

THE Cultural MARTIN FAMILY

Carmenstrasse, 48

CH-8032 Zürich

SWITZERLAND

January 15, 2011

Dear Reader,

I hope that this week finds you healthy and happy. Uncharacteristically (for winter) the weather here is warm and sunny. And sunny was what we wanted a few days ago because:

“It will be a partial eclipse of the sun, Nazy.” I explained. “We **must** see it.”

“Partial eclipse?”

“Well..”

“Wouldn’t a **total eclipse** be more stunning?”

“Of course, but I can’t arrange one of those for tomorrow morning.”

“What time tomorrow morning, Dan?”

“Early. We can see it as the sun rises. The sun’s disk will be 78% obscured.”

“Early?” Nazy replied - skeptically.

Nazy was, however, a good sport. She joined me (early) in our expedition. Awake before sunrise, Nazy and I searched for an unobstructed view of the sunrise. The clouds were thick:

“Luckily,” I said as we drove toward Lake Zürich. “We can use GPS navigation to locate East - where the sun is purportedly rising.”

“Do you still think this was a good idea?” Nazy asked.

“Of course!” I replied. “It turned out even better than I expected.”

“What are you talking about?”

“I thought we’d see a 78% obscured sun - but we’re lucky. It’s 100% obscured. The sun is totally eclipsed by the clouds.”

“Can we go back home now?”

“The eclipse was going to be the lead item on the weekly letter,” I thought. *“What will I do now?”*

Although our “view” was disappointing, I was confident that the event would be experienced by at least one member of The (Cultural) Family Martin. It wasn’t visible from

California (the planet is a spheroid), but it was well placed for viewing in Lebanon. In search of a live report, I called Darius.

“It was raining, Dad.” Darius noted.

“In Beirut?”

“Yep, really strange. It’s very troubling. Astronomical anomalies portend political doom.”

“Don’t be ridiculous.”

“Just wait, Dad.” Darius replied.

Note: The Lebanese government collapsed less than a week later.

Once Melika, Mitra and Stefan returned home following the Christmas holiday, there was time to experience and explore the cultural highlights of Zurich. Everyone had ideas. Cleverly, Darius and I deferred to Nazy.

“We should see the Picasso exhibit at the Kunsthaus.”

“He’s not my favorite...” I began.

“And who is your favorite?” Nazy retorted.

“I’m more of a, eh, Rembrandt or Vermeer kind of guy.” I replied. “*Or when it comes to Picasso, more of a Jones or Smith kind of guy,*” I thought.

The Kunsthaus exhibit was a partial replica of the last Picasso show - an event that took place in 1932. (Picasso himself attended in 1932.)

“A Picasso exhibit every 78 years seems about right to me,” I remarked as we entered the hushed room full of admirers

As expected, Darius and I were quick to complete a sweep of the display. While Nazy read the accompanying placards, Darius and I compared our own analyses.

“Well Dar?” I asked. “What do you think?”

“Picasso got away with a huge joke, Dad.”

Darius and I went into contemplation mode. [“There are 606 floor tiles in this room,” I observed. “I know,” Darius replied.] A short time later, Nazy joined us.

“This is rather unusual,” I noted. “I don’t think you read all the placards.”

“Picasso is not my favorite either,” Nazy replied.

“I suggest a change of pace on this cultural weekend,” I said as I sensed and seized opportunity. “We should see a film.”



“A movie?” Nazy responded.

“A movie, my dear, is passé. A ‘movie’ is for those who are synapsically challenged and bereft of intellect. A ‘film’ is far more appropriate for us, The Cultural Family Martin.”

“Which ‘film’ did you have in mind?”

Simple, my dear. Let’s see ‘The Little Fockers’.”

“Isn’t that a crass and tasteless comedy?”

“A Divine Comedy - just like Dante. In this film, academy award winners Robert De Niro and Dustin Hoffman reprise their roles in ‘Meet the Parents’.”

“It won’t be as funny as the Picassos,” Darius thought.

I asked Nazy what she thought of the movie, eh, film, as we left the theatre.

“It was tasteless and crude,” she noted.

“Yes,” I concurred. “But very funny.”

“Indeed,” Nazy agreed - alliteratively.

We were dissecting the plot the following morning when the telephone rang. Lina, a viola player in the symphony asked if we’d like to join her at the..

“Opera? Did you say ‘Opera’?” I asked.

“Lina says we can get good seats for The Marriage of Figaro.”

“Who wrote that, Dad?” Darius, who would join us, asked.

“Probably Verde,” I thought. *“Figaro sounds Italian.”*

Note: It was, of course, a Mozart opera. It was, in fact, a comic (boffo) opera - the sequel to The Barber of Seville. The opera (all 3.5 hours) recaptures (in real time) the events of a single day. The songs are Italian, but as I discovered...

“Subtitles!” I thought at the beginning of Act I. I had seen four lines of small text at the top of the stage. *“Drat! German subtitles - and too many lines to read and translate.”*

Toward the end of Act I, I noticed that the bottom two lines of the subtitles were in English - a fact that considerably improved my ability to understand the plot. The singing was beautiful and the Zürich Opera House is a spectacular venue. As we exited the opera, it was clear that we (Darius, Nazy and I) were *cultural icons*. In fact, to show our global interests in cultural things like wine see [→]

Take Care and Cheers,

