

**THE MARTIN FAMILY**  
**THREATENS THE HOMELAND**

**SWITZERLAND**

September 11, 2011

Dear Friends and Family

I hope that you are healthy, happy and zooming along on a smooth road to prosperity. (The economic malaise that enfolds many parts of the world could introduce significant potholes on your road to prosperity. So, more specifically, I hope you're following a pothole filling truck on a toll-free highway devoid of IEDs.)

Questions were received from readers of last week's edition of **The Weekly Letter**.

Q: I used to live in Houston, so your recollection of 23 billion degree temperatures could be accurate. Can you tell me whether that was Fahrenheit or Celsius?

A: It was 23,000,000,000°C.

Q: Hmm. That's 41,400,000,000°F. Now it's a little unbelievable.

Q: Is it possible for relative humidity, even in Houston, to be 1530%?

A: Have you been to Houston in the summer?

Q: No.

A: Residents frequently experience 1530% relative humidity. During summer, the "air" becomes supersaturated with the density and viscosity of rubber cement.

Q: Can you explain the strange juxtaposition of a totally factual anecdote about weather in Houston and the clearly fictional account of a successful technical installation on the first visit?

A: As described below, I was suffering from st★rry-eyed over-optimism.

From last week's letter:

In a shocking and totally unexpected development, Wolfgang, the technician, installed a fully functional service on his very first trip ....I thought he was perfect

I have reconsidered my assertion of perfection. Successfully tested while Wolfgang was in the apartment, the wireless internet stopped working as soon as his van left **Carmenstrasse**. Discussion with the Swisscom help**less** desk followed. Since I was too annoyed to talk, Nazy handled the negotiations. She began with an irrefutable statement:

"You said that the new service would be better."

"It is! it's five times faster."

"It doesn't work upstairs. My laptop is upstairs. Do you understand the problem?"

"You should upgrade from gold to platinum. It's four times faster."

"Four times faster than the gold that was five times faster than the network that worked?"

"Yes."

"That's not an improvement."

“Ah.”

“The platinum network is four times faster. But it won’t work. Is that right?”

“You could buy a wireless repeater.”

“I had a wireless repeater,” Nazy looked at me for verification. “Wolfgang took it away.”

“Here at Swisscom we value our customers. We want you to be happy. We can solve your problem if you buy a wireless repeater for CHF150. We’ll install it for CHF200. With the upgraded home service (CHF 75/month) everything should..”

Nazy hung up. A face-to-face meeting was required. The attendance decision followed the process used in the Animal Kingdom TV program: “While I observed the mating habits of the double breasted wench, Jim was downstream wrestling with the man-eating alligator.”

In short: while I feed the tropical fish, Nazy will be downtown wrestling with Swisscom.

Swisscom is a large organization and dealing with large organizations is always difficult. We had a recent challenge with the Bank of America (BoA) and the US government. Because international wire transfers attract the attention of both the IRS (taxation authorities) and the Department of Homeland Security, I maintain a bank account in the USA. I needed to transfer funds from that account to pay for renovation on our rental property in Washington. I began at the BoA website, but...

“It won’t work, Nazy.” I said. “They won’t allow a transfer because we don’t live in the USA. Can you call them?” I asked thinking: “*While I feed the fish?*”

After a bit of fruitless repartee, Nazy handed the phone to me.

“Do I understand this? You will not allow me to transfer money from my account....”

“That’s correct. But you could get cash in Zurich. Then go to Western Union..”

“Are you telling me that I can’t pay a bill in the United States with the money that I have in a bank that is located in the United States?”

“That’s correct.”

“It’s my money - and the Bank of America will not let me spend it.”

“Well..”

“Maybe this is why your economy sucks.”

“After the events of 9-11, we have new rules. I’m sure you understand.”

“Of course. I’m certain that your rules make the country much safer,” I replied.

“I understand your unhappiness...”

“Does anyone at Bank of America have any common sense?” [BoA bought Countrywide Mortgage and Merrill Lynch. so I should have known the answer.]



It was an ominous night

“Western Union is your solution. We are constrained by Homeland Security. If you want to transfer money, you have to come to the bank in person.”

“Why does Homeland Security want the terrorists to come to the USA?”

“Eh..”

“If I came in person, I wouldn’t need a transfer, I’d put the money in my briefcase.”

Luckily, we had more important concerns. Several months ago, I assembled and installed a huge kitchen shelf complex that Nazy populated with various pans, pots and potpourri creating an inspirational monument to husbandly handicraft. And there it stood - as immobile, timeless and eternal as the Matterhorn. Until..

“We have to clear the kitchen?” I asked.

“Yes, they are sanding and sealing the floor.”

“I really wish that **you** hadn’t put so much stuff..”

“The floor has to be fixed because **you** spilled water that caused the planks to warp.”

“It is stupid to have a wooden floor in the kitchen..”

“If you would carefully carry the ice trays to the freezer..”

“The kitchen sink treats water like battle shields treat photon torpedos.”

“What are you talking about?”

“The sink repels water. It is shallow and poorly designed.”

“The problem, Dan, was compounded when you loaded a pistachio shell into the dishwasher. The drain clogged and..”

“... now we have to remove my **MONUMENTAL SHELVES**. Would it be fair if **I** move the shelves right after **you** move all the content?”

“Would it be fair if I fed you to the alligators?”

“The sanding and staining process was incredibly messy. In spite of plastic barriers, red dust settled everywhere. It reminded me of a visit to Lubbock, Texas. (See Happiness is Lubbock, Texas in the Rearview Mirror.)

Take care and Cheers,

Dan



Stuff moved from the Monument