

THE MARTIN FAMILY

Carmenstrasse, 48

CH-8032 Zürich

SWITZERLAND

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Dear Reader,

I hope that you are well and happy as Spring begins to show up in the Northern Hemisphere. In the last letter, a rare mid-week update, Dan and Nazy were still in Rome. The story continues.

We awoke to another beautiful day and decided that it would be 'stupid' if we failed to step inside the Colosseum during our trip. We walked in that direction and stared at the traffic.

"How do you plan to cross the street?" I asked - watching six lanes of car and bus traffic intermingled with 24 lanes of motorcycles zoom by in front of us.

Nazy, with street-crossing aplomb honed in Lebanon, simply stepped into the traffic flow. "I'll just stop them by putting out my hand - like the traffic police."

"*They ignore the traffic police,*" I thought as I carefully positioned myself behind her.

As an astute reader, you've probably guessed that we weren't killed as we dodged the obstacles (and more importantly, the *moving* obstacles dodged us). The next challenge was even more exciting. We had to get through a gauntlet of itinerant hawkers who were pushing 'good copies' of Italian handbags, 'almost real' pashminas, exquisite origami cranes, a wide range of camera tripods and a plethora of "photo ops" with gladiators kitted out in plastic. However, when we got to the guy with 'cold' **Coke Zero**, in a moment of weakness, I wavered. Nazy, sensing crumbling resolve, grabbed my hand and pulled me along.

"Look at the line, Nazy." I exclaimed. "We'll need sustenance to..."

I had, of course, forgotten that Nazy does not 'do' long lines. She found a shorter alternative that let us bypass most of the clueless tourists - provided that we spend an additional €5 (each) for a radio receivers that would guide our tour.

"That will be €38," the clerk explained.

I pulled out my credit card.

"Cash only."

I checked my wallet and my pockets. I had €34.75. "*I knew that we should have stopped at an ATM machine,*" I thought.

"Well that was a great idea, Nazy." I mumbled. "Now we'll have to get back in the long line."



I had of course forgotten that we would be able to take advantage of Nazy's charm. The clerk took our money (all of it) and let us through. As seasoned travelers, we decided to follow the crowds. "*No need to read the instructions,*" I thought as I tuned the audio device to English. (Naturally we missed several stops.)

In my opinion, the Colosseum, like the Statue of Liberty, is best enjoyed from outside. But I must admit that walking through the ruins does engender thoughts about the Roman Empire and the way people entertained themselves 2000 years ago. We faced a more timely challenge when we exited.

"We need to find an ATM machine," I said.

"But we're going to leave." Nazy replied.

"We have to pay the airport taxi and get lunch. It won't be hard to find a cash machine."

"Didn't we have problems with that when we were here before?" Nazy asked.

"That was 20 years ago, Nazy. Times have changed."

Note: When we were in Rome in 1990, in a decision designed to bolster clerical employment, legislation provided that ATM machines could only be used during regular banking hours.

It turned out that a situationally selective cloak of invisibility is an integral part of every Italian ATM machine. In short, the machines are visible 'everywhere' - as long as you're not looking for one. As we walked, Nazy suggested a diversion. ("There will be an ATM here.")

Nazy was right.

"However," I explained. "This particular machine is broken."

We partially retraced our steps and, following my suggestion, turned right. As a result, we began an agonizing trek through the hills of a residential district devoid of cash machines. Eventually disgorged into Piazza del Quirinale, I found another ATM machine. This one was working - but it had no money. We passed two more functionally inadequate ATM devices.

"No wonder they call it the 'Eternal City'," I muttered as we resumed our expedition.

Successful at the 5th machine, we had lunch, collected our luggage and took a taxi to the airport. Queues were short and we boarded the airplane on time. The Swiss European Airlines Captain was in the midst of his welcome speech:

"... will depart on-time and I expect.."

The electricity failed. Emergency lighting, powered by D-Cell batteries that had been recovered after a lifetime of use powering children's toys, cast an eerie glow through the cabin. Passengers waited. (And waited.)

Power was eventually restored. The Captain explained the situation:

"The on-board power supply, as I'm sure you noticed, has failed. It cannot be repaired. We are now using a ground power supply. We don't need the on-board supply to fly to Zürich, but the ground supply is not powerful enough for us to start our engines. I've asked for an external

supply and as soon as it arrives, we'll start the engines and be on our way. In the meantime just sit back and relax."

"*Easy for you to say,*" I thought. There was silence on the airplane. I reached above my head to turn on my reading light. It didn't work.

"Should we be worried about that?" Nazy asked.

"I'm sure it's safe, my dear." I replied. "*I hope it's safe,*" I thought.

After about an hour the engines were started. Once again, I tried the reading light. This time it worked.

"That's reassuring," my seatmate muttered.

After that, the flight was smooth and trouble free.

Back in Zürich, we decided to call Darius to wish him a happy birthday. But:

"As soon as I dial his number, Dan," Nazy explained. "I get music and an automated announcement that he is 'not in the area'."

"*I hope he didn't go to Syria,*" I thought. (I was watching a CNN special about riots in Damascus.

"I hope that Darius isn't in Syria," Nazy said.

"He probably forgot to charge his phone," I replied. "Why would he go to Syria?"

"He told me that there was no South African Embassy in Lebanon. He wanted to go to Syria to get a South African visa."

"Don't worry." I said. "*I sure hope not,*" I thought as I pounded out an SMS on the iPhone. [Confirm that you are NOT in Syria. Thanks, Dad.]

I got a reply - several hours later. [Of course not. Why would I be in Syria?. Dar]

"*Because you relish challenging places,*" I thought.

Note: April 6 will mark the end of our tenth year living in Switzerland. This means that April 7th will begin our 11th year - a new record for Dan and Nazy. I lived in Atlanta for 10 years, Nazy and I lived in Memphis for 10 years, Vancouver for 1 year, Houston for 1½ years, The Hague for 5 years, Hanover for 10 years (3 years + 7 years). We like it here.

Take care and Cheers,

Dan



Ink on kodak paper smells like filter in fish tank after.

McDonalds

real orange juice this trip. "Breakfast rolls hermetically sealed in volcanic ash recovered from Pompeii)

Flight home

Darius in Syria