
From: michael munroe [mailto:mmunroe@compuserve.com]
Sent: Tuesday, July 17, 2007 9:23 AM
To: Veronica Veronica (Veronica.Phillips@ xxxlex.com)
Subject: FW: In Rout to Vancouver, My Passport Saga

I am well, but yesterday was a bit stressful. Fully self inflicted as you will read. Read to bottom for receipe for "Mongolian Motherfucker" Dear Friends and Family, (Randy, note fan of <http://xkcd.com> near end of story) (Debbie, note Conaway Haskin's response within 5 minutes, Sunday evening)

The saga started on Saturday morning. As Julie drove Douglas and me to the Chesterfield library, she casually asked,

"So where are you going on Tuesday?" Surprised she didn't remember,

I answered, "*Vancouver.*"

Julie, "*Don't you need a passport to home from Canada now?*"

Me, "*No?*", "*Oh shit, do I really?*"

Thus the saga began.

So, why had I let my passport lapse in 2005. I had planned to renew my passport just before Katrina hit New Orleans but two attempts at photos from CVS were a failure. The first passport photo from CVS had a huge shadow behind my head. A passport photo, has to have a clean profile with a white background, the Midlothian or Forest Hill post office passport official explained to me.

The second attempt a couple of weeks later, was rejected at the Forest Hill Station office because there was too much glare on my glasses. The photo had to show my face and eyes. Then Katrina hit and since I didn't expect any overseas trips in my new job, I just let it go.

But now I had a problem. I had a meeting of my standards association and I was the draft editor for one committee and the committee hair for another standards committee. One of my documents was going to ANSI balloting and I felt I should be at the last meeting to hear any corrections that were going to be suggested. But the meeting was going to be in Vancouver on Wednesday and I had a 10:00 am flight out of Dulles on Tuesday morning.

Doug took my photo on the back porch and the natural lighting, gave us a clear image without glare. I held a large piece of poster board behind my shoulders for the background. Then off to CVS. After more than an hour and a half waiting while Windows 2000 rebooted two times my edited photo was lost and I didn't have the heart to make the woman behind me wait any longer. So, I drove to Wal-Mart as they have the same Kodak Kiosk. Unfortunately Wal-Mart turns off the machine at 8:30 pm because they don't have anyone to reboot it between customers

I guess. So I was back to Wal-Mart at 9:30 Sunday morning. A guy was at the one working machine sending phone pictures to the machine using the built in Bluetooth and it was working fine for him. But the other machine seemed to be dead with the Windows 2000 boot up screen stopped at a password dialog box.

I waited until the one hour photo counter woman was free and I asked her to reboot the machine that was available. She opened it up with her key and flicked the on and off switch and about five or six minutes later it was ready to work for me. I now was familiar with the start up procedure, it is Windows 2000, there are about 5 hard drives inside the machine and a many peripherals. At least the Wal-Mart machine didn't require the operator to configure a network connection.

Anyway, about 45 minutes and 58 cents later, I had two sheets of 2" x 2" photos. On one sheet of six the head was too big but the other one was just right.



Now the phone calling and web searching began. It was clear that the patent office would get \$ 127 for its service. Anything less than about 3 weeks would cost an extra \$ 60.00 expedite fee. More about that later.

Travel Document Systems, Inc.

(TDS) is a leading visa and passport processing agency.

TRAVISA This is Travisa's Service Order Form. \$\$\$. . .

A BRIGGS PASSPORT & VISA

A-1 PASSPORT & VISA EXPRESS

PASSPORT VISA EXPRESS COM INC

AMERICAN SERVICES INC

WASHINGTON Passport Agency

1111 19th Street, ground floor, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20036

Hours: 8:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m., local time, M-F, excluding Federal holidays

Automated Appointment Number: 1 (877) 487-2778

The Washington Passport Agency only serves customers who are traveling, or submitting their passports for foreign visas, within 14 days.

Ah, but after several phone calls Sunday afternoon trying all the options, I learned there were no appointments available in the next two weeks which seemed to be sort of a Catch 22 since, that regional office only will help you if you need to travel in less than 14 days.

Ah, but there is a special office in Washington above the main Washington DC Passport Agency,

SPECIAL ISSUANCE Agency

1111 19th Street, N.W. Suite 200 (upper level)

**Applications for Diplomatic,
Official, No-Fee and Congressional referrals only**

Public Hours of Operation:

By Referral Only 8:15 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Monday through Friday (except Federal holidays)

Since it was clear I couldn't get any appointment for Monday and since there wasn't time to FedEx paperwork both ways to one of the services,

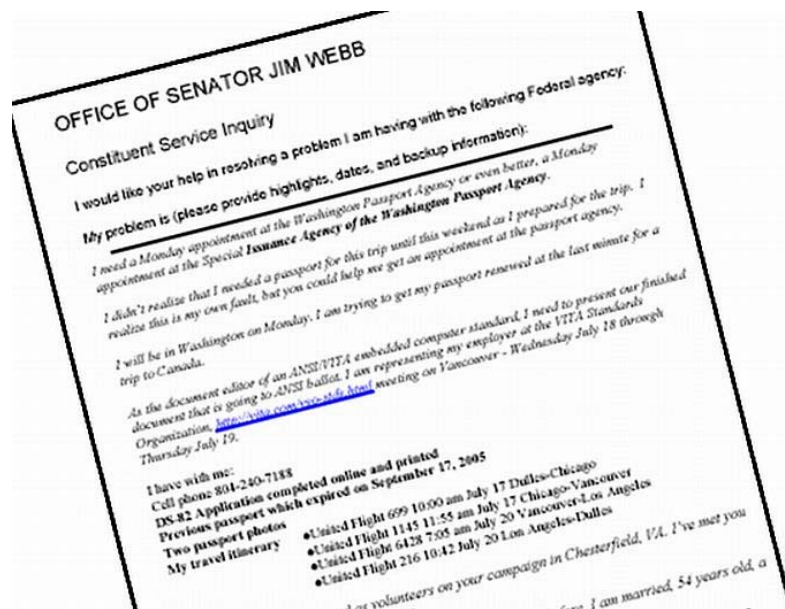
I knew that I was going to have to drive to DC on Monday morning anyway. So, maybe I could get a Congressional referral.

So, I emailed Jim Webb's deputy state director who was responsible for constituent services.

Sent: Sunday, July 15, 2007 8:59 PM

To: Conaway_Haskins@****.gov

Subject: URGENT Request for help Monday (today) with passport renewal for trip to Canada Tuesday.



WOW! Five minutes later, at 9:04 pm on a Sunday evening, I had a reply from Conaway B. Haskins, the Deputy State Director for Jim Webb, our maverick Democratic Senator from Virginia. Wow, on a Sunday night.

From: Haskins, Conaway (Webb) [mailto:Conaway_***@]
Sent: Sunday, July 15, 2007 9:04 PM
To: mmunroe
Subject: Re: URGENT Request for help Monday (today) with passport renewal for trip to Canada Tuesday.

We will do all that we can to assist you on this trip. Please be aware that the passport situation has vexed the federal government and travelers for months. Congress is seeking ways to relieve the problem, and I will have our passport specialist work on your case first thing in the morning.

Conaway B. Haskins III
Deputy State Director
Office of U.S. Senator Jim Webb
507 E. Franklin Street [contact info deleted by m.m.]
Richmond, VA 23219
Website: <http://webb.senate.gov>

Monday morning at 9:30 I was out in front of the Washington Passport Agency.



I went up to the armed State Department Guard who was the gate keeper to plead for entry with no prior appointment.

I brought with me the following documents:

- *Expired passport, (expired in 2005 when I was older than 16 years of age)*
- *A preprinted application filled out on line, so it was machine printed.*
- *My travel itinerary showing my flight from Dulles at 10:00 am Monday.*
- *My letter to Jim Webb's office. (for personal moral support)*

The third item was clearly the most compelling document. When I showed my travel itinerary, without further comment, the guard immediately held the door open and said, "Go in."



So, it was into the air-conditioning and through the security inspection and metal detector. I had to take out my computer and turn it on and empty my pockets. But I was inside.

Inside, there were people from everywhere; students who had already missed their flights that morning, mothers with children, grandmothers with high school students, people trying to visit family in India, businessmen needing a rush Visa page, and the couriers from those private agencies. This is the line.



First everyone entering for the first time, gets in line for the first window. In line, somebody checks your documents and gives you papers to fill out if you don't have every thing you need. The line moves slowly past the first set of windows where they look at your papers and give you a number. My number was A091.

When I went in, they were taking number A054. There were also D numbers. I was glad that I didn't get a D-number. Those seem to be for people who sent in documents three or four months before but hadn't heard anything since then but were now a few days away from their departure date; People who had sent in expedited requests with their extra \$ 60 fee four or six weeks before and hadn't heard anything.

On my way to the Washington Passport Agency I had exited the West Farragut Metro station at along with a woman who seemed about 90 years old. As we reached ground level she asked me in a very soft voice, how to get to 19th Street. She was going the same place. She had two advanced degrees, one in political science and a degree in Library Science. I forget her story but after walking about three blocks with me, she was turned away by the guard at the door. She must have had an unhappy trip back to her home. I think she didn't have all the papers she needed and no appointment.

I was luckier, and maybe more desperate. So, after getting my number, I went and sat down in a large room at the end of the main hall. On two sides of the room there were windows. Six windows on one wall, and five windows on the other wall. Only four of those windows were manned. It seemed like 9 of the windows were working on "A" numbers and three were working on "D" numbers. Those "D" numbers moved slowly.

What did the Washington Passport Agency look like to me. Well, imagine an old Motor Vehicle office smaller than the one in Chesterfield, and dumpier looking. I would estimate that with 11 windows and each person standing in line at least 3 times it serves about 30 to 40 people an hour. It doesn't look like a facility that hasn't changed much in outward appearance in 10 years or so. The other nearest regional offices are New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, Miami, Houston and New Orleans.



Here is part of the other wall.



I waited next to a woman from Raleigh North Carolina who was worried about getting her passport. She had sent her application in a couple of months before and had a flight Tuesday out of Raleigh. All of a sudden my two hours that morning spent going from Richmond to the Franconia Metro station and then on the blue line to West Farragut didn't sound so long. She had a seven hour drive ahead of her when ever she got out.

Another woman was there. She was there with her 10 year old daughter. I think that they were from out of state too. There were five in her family she explained. Two of her children had gotten their passports as well as her and her husband. But her daughter hadn't gotten her passport and they had been waiting a couple of months and now their trip was just a few days away.

The problem was that the 10 year old had a twin sister. That didn't seem all that rare, but there she was with her daughter waiting in for her "D054 number to be called. (the picture two above was taken around 3:00 pm. Although the "A"s had progressed from A054 to A091 by 11:45, you can see that the "D"s had only made it to D085 by 3:00.

At 11:47 am, I was called to window 11 where they looked at my computer-printed form that I had filled out online at home. She looked at my expired passport and made check marks against my name, birthday and social security number and wrote down my old passport number.

Then she looked carefully at my Orbitz travel itinerary and wrote something more on the corner of my form. Then she got me to sign the form and date it. Then she asked for \$ 127 dollars. (\$ 67 for the passport, and \$ 60 for the expedited process) I was given two receipts and told to come back at 2:00 pm.

I asked the clerk, what the procedure was, she told me that a line would start to form outside around 1:00 for the 2:00 pick ups.

So, I was now back out on 19th street.

Across the street were many small not too expensive looking restaurants; several Asian, a French restaurant, a pizza place and a Greek deli. The Greek deli was just carry-out but they had about five tables outside for customers. Inside, while I waited in line, I saw that they had a picture of one of the Kennedy's on the wall. I ordered the Souvlaki, chips and Orangina and took it outside to one of the tables where I sat and enjoyed it. Boy did it taste good.

While I had been in the Passport Agency, I had called Jim Webb's Richmond office and left a message for Conaway letting him know, that I was probably OK and I was inside with a number. Now as I sat at my table enjoying my lunch, someone else from the Richmond Webb office called me back to find out what was happening. I told her everything was under control and thanks anyway.

Oh, yes, another short story: When I was taking the Metro from Springfield into D.C., I struck up a conversation with the man sitting next to me. He said he was visiting from New Zealand with his wife, so I just had to tell him that I had just seen the movie "*The World's Fastest Indian*" and guess what?

He quickly informed me that he lived only 13 miles from Burt Munro (the real life figure about which the movie was made) and had watched him race his motorcycles on a nearby beach where he and his wife would to fish for flounder with a net from the shore.

He said he though that Burt Munro's land speed record had finally been beaten last year. It had stood since 1967. He loved the movie and said he thought it was as perfect as the story could be told. We talked about some of the events in the movie.

He then confided that he had a small vineyard, in an area where a large property had been divided up into community plots. He was going to visit a neighbor who lives in New Jersey in the summers and in New Zealand in their summers. I think he said Richard V. Allen because he said this guy had his finger on the nuclear button all day during Reagan's assination.

Back to the Passport Saga.

At 12:45, I started waiting for the 2:00 pm line to begin forming. I asked the guards out front three times and they never made it clear that I should go back in the line behind the ropes with all the other first time visitors. I had thought that it would be a separate smaller line off to the side.

Around 2:00 I realized that I needed to be in the main line. I was a bit irritated. But when I got in line I was behind people who were still waiting for the 11:30 group to be admitted so I didn't feel so bad.

Then I started talking to a young man behind me. He was there with his grandmother. His family had hosted a boy from Dusseldorf that school year and he was going to visit the boy in Germany this week but didn't have his passport yet. I think he was a senior and was going to college in the fall.

I asked him what he was going to study and he said Computer Science. He had a big afro and a nice "Earth Wind and Fire" tee shirt and seemed friendly and talkative. So, I naturally told him about the web based cartoon that my son has.

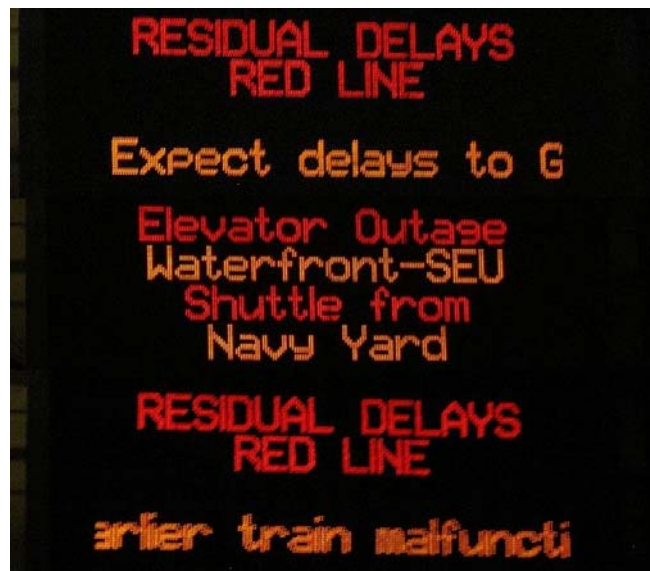
He responded, "I look at web cartoons, which one is it?"

I answered, "<http://xkcd.com> "

He smiled, He said that he really liked xkcd and a lot of his classmates did too. He talked about the raptors. Now I was really happy. Isn't it a small world.



Around 3:00 pm, I was still waiting for my passport and I got worried because I suddenly remembered that the office closes at 3:00 pm. I was reassured by a woman near me that although the stop letting new people in at 3:00 pm, people often wait inside until 8:00 pm for their passports.



Around 4:00 pm I finally received my passport and headed back to Dulles. I got a room at Comfort Suites in Chantilly, VA where I can leave my car until Friday for \$139.00. It is a nice room.



Here it is, my “prize” -my new passport. I have discreetly covered up most of the writing in case Uncle Sam would get mad at me. However, you can tell by the new eagle motif that this is a fresh new passport.



After settling into my hotel room, I decided to go outside and look for some dinner. I saw that across the street there were several a likely looking establishments in a small strip mall. I chose the one named, **The Backyard Bar and Grill**. First I had a Sam Adams in a glass, then I ordered an appetizer sampler plate and another Sam Adams.

I was sitting next to a colorful young man who, while young, was a very experienced consumer of alcohol. He was an Army brat and had lived around the country in his short life. He spoke of various legal entanglements.

In fact he admitted that he didn't have a valid driver's license and he was also on some list that caused him to always get pulled aside by the Transportation Safety Administration guards when he went through security at airports. He

I noticed him when he ordered he ordered an interesting sounding drink. It was a fairly elaborate undertaking and I asked him about it. He said that he could only order this drink at this particular bar from our bar maid, Lynette.

This drink with the interesting name was named, "Mongolian Motherfucker."

The young man assured me that, "*a few of these can really 'mess you up'.*"

I briefly considered that I was less than a hundred a hundred yards from my hotel and on foot, so I decided to risk one. It seemed to me, simply from the name, that it might just be the perfect drink after a full day at the passport office.

He was right. It was deliciously sweet and only tasted vaguely alcoholic but I could soon feel a slight sense of disorientation, a buzz. Lynette asked if I wanted another Sam Adams, and I said, "No, I think it is now time for a great big glass of seltzer water." I've got to walk home.



Later in the evening when back at my hotel room and in fair possession of my senses, I researched this drink on the web. Here is the version that I found which seemed closest to what I was served. Here it is, so that you can teach it to your favorite bar tender:

Mongolian Motherfucker recipe # 2 <http://www.drinks.mixer.com/drink12064.html>

1/4 oz vodka

1/4 oz gin

1/4 oz rum

1/4 oz sloe gin

1/4 oz Bacardi® 151 rum

1/4 oz Southern Comfort® peach liqueur

1/4 oz triple sec

1 splash grenadine syrup (she gave a more generous portion of the Grenadine)

1 splash orange juice

1 splash cranberry juice

"Add all ingredients to a cocktail shaker. Shake well, strain into a rocks glass or old-fashioned glass filled with ice cubes, and serve."

(Lynette served it shaken with ice but then strained and served straight up)

michael munroe