

# The Martin Family

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## SWITZERLAND

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Dear Reader,

I hope that you are well and happy. Here in **Switzerland** the delightful **Spring**-like weather of early February has morphed into dreary (gray) *normality*. The shift occurred as Nazy's sister Shahrzad arrived for a short visit. Moreover, as we were driving from the airport, disaster struck. It began innocently with a mobile phone chime. Nazy answered.

"It's Darius," she said. "He wants to talk to you."

"Oops," I thought. "*When Darius calls my mobile, he has a major problem.*"

"Hi Dad," Darius began. "I've got a problem."

"*Ah ha!*" I thought. "Sunni or Shia?" I asked.

"Eh?"

"Your problem, Dar? Is it Sunni or Shia?"

"It's Compaq."

"Compaq is ...," I replied.

"Dead, Dad. My Compaq laptop is **dead**. The AC adapter sounds like a Xylophone."

"A Xylophone, eh? What tune is it playing?"

"It's playing a dirge, Dad. It won't power the computer and it won't charge the battery. When this happened in California, it took me weeks to get a new adapter."

"Weeks?" I replied. "*It will take years in Lebanon,*" I thought.

"Do you have any remaining contacts at **HP**?" Darius asked. "Someone who can expedite delivery?"

"How soon do you need it?"

"I can't do anything without my computer, Dad. I need a power supply now."

"I'll call Tracy. He has good contacts in the Middle East."

"Thanks Dad. Remember, I need it now. I've called HP service in Beirut..."

“Good idea, Dar. I think the support center was outsourced to Beirut.”

“All I get is a voicemail system.”

*“Almost surely outsourced to Beirut,”* I thought. “Well..”

“Hurry Dad.”

While I was talking to Tracy, Darius sent an SMS. He found the part and his laptop was working again. Crisis resolved. (Sort of resolved. The AC adapter is unable to simultaneously run the computer and charge the battery. It is not completely outlandish to conclude that the Lebanese AC Adapter was not exactly certified original Compaq equipment.)

Happy that Darius’ challenges involved batteries rather than battery (with assault), my own challenges seemed rather mundane. (Not, of course, mundane enough to escape commentary in The Weekly Letter.) So:

I was at the pool, in the middle of lap-swimming activities. I have been assured that swimming is a wonderful exercise. However, I confirm that it can also be a bit, well, boring. The mind can wander. In addition to losing (lap) count, it’s possible to provoke the denizens who are sharing the pool. On this particular day, I was dodging the old dullards who dawdled their way through the water.

*“These pea brained dunderheads are floating along with the lethargic torpor of congealed bacon fat,”* I thought as I kicked hard to avoid collision with a bulbous mass of cellulose floating in my path. Several laps later, the bulbous mass drifted to the edge of the pool and docked. It grabbed my shoulder as I began to turn. It wanted to talk. Unable to propel the attached tonnage through the water, I stopped and listened.

*“This is totally pointless,”* I thought. *“She’s speakingl German.”* Dismayed, I began to concentrate. “Are you saying that you got wet?” I asked politely. In English.

“Ja,” She replied.

“Do you speak English?” I inquired.

“Nein,” She replied.

“Nice meeting you,” I said as I pulled away and resumed swimming.

A few laps later I was stopped by a pool guard who claimed that I had splashed the cellulose. “So,” I asked, pointing toward the nearby leviathan, “She is complaining because she got wet in the swimming pool. Is that right?”

Noting that the woman had displaced so much water that I had to swim uphill when passing near her ‘event horizon’, I decided to move to the fast lanes - aware that I had once again reached an awkward age: too fast for the normal lanes, too slow for the fast lanes. Nazi was not moved by my plight. She just wanted to go to..





“La Gruyère, Dan. Shahrzad will love the quaint village. It’s a short drive.”

“It’s three hours, Nazy,” I replied.

“Two hours. You’ll love it.”

Le Gruyère (the cheese) is one of my favorites so, in fact, I was looking forward to the excursion. The weather slowly cleared as day unwound. The village (population 1600) was very picturesque. We toured the Gruyère Chateau which was used as a residence as recently as the 1920’s. The Chateau has wonderful views of the alps and, unlike royal residences, seemed livable. (On second thought, I never saw a bathroom, so livability is questionable.) The local HR Giger Museum stood in stark contrast.

HR Giger won an academy award (visual effects) for the movie “Alien”. His creations are distinctively disturbing: certainly not what you’d expect to see in a quaint Alpine village. [→]

We had lunch (fondue) at the Cheese Museum. (This was our second cheese fondue in two days; we didn’t know that the dinner engagement booked for the coming evening would feature... fondue.)

The setting was really beautiful. Shahrzad and Nazy bought cheese and chocolate and I took lots of photos.

Remarkably, the clouds (mostly) cleared away while we there. The drive home was challenging because of road construction. (The Swiss have been constructing, repairing, resurfacing, rerouting and recycling roads since the time of Charlemagne. It is a core competency of the Federation.) Undaunted, Mildred, the navigation computer, was able to route us around the bulk of the problem. Predictably, it began raining as soon as we returned to Zürich.

Take Care and Cheers,

