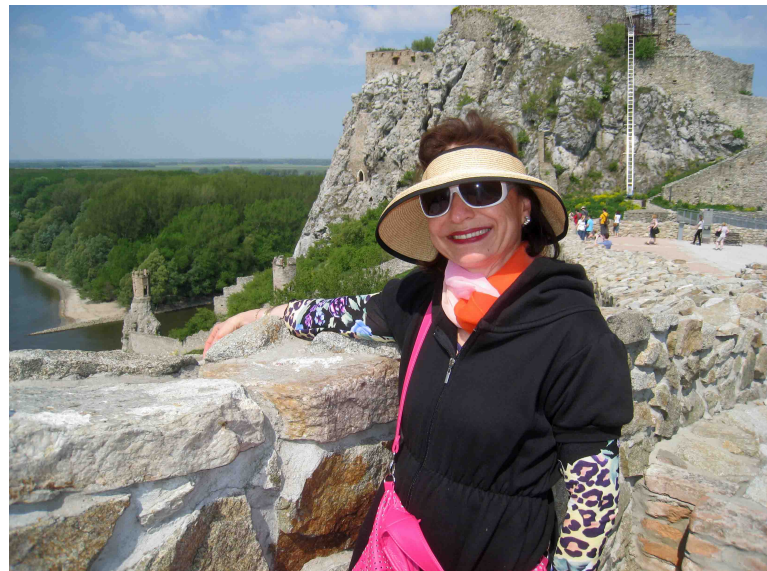
"*Maybe if the river was blue,*" I thought.

Purchasing tickets, we were happy to learn that we would be traveling on a river boat named "Martin". The Danube flows rapidly in the area of Bratislava so the trip was scheduled to take 90 minutes upriver and 30 minutes back.

Devín is more of a fortress than a castle - a fact that might explain why Napoleon had it destroyed in 1811. Located at the junction of the Danube and Morava rivers, it offers a commanding and beautiful view of the river valley and the hills beyond. Turrets jutting upward from the rocky cliffs where especially impressive.



Devín Turret



Nazy on the River  
Turret in background

Back at the Morrel Boutique Hotel, we faced a 'situation':

"We can't go shopping," Nazy explained. "The stores are closed."

"Right, my dear. Did you know that the toilet doesn't work?"

"We should drive to the wine-country."

"Sure. Remember that the toilet was running all night? Now it's not running at all. They've turned off the water. We have a non-functional bathroom."

"And?" Nazi implored.

"Well," I replied, stumbling over words momentarily. "You could talk to the clerk about, eh, the wine country and then casually mention the bathroom challenge."

"While I'm doing that you'll be..."

"... reading up on Slovakian vintages."

Nazi had an interesting experience at the check-in desk. The clerk knew nothing about wine, vineyards, driving, Bratislava, Slovakia..

"*Weekend staff*," Nazi thought. Giving up, she brought up the room quality issue:

"You need to send someone to fix the toilet in Room 202,"

"It can't be fixed," the clerk replied. "We've scheduled a plumber for Wednesday."

"We're leaving on Monday."

"Yes, I know."

"The toilet in our room doesn't work. It's useless."

"Hmm..." the clerk hummed.

"What are you going to do about it?" Nazi asked.

"Perhaps we should move you to another room."

"That's a great idea," Nazi replied. "*This clerk's neuron and synapse count is exceptionally low*," Nazi thought.

Once we were re-settled in Room 502, we collected the car and began an expedition to Modra, the capital of Slovakia 'Wine Country'. The vineyards were pretty. Modra was...

"Closed, Dan." Nazi glumly noted.

"Not completely true," I replied. "the ice cream store is open. Could I interest you in a cappuccino and a **pomegranate** ice cream cone?"

"And what will you have?"

"I would enjoy a **Coke Zero**," I said. "*Look at my teeshirt*," I thought.

We found some Slovakian wine at a 24 hour shop on the way to the hotel. Note: Slovakian wine tastes better in Slovakia.

The drive home was typical. We were either traveling incredibly fast or we were completely stopped. Claudia, the navigation computer ("Attention: The traffic situation has changed.") tried to help, but in most places, there was simply no alternative.

The Zürich apartment survived our absence. But..the aquarium was an epic mess. Mechanical failure in water filtration led to an uncontrolled microbiological response. As stagnant water allowed toxic build-up and rampant proliferation of oxygen-consuming bacteria, the fish must have noticed increased water viscosity. When we got back, the aquarium looked like:

"..a giant slab of gray smelly **amber**." I exclaimed.

"Dan..."

Fish well on the way to fossilization were trapped in 'water' that had the consistency of congealed jello and the smell of a soggy elephant latrine. Even Fiona, my angelfish, had expired: trapped in slab of water with the density of newly-poured cement. Fortitude and a face mask were needed to break through the surface tension. An industrial-strength net and several trips to somber burial facilities (in the bathroom) followed. I removed liters of sludge and added fresh water. I cleaned and restarted the filter. There hadn't been a power failure, so I wondered what happened.

"Maybe it was my fault," Nazy confessed.

"Excuse me?" I shouted.

"An electrician installed a new light fixture the day before we left. He couldn't find the right circuit breaker, so he kept cycling things on and off. I bet.."

"... he killed Fiona - and her friends..."

"... your pump failed to restart - and you didn't notice the problem," Nazy concluded

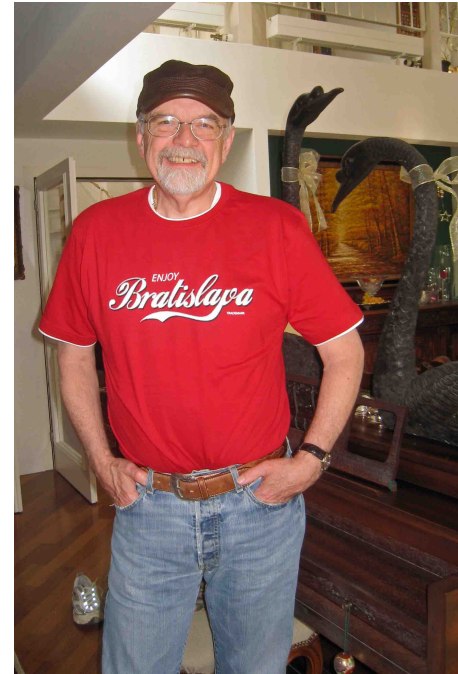
"Are you saying that it was my fault?" I asked.

"If the shoe fits..."

"We're talking about dead fish, not shoe fits." I mumbled. "*I should have checked,*" I thought.

I was particularly unhappy about Fiona's demise. Melika and Nazy bought her as a birthday present 4 years ago. About the size of a quarter at that time, she had grown to be bigger than a saucer plate. More than 30 fish were lost in the sludge; maybe I can blame **BP**.

Take Care and Cheers,



Enjoy Bratislava  
(And Coca Cola)

Dan