

# THE MARTIN FAMILY

Carmenstrasse, 48

CH-8032 Zürich

## SWITZERLAND

January 23, 2011

Dear Reader,

I hope that you are as healthy and happy as we are here in Switzerland. Zurich, in the middle of January has been unseasonably warm. In fact, it is normally unseasonably warm in the middle of January. (When we lived in New Hampshire, this was called the January Thaw.) In any case, the thaw has ended: the snow returned. Disclaimer: Although there is snow in Zurich, the amount does not compare with that drifting on the streets where my sisters live: Boston and (gasp!) Atlanta.

Readers know that the garage at THE MARTIN FAMILY residence in Zurich is essentially the same size as the car. As you can imagine this topological coincidence creates challenge for the everyday task of putting the car into the garage. (The challenge is compounded by nearby stone walls and granite outcroppings.) Nerves of steel and the polished skill of a matador are needed to successfully back the car into the garage. Once the vehicle is inside, the driver must slide out the door and squeeze through a minuscule space that eventually results in ejection into the basement bomb shelter.

The aforementioned garage limitations frequently foster flawed decision-making. It was Tuesday and, returning from my morning swim I saw:

*"A parking place on the street directly in front of our home,"* I thought. *"It is a miracle."*

That was an understatement, eh underthought: Not only are parking spaces on the Carmenstrasse scarce, they normally require parallel parking into a space that is exactly the same size as the car. (Parallel parking success rates can be increased with the installation of **heavy duty** bumpers.) But this space was

*"Different! I can drive right into this space,"* I thought. *"It is a divine sign."* The cloud cover broke and a shaft of sunlight beamed down - illuminating 'my' space.

Naturally, there was one potential fly in the heretofore unsullied ointment. I knew that Nazy would need the car at noon. But it was 10:32 and parking regulations (enforced by binocular-wielding sexagenarians) meant that I could only claim the spot for one hour.

*"So close,"* I thought. And then...*"Ah ha!"* I remembered. *"There are no parking restrictions between 11:30 and 13:00. Nazy will be thrilled."*

Instead, Nazy, heading to the car at 11:52, was shocked by a parking ticket that had been issued at 11:41. Outraged, she drove straight to the police station to complain.

Flashback: When we moved to Carmenstrasse, I went to the police station to ask about a street parking permit. I walked in and said: "I have a problem." The response was

encouraging: "I am a Cantonal police officer. We have no problems, only solutions." I explained that I was driving a company car and that the company headquarters were in Geneva. "Ah," he replied. "**You** have a problem."

Nazy had a similar experience. The police explained that while it made no sense, the parking regulations could be interpreted to mean that automobiles must be moved before they take advantage of the lunchtime exception.

"That makes no sense!" Nazy exclaimed. "I was given a parking ticket for a time when no parking restrictions apply. It's not fair."

"You're right," he responded. "But the regulations are not based on fairness."

Nazy, the family archivist, has built a massive collection of photo albums. However, after a particularly painful "holiday" in Sicily several years ago, she stopped. During the interim, in spite of a digital camera, we made extensive use of the Canon printer. The glossies piled up and the task began to look impossible. This January Nazy attacked the issue.



the photographs had decayed into a "total chaotic mess". Two shopping bags were filled with unsorted pictorial records of the last 3½ years. Nazy purchased 4 large albums and began the sorting process. I was expected to help.

"When did we go to Mainau with Darius?" Nazy asked. [The photo above is from Mainau.]

"Mainau? Is that in Switzererland?"

"It's in Austria."

"Ah. I think we went there last year or the year before."

"Which one?"

“The year before?” {Nazy didn’t hear the question mark.}

“What month and day?”

This sequence was repeated for everything we’d done since the middle of 2007. My responses drifted in the direction of perfunctory.

“Hmmm.” I answered in response to a question mark that I noticed lingering in the air.

For some silly reason, Nazy concluded that I was ‘not paying attention’. I tried to recover:

“Nonsense, my dear. That gargantuan pile of photographs has my complete attention. I simply missed your question because a high frequency signal from the Apple TV, combined with the low humidity levels that are prevalent during the winter, collectively distorted the dulcet tones of your ardent query.”

“You weren’t listening.”

“That’s not what I said.”

“I think it is exactly what you meant.”

“*Perhaps,*” I thought. “But it’s not what I said.” I repeated peaking at the photo in Nazy’s hand. “By the way, the Bahnhofstrasse pot episode took place in July 2009.”

“How did you know that?” Nazy asked.

“*Thank God for the weekly letter archive,*” I thought.

Take care and Cheers,

