



## Tom Foolery

### Run For The Border

Let me tell you about our (Jim and my) experience at the border. We have been crossing into Canada and back into the U.S. each season for 7 years smoothly and quickly. Not this time. This time, we learned the joys of "Secondary". It might have been partially my fault, but I can't let Jim get away without at least some of the blame, I mean, even my grandson knows how to open a car trunk.

I'm pretty sure it began as we were sitting in line, waiting for our turn to cross the bridge and reenter the U.S. Being the conscientious U.S. citizen that I am, I opened the glove box to get my passport so that when our turn came, it would be ready to hand to the Customs officer. Well, my passport didn't seem to be there. So I took everything out and found the usual stuff that people keep in their glove box; an outdated road atlas, an old Fuzzbuster that may or may not work, some McDonald's napkins, and a pen that didn't write, but no passport. So, of course, I put everything back and took it out again, only slower. Still, no passport. Hmph. It was there before we left Boreal Bay. I know, I checked.

Next, I turned around in my seat and started going through the suitcases. Nope. Still no passport. Giving up the search, I resigned myself to using my driver's license for identification and hoped they wouldn't ask for my birth certificate to back it up. A few minutes later we pulled up to the booth and were greeted by not one, but two defenders of our sacred borders, our friendly Customs and Border Protection officers (Alert one). The nice gentlemen asked the usual questions, and then some more and some more (Alert two). But when they asked Jim to open the trunk (Alert three) of his new car and he couldn't figure out how to do it, I knew we were off to bask in the joys of "secondary".

You see, "Secondary" is where you go when they pull you out of line for further inspection because they think you might be a threat to the country and too stupid to sneak across the border someplace where there isn't a checkpoint. And that's where we went. Jim parked the car as directed, and a moment later we were both escorted to the CBP office, an intimidating little place decorated in the latest version of "Government Modern"; chrome, Formica, and concrete, all watched over by the obligatory picture of the current President. However tacky the decor, we both noticed that it was away from the rest of the people waiting to cross, also known as "witnesses". Needless to say, Jim and I behaved ourselves. We did our best to answer all of their questions, making liberal use of the terms "Yes sir" and "No sir" until they stopped their interrogation and asked us to sit on the "Group W\*" bench while they searched the car.

I've heard a lot of horror stories about crossing the border at Tijuana, and having the Customs officers literally take a car apart, find nothing, then giving the owner two hours to put it back together and get it out of there. That didn't happen here. The team of officers that searched our car were as neat as they were thorough, as well as being very good about putting items back where they found them. At one point, one of the officers came into the office with Jim's laptop computer and asked for the password so he, presumably, could look at the files. Jim, being the great citizen that he is, gave his password to the officer who then went away, probably to search the computer for Osama bin Laden's address or the latest plans for bringing down WalMart, thus destroying the American way of life. I won't tell you what he found on Jim's hard drive, but apparently it wasn't anything

that threatened America.

Things were looking up, and we were beginning to think that we would soon be on our way when another member of the search team, with a bit of a scowl on his face, held up a baggie and asked "Who does this belong to?". Jim and I looked at each other, looked at the baggie, then back at each other, before both of us, stifling a laugh, answered "Mine". Yup, they had found the contraband, our last two pieces of home made beef jerky. It's not like we meant to try to smuggle it into the country. Jim had put the baggie in the bin on his door 10 days before, expecting to eat it on the way home from a brief excursion to Wisconsin, and had simply forgotten about it. We explained that it was American beef, however he insisted that there was no way to prove that, and policy dictates that he treat it as Canadian beef and confiscate the contraband. And so, after an exhaustive lecture on the evils of trying to smuggle beef in from Canada, they let us go and wished us a safe trip home.

I have to believe that Jim and I are now in the Federal computer system as "Known Jerky Smugglers", and while I don't expect to see our pictures in the Post Office anytime soon, I won't be shocked if our recent indiscretion has a negative effect on future border crossings for either of us. Then again, all of the CBP officers were very polite and very professional throughout our ordeal, doing a job that needs to be done to help keep our borders secure, so they will probably recognize our error it for what it was, a simple case of forgetfulness. So, no, I won't be bringing back any Cuban cigars, or Canadian Big Macs, but I will keep a tighter rein on my passport and will try to keep from doing anything that might look suspicious while in line at the border. After we got home, Jim found my passport in his car. I'd tell you where it was, but then everyone would know about the hidden space above the glove box in the 2007 Altima.

Tom

\*Arlo Guthrie, "Alice's Restaurant Massacre"