

THE MARTIN FAMILY
SUMMERTIME (AND THE WEATHER IS RAINY)

SWITZERLAND

July 31 2011

Dear Reader,

I hope that this week finds you healthy and happy. Here, vacation season has arrived: most residents departed. A few years ago, Nazy and Melika made an unsuccessful jaunt to Milano for an August shopping excursion. (All shops were closed.) Noting that they don't take vacations so seriously in America, I thought about other differences while driving:

"My goodness!" I thought as I narrowly averted a collision. *"Why are we living in Europe? I could have been killed!"*

The near catastrophe was caused by the lack of an American warning sign:

Objects in Mirror Are Closer Than They Appear

"That car was closer than it appeared in the mirror," I (naturally) thought.

Distraught by the near disaster, I decided to browse the 'pending legislation' file of the US Congress. *"Legislators,"* I thought, *"have a chance to address the same challenges faced by their constituents: meeting obligations (i.e. paying the bills) during a financial crisis. It should be an opportunity to empathize."* Instead the Committee on Legislative Stupidity is developing label legislation. Consider the following proposal for automobile mirrors:

Objects in Mirror are Actually Behind You

All of these warnings would have been wasted on my Grandmother. After she learned to drive at age 65, she removed rear-view mirror from the car because: "It's hard enough to keep track of what's in front. If someone is behind me, well, that's their problem."

Contemplating this, I flawlessly backed into a parking place at the post office. Entering, I grabbed a queuing ticket (no.129), noted the projected wait time (03 minutes) and moved to a position that would allow a clear view of the "SERVING NUMBER XXX, WINDOW Y" sign.

"This system is totally fair," I thought, *"I can't choose the wrong line."*

In a refreshingly short time I heard a beep and saw the sign;

SERVING NUMBER 129, WINDOW C

I moved to Window C, but the previous customer, a little old lady, hadn't left. As I noted that she had blue hair and determined stance (elbows on the counter), a smidgen of concern and a quantum of doubt materialized.. The woman appeared to be looking (in her purse) for a place to put her purchased stamps. The postal clerk was chanting:

"Danke und auf wiedersehen, Frau Thickbottom. Danke und auf wiedersehen, Frau..."

I also heard a bong: SERVING NUMBER 130, WINDOW A. Mrs. Thickbottom poured the contents of her purse onto the counter and noticed a letter that she had meant to mail. Unfortunately, the voluminous letter exceeded the 'one stamp' weight limit (SERVING NUMBER 131, WINDOW F). After a lengthy negotiation involving three scales, Mrs. Thickbottom decided to (SERVING NUMBER 132, WINDOW D) remove one page of the letter. She also wanted to purchase a single envelope. (SERVING NUMBER 133, WINDOW B). As she addressed the replacement envelope, she told the clerk, who shrugged in my direction, to count the change in her change purse. Naturally, her pencil broke (SERVING NUMBER 134, WINDOW E) and she didn't have enough change. (SERVING NUMBER, 135, WINDOW F). I moved to the door and grabbed another queuing number (158), noting that now the weight time was 08 minutes. I watched Frau Thickbottom at Window C and eventually heard her shout a cheery *auf wiedersehen* as she waved farewell. (SERVING NUMBER 158, WINDOW A) I sprinted to Window A, resisting the urge to trip Mrs. Thickbottom while en route.

Reader Alert: The solitude that I require while composing this document has been interrupted by a loud "Splat" from the kitchen.

"What's the problem?" I shouted as I jumped up and raced to the rescue.

"I'm catching fruit flies for Carolyn," Nazy replied.

"Carolyn?"

"Carolyn, our carnivorous plant."

"That's a bad idea. You're training Carolyn the Carnivore to be lazy and obese."

"Obese?"

"Obese! If Carolyn doesn't exercise, she'll gain weight and..."

"I'm not training Carolyn, Dan. I'm training the fruit flies."

"The fruit flies?"

"I'm training them to stay out of my kitchen." **Splat.**

Returning to the laptop, I discovered that Bert, a devoted fan of The Weekly Letter, had requested clarification on an assertion in last week's edition. In particular: "If Darius has your travel genes, Dan, he would never have flown first class to Moscow. Please clarify."

(As a reminder: in last week's letter, Nazy asserted that **all** of Darius travel issues were caused by "your genes, Dan".) I decided to trap, eh, ask Nazy for an explanation.

"Ah ha!" I claimed, relying on Bert's observation. "Darius got a first class upgrade because of my genes. What do you say to that?"

"The lost baggage? Your genes, Dan! The first class upgrade? My genes! It's not complicated at all, Dan." Nazy replied.

Finally, please consider the following similar events:

Event 1: Nazy had asked me to get a bottle of **Dijon** mustard from the minuscule refrigerator that she had stuffed with bottles, bags, tupperware, **vegetables**, AAA batteries, superglue, fruit and so forth. (It's crowded in our refrigerator - so crowded that this paragraph wouldn't fit.) I cautiously began exploration with Nazy's helpful "It's on the top shelf". I extracted and juggled bottles of pickled onions and garlic, jams and jellies, carrots and cauliflower. I finally spotted the target behind the english muffins - which I grabbed and balanced on my head. Zeroing in, I extended my right hand and momentarily forgot that a bottle of olives was pinned between arm and chest. Worse, I failed to engage the anti-gravity field. The olives crashed to the floor - **making a huge mess and a loud noise**. Nazy, attention attracted, looked at me and said: "**Why can't you be more careful?**"

Event 2: I was reading and Nazy was preparing for bed. The bathroom counter was cluttered with bottles and lotions, cremes and shampoo, tubes and sticks and an extensive variety of electrical equipment. Overly obsessive, Nazy decided to put the curling iron away. She failed to notice that the power cord was wrapped around a (large) flask of mouthwash. With noose-like effectiveness, the tangled cord pulled the mouthwash to the floor - **making a huge mess and a loud noise**. Nazy was fast "Why don't you tightly replace the bottle cap you're done?"

I considered articulating my thoughts ("**Why can't you be more careful?**") - the same thoughts that Nazy used to shift responsibility to me earlier in the day. Luckily, I reconsidered.

"It's not fair," I thought. *"It was the spiller's fault in event 1 and it was someone else's fault in event 2."*

"Life if not fair." Nazy decreed. "Get some paper towels."

"But when I spill it is my fault and when you spill it is my fault," I asserted.

"It is **always** your fault, Dan."

"That makes it simple."

"And, on another subject, sell our US bonds."

"Why? I'll get US Dollars."

"When the country defaults, you'll get nothing."

"Same thing."

Take care and Cheers,

Dan



Bicycle in Ribeaupville, France
Nazy's watercolor available