

THE MARTIN FAMILY  
DANCING WITH BURNING MAN IN SOUTH AFRICA

SWITZERLAND

September 18, 2011

Dear Reader

I hope that you're healthy and happy. Here, Nazy and I are enjoying a beautiful autumn while we look forward to a weekend trip in the Dolomites. Our activities are but a small part of the excitement recounted in this week's letter.

Darius, an ever-present source of material for The Weekly Letter, had planned to prepare for his sabbatical trip to South Africa. Accordingly, in the midst of preparations, he left Beirut for a visit to a bedouin tent village and a scuba diving trip to the Red Sea.

He had a great time, demonstrating an optimistic, positive outlook. with the assumption that the machinations needed to complete his journey to South Africa would proceed flawlessly in his absence. Nazy and I, discussing the situation were less sanguine.

"Do you think this is a good idea?" Nazy asked me.

"Can you think of any of his trips that worked flawlessly?"

"He said that there was nothing more to do."

"Does he have a visa?"

"He 'may' not need one."

"Has the university paid him for the trip?"

"I'm sure that Darius has arranged that."

"Are you talking about *our* Darius?"

"It will work out, Dan. It always does."

"I know. At the last minute."

"The *very* last minute."

After returning to Beirut, Darius telephoned: "They didn't deposit my pay. And, even if they had, I just found out that I can't access a Lebanese bank from South Africa. And the travel group in South Africa hasn't cleared up my visa. I have to sit in on two Master's thesis defenses and the person who is subletting my apartment is about to arrive."

"Hmmm.. Have you packed?"

"There is nothing to pack. I may not even be able to go. This is.."

"... normal, Dar," I interrupted. "Remember that you need to bring winter clothes."

"To Africa? Come on, Dad."

"You're coming to Zurich for Christmas. It is usually cold.."

"Oh. Right. But what am I going to do about the pay? It takes AUB a long time to generate a bank transfer and I need the cash now."

"It will work out Dar."

"Yeah right! How?"

"I have no clue, but it always works out for you.."

"Duh.."

"At the very last minute. You're a miracle worker."

Note: As I write this, Darius is en route to South Africa. Enough worked out for him to depart. However, he must visit Lesotho to finalize his visa within a week of his arrival in Capetown. Personally, I think he did that on purpose.

"He just needs a wife," I asserted.

"A wife, Dan?" Nazi responded. "A wife will not tell him everything that he has to do."

"I have experience and there is one sure thing. A wife *will* tell him what he has to do."

"I'll tell you what you can do.."

"Can I just retract the previous sentence?"

While Darius was planning for South Africa, Melika went to the Burning Man. Naturally our knowledge of this event was limited.

"What is it, Dan?" Nazi asked.

"It's some kind of festival in the Black Rock desert of Nevada."

"How do you know that?"

"I read a suspense novel about 4 years ago - the action took place at Burning Man. It's sort of like a temporary city where all the participants are supposed to, eh, participate. There's no money and no food. You have to bring everything and camp out."

"Camp out? Melika?"

"Maybe I'm confused, but that's what I remember."

Melika's lifetime experience quota of showerless camping out was exceeded during her trip to Kilimanjaro, so she and Tom (and a few friends) made the trip in a convoy of three RVs - bringing food, beverage, air conditioning and showers. (*"Ab, life in the desert."*)



<http://www.callmarybeth.com/>

I checked out Burning Man on “a well-known search engine”, but confess that the description left me in the dark - i.e. at a time before they lit the bonfire. Melika cleared things up by declaring that it was ‘cool’ (not the term I’d come up with to describe a communal gathering in a desert). There were thousands of visitors; Mel was worried about getting lost.

While Melika was out setting fires, Mitra was celebrating. Brian Nguyen and Yuliana Basmajyan, who teach at Oxygen Tango (the world’s greatest Tango School) established by Mitra and Stefan won the Salon Tango world cup third place on August 29 at the Tango Buenos Aires Dane World cup Finals at Luna Park Stadium in Buenos Aires. (They also won first place in the USA finals.)

It is rare for non-Argentine couples to succeed in this event. (In fact, in some competitions in Buenos Aires, it not even allowed.) This result is a real feather in the cap of Oxygen Tango. And to show that I’m completely international, I decided to use the Dutch equivalent to congratulate Mitra.

“This, Mitra,” I said. “is a real feather up your ass.”

“Dad!”

*“Perhaps she didn’t ‘get’ the Dutch expression,”* I thought. *“I’ll explain it to her.”*

“It’s a Dutch expression, Mitra. It means you’ll be proud as a peacock.”

“Well, Dad..”

“An accomplishment like that is not like two fingers up your nose.”

“Let’s stick to English expressions, Dad.”

“Ah! A rolling stone gathers no moss.”

Oxygen Tango continues to grow and develop. Mitra and Stefan have infinite energy and have created a wonderful dance community in California. Oxygen is recognized world-wide and their approach - which combines science with art - is unique and popular.

Nazy and I are looking forward to the trip to Italy. A preview photo is provided to whet your appetite.

Take care and Cheers,

Dan

