

# THE MARTIN FAMILY

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## SWITZERLAND

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Dear Reader,

I hope that you are well and happy. The weather here is delightful - and has been for (almost) the last month. (The only time we've had dismal weather recently was when Nazy's sister Shahrzad visited. Although I am sure that there is no correlation between the two events, perhaps we should be cautious about follow-up invitations.)

Regular readers (a deeply appreciated group) know that Nazy and I were in Milan last weekend. At the end of last week's epistle, I alluded to shopping activities that (predictably) had occurred during our visit. As you might suspect, "we" - more specifically, "Nazy" was not content with our procurement of Extra Special, Double Virgin, First Press, Hand-Picked, Papally Blessed, Sun Ripened, Berlusconi-Free, Grade A, Light Amber, Sicilian Pampered **Olive Oil**. She wasn't content even though her purchase was...

"... a wonderful bargain," Nazy enthused.

"I certainly hope so," I replied. "You spent long enough negotiating."

"In Italy, they expect haggling..."

"I liked the part where you requested the 1 liter bottle for the same price as the ½ liter bottle..."

"It was worth a try..."

"... right after a 30 minute negotiation to agree on the ½ liter price."

"... but he gave us a bottle of balsamic vinaigrette..."

"... So we'd leave."

"...for free," Nazy concluded.

After the **Olive Oil** acquisition, Nazy went looking for gloves. She wanted Italian gloves "without fingers."

"Why? Has something happened to your hand?" I asked.

"I can't use my mobile phone with gloves. Fingerless gloves will solve the problem."

Although I felt that fingerless gloves missed the point, I wasn't surprised when Nazy located a Milano shop with an extensive collection. After making an initial selection of several (score) pairs, Nazy asked for my opinion.

“This gray pair...” I began.

“... those are pink...” Nazy interrupted.

“Whatever. I saw a pair that looks just like them - except that ‘my’ pair has fingers.”

“So?”

“And the pair that I found costs exactly the same as the fingerless model. So, for the same price, you can buy my pair.”

“I want a pair without fingers.”

“I know. You can cut off the fingers. Then you’ll have what you want. And from a price point of view...”

[Note: *I realize - now - that I had based my position on the unreasonable supposition that a macro economic indicator like price would influence a purchase decision.*]

Aware that my assistance was neither needed nor appreciated, I decided to wander around. We were in the midst of a vast, covered shopping area in the center of Milan. I could visit the nearby art museum to view a rich tapestry of Renaissance Art - but the outdoor exhibit [▶] reminded me of neither Michelangelo nor Leonardo di Vinci. I decided to window shop. I found a fountain pen store and waxed nostalgic.

I remembered my first experience with the precursor of a fountain pen. It took place in Revere, Massachusetts. I was in third grade and we had moved from Savannah, Georgia. We used pencils in Georgia. They used ink wells and straight pens in Revere. My attempts at penmanship were ugly.

I realize that fountain pens are an anachronism. Writing with my MacBook Pro, for example, I can do things that I could never do with a fountain pen.

Reader interrupt: “Really? Like what?”

Like - create legible text. I couldn’t ‘do’ legible text in third grade, but after decades of effort, I still can’t ‘do’ legible text with a fountain pen. However, I like the look and feel of a quality fountain pen and I was in a fountain pen shop. After examination of the one-of-kind €9500, hand-painted Montegrappa and the equally expensive Visconti, my eyes (and budget) were drawn to the Conklin. Extremely colorful, this model used an antique ink-filling mechanism. I just knew that it would be a dandy addition to my collection.



Nazy, having decided on a pair fingerless gloves, cheered the fountain pen purchase. But, in the middle of buyer's remorse, I was less sanguine: "*Now I really must use my fountain pens*" I thought. Note: The Conklin ink-fill mechanism is rather messy.

As we started home, Nazy noted that "the Mendrico Factory Outlet Mall is on our way. We can stop and eat."

"Stop and eat?" I replied.

I'll save the suspense. We bought french fries, green tea, an enormous salad, Coke Zero, a Missoni skirt and top and...



"You need this, Dan!" Nazy exclaimed at the Ferragamo Boutique.

It was a white felt hat that met my baseline requirement for purchases at the Ferragamo outlet - a discount of at least 70%. On the other hand, an earlier purchase (white shoes) had been skewered by my sister with the comment: "White Shoes, eh? Grandpa is the only one I know who wore those."

"*But this,*" I thought, "*is not a 'Grandpa' hat. This is a Justin Timberlake fedora.*"

We were very careful on the remainder of the drive home. To cope with the budget challenges, Swiss authorities have installed 'hidden' several traffic enforcement cameras. The cameras used to take a photo of your traffic violation when the speed was 5 kph above the speed limit. The fine was CHF40 for the first 10 kph. Now, however, you're given a mere 3 kph (which is less than 2 miles/hour) before the photo. So - you either have to be extremely careful or..

".. you have to know exactly where they hide the cameras," I explained.

"Dan.."

"And, luckily, I am driving with you and you know the camera locations - because you've already found them all."

"I appreciate your confidence, Dan," Nazy began. "But they are installing new cameras."

"*I'll rely on traditional methods,*" I thought. The traditional method was simple:

"Slow Down!" Nazy shouted.

In last week's letter, I noted a forthcoming special event. The following numbers may help you guess: 1964-1974; 1974-1984; 1986-1989 & 1994-2001.

Take care and Cheers,

Dan