

# THE MARTIN FAMILY

Carmenstrasse, 48

CH-8032 Zürich

## SWITZERLAND



April 2, 2011

Dear Marjorie,

I hope that you are well and happy. As you know, Nazy and I were in Rome last week where we partially retraced our steps from a 1990 visit. For this trip, we chose a splendid hotel, a *very* splendid hotel: the Palazzo Manfredi. To give you an idea about the Manfredi, it had a special offer: A rental Lamborghini available for €1200/day. (The rental fee covered the first 200 kilometers. Additional kilometers were available for €30 each.)

“At least we wouldn’t exceed the kilometer allowance,” I remarked.

“Why not?” Nazy asked.

“Look at the traffic. I doubt that we’d make it around the colosseum in a day.”

Naturally, we decided to forgo the Lambo and, after a wonderful night in a quiet room and a delightful breakfast, Nazy and I booked day tickets on the 1010PEN, a hop-on/hop-off double decker tourist bus. (Open-top transport somewhat like a sports car.) We decided to stop at St. Peter’s Square before continuing toward the premium shopping district near the Spanish steps.

As we walked into the square, I immediately noticed a phalanx of Swiss Guards and, on nearby giant TV screens, the **Pope-Mobile**. With no hesitation and nary a doubt, I turned to my wife.

“Impressed?” I asked.

“What are you talking about?” Nazy replied. “It’s crowded.”

“Well, my dear, I phoned ahead and told Benny.”

“Benny?”

“That’s what close friends call him. Others call him Benedict XVI - or simply ‘Your Holiness’. I told him that we were coming and, eh, well, mentioned that it would be nice...”

“So, we won’t be able to see the Basilica?”

“No, but we do see the Pope.”

Photographic proof at the right. (The view was better on the giant TV.) “Benny” was speaking Latin, so I told Nazy to listen for her name.



THE POPE



Dismayed by the crowd, but anxious to shop, Nazy persuaded me to hop on the 101OPEN bus.

“Let’s go to the Spanish Steps, Dan.”

“*There was a giant McDonald’s there in 1990,*” I thought. “Hmm,” I said.

“Remember the McDonald’s, Dan?” Nazy replied. “It had a salad bar and...”

“... big Macs, French Fries...”

“... a huge fountain and ceramic tiles.”

“I wonder if it’s still there?” I concluded.

It wasn’t.

Interestingly (and unpredictably), Nazy was not enamored by the shopping choices on the streets surrounding the area. As soon as we made the decision to walk to Trevi Fountain, several 101OPEN buses passed by. Unlike the Appian Way, the central Rome streets are not straight. We, well, Nazy asked for directions to our next stop - Trevi Square.

“We should continue on Via Corso.” Nazy recounted. “When we get where another McDonald’s used to be...”

“Used to be?”

“... before it closed, we turn.”

“Which way?”

“Who knows?” [The signs ↔ were less than helpful.]

We eventually stumbled into Trevi Square. The fountain was much more impressive than it had been during our 1990 visit because

“It was being repaired when we were here before,” Nazy remembered.

“It *is* more impressive with water,” I replied.

“We need to throw a coin into the fountain,” Nazy continued. “By legend, our wish will be granted.”



Accuracy Alert: Following normal procedure, this issue has undergone a comprehensive editorial review by a qualified 'fact checker'. The legend referred to by Nazy actually says that if you toss a coin into the fountain, *you will come back to Rome*. Thus, Nazy's wish for health, happiness and prosperity is not guaranteed. (And, my retirement investments in the Italian Lottery failed to produce the expected returns.) A review of family photos from our 1990 visit shows that the fountain was being repaired during our visit, parts of it did have water.

Shunning the frequent IOIOPEN buses, we continued to stroll through the crowded and exciting Roman streets heading in the general direction of the Pantheon which, we were assured, was located right next to the "closed McDonald's". We passed several ancient obelisks as well as a plethora of crumbling columns:

"The Roman ruins in Lebanon are in better shape than the ones in Rome." I opined.

"Some of the these do look a bit.."

"... ruined." I interrupted. "And the amphitheater in Verona was nicer than the Colosseum."

"I know," Nazy agreed. "They were still using it. In fact, Aida..."

"Aida?"

"The opera, Dan. Aida was being performed in the Verona amphitheater."

"Maybe they should offer professional wrestling in the Colosseum."

We eventually worked our way back to the Victor Emmanuel II monument - a massive, over-the-top, shiny white, ponderous memorial designed to look like a wedding cake. It is right next to the famous statue of Romulus (founder of Rome) and Remus (the twin brother that Romulus killed) being suckled by a wolf. Unfortunately that statue is located at the top of a very long group of stairs. When we finally got back to street level, we decided to take the IOIOPEN bus back to the hotel. Of course, now that we were waiting, IOIOPEN buses had vanished.

As we stood - waiting - we saw lots of buses from companies like Roma Tours, See Rome, and Rome-Vatican excursions. We saw Silvio Berlusconi's Bentley, an Italian Army tank, the hotel's rental Lamborghini, an ice cream truck designed to look like Daffy Duck, 32,257 motor cycles and the Pope-Mobile. We didn't see 'our' bus.

We (eventually) had a great dinner (the Italians 'do' food very well) in a nearby restaurant frequented by the locals. We were ready for our final day in Rome... more next week.

Take care and Cheers,

Dan

Our hotel is the building on the left. The ruins in the foreground are from a gladiator training site.

