

My Detainment

JOHN MARTIN meets a suspicious character: himself

Another routine trip through immigration, as I departed Montreal en route to Raleigh via La Guardia airport in New York. There was one person ahead of me in the line — a slow day in immigration, it seemed.

The bearish attendant doing the pre-check looked at my immigration form. Then he nodded toward a table and, pointing to the form, said, “Follow the roped aisle there, go to the table at the far end, answer these questions, sign and date the form, and come back to me at the front of the line.”

I’d filled out my name, address, passport number, and birthday information, but hadn’t checked off the answers to the questions about whether I was bringing plants into the country, or if I was carrying over \$10,000 in cash with me, those sorts of things. I have often thought that the picture in my passport makes me look slightly Middle Eastern — sadly, a suspicious look with the country on a Code Orange Security Alert.

I walked to the table, completed the form, and returned to the attendant — again, with one person ahead of me. He noted my Provincetown sweatshirt, said, “Nice shirt,” and then, with a knowing grin, “Go to Line 10. She’s a lot of fun. You’ll really enjoy her.”

I handed my passport to a stern, “outdoorsy” woman who didn’t smile and immediately reminded me of Jane Hathaway, the starchy secretary on *The Beverly Hillbillies*. I glanced back at “the bear,” and with a smile and a nod I acknowledged his sarcastic, yet accurate, assessment.

Jane was decidedly not fun, and asked me the usual questions.

“What is your date of birth?”
“October 13, 1957,” I replied.
“And when did you leave the country?”

“I arrived here in Montreal on Friday, the 26th.” It was now Monday, December 29, 2003.

Then without conversation, she tilted her head back to scan the screen of, what I suppose, was “my record.”

“Have you ever been to Aruba?” she asked, which surprised me.

“In fact I have,” I said, and I smiled as if she were dreaming she herself might go one day. Then she asked me if I was familiar with either a company, or hotel, or some establishment there, which I wasn’t and said as much.

“Have you ever been arrested, Mr. Martin?”

I did the split second analysis of the DWI I received in college, trying to remember if I was actually put under arrest or not. Since that charge ended up being reduced to careless/reckless driving, and defending myself I’d ended up with a reduced fine, I felt OK answering, “No.”

Then she said, “Never? For anything?” And I thought, *Oh, lord*.

“No,” I said again.

“When were you in Aruba, and where did you stay?”

“Oh, I don’t know. It was a long time ago; I would guess in the early-to-mid ’80s. And I stayed in a resort hotel there.”

“In a resort hotel?” she asked. She stressed the word *resort* as if it were suspicious.

“Yes,” I said.

I handed my passport to a stern, “outdoorsy” woman who reminded me of Jane Hathaway, the starchy secretary on The Beverly Hillbillies.



“And you don’t know when that was?”

“No; perhaps there’s a stamp in my passport.”

She flipped through quickly, then to the picture/information page. “This was only issued in November of ’98, so it wouldn’t be in here. What do you do Mr. Martin?”

“I work for IBM; I’m a computer programmer.” Then I thought, *Well I don’t exactly program. Surely they don’t need to know that. It’s not like she’s going to ask me to write a small piece of code or anything to prove I’m a programmer.* Nonetheless, I thought, *I should have said a Software Engineer instead.*

I’ve now opened myself up to prosecution on two accounts of false statements to an officer.

“Come with me, Mr. Martin.”

She took me to a back room, the “interrogation room,” I was imagining. She gave my passport to a light-skinned African-American gentleman who

nodded at me, pointed to red, yellow, and green (I think) lines on the floor and said, “Stand over there behind the red line.” It can’t be good that he

chose the red line. When is red good?

Jane Hathaway whispered

something to the policeman, and then left. He kept looking at his computer screen, looking up at me, and back at his computer screen. I got the distinct feeling he was comparing my face to mug shots.

I tried to remain calm, to look casual, and looked around the room for as long as I could before starting the downward spiral in my mind.

Oh, my God. I’m going to be accused of a crime I didn’t commit. It’s going to be so expensive defending myself, even though I didn’t do it. It sucks that you have to pay for an attorney to defend yourself against something you didn’t do. I wonder if John Edwards would take my case.

The person I had met in Montreal on this vacation had loaned me *Four Trials* by John Edwards, and I was in the thick of it, remembering how he came to the rescue of wronged individuals and won huge settlements for them. Never mind that this wasn’t to be a negligence case, or that he is no longer practicing law in Raleigh since he’s now a member of the U.S. Senate. Those details I would tend to later, when I got back in my mind.

After a few minutes, the man got on his walkie-talkie and radioed someone else over: one of the guys with the handcuffs, I imag-



“What were you doing in Turkey?” I was so stunned by this question that my thoughts started rambling.

SO THESE TWO GUYS WALK INTO A BAR...

They look at the lunch menu and one guy orders the red bean and gorgonzola quesadilla. The other has the daily lunch special — a cup of homemade soup, sandwich and fries. They enjoy their meals, relax in an authentic pub environment, and eventually head back to work.



A great place for lunch. No joke.

ined. When the man arrived, they leaned their heads together and whispered back and forth, and I felt myself beginning to get a little physically sick to my stomach. *This is starting to look real bad*, I thought.

I'm going to call the black guy Andy and the white guy he called over Barney (and if Jane pops back in, I may rename her to Aunt Bea to extend the analogy).

After their *tete-a-tete*, Andy and Barney moved back behind the computer and looked at a few screens together; then Andy said, "Mr. Martin, come forward please." He put his hand out, but sort of crimped up. I wasn't sure if he wanted me to turn over my John Edwards book, or shake my hand. I thought, *I'm just going to do the normal, nothing's-wrong thing and shake his hand.*

"Nice to meet you," he said, which I didn't think was at all appropriate.

"Nice to meet you, too," I said, unconvincingly.

"Mr. Martin, what were you doing in Montreal this weekend?"

"I was on vacation with a friend. He got a free trip from Wells Fargo for refinancing his mortgage, and he invited me along."

"Oh yeah? And where is this friend?"

"He's still at the hotel; he's staying an extra day."

"What hotel?"

"The Delta Centre-Ville, downtown Montreal."

"Mr. Martin, you travel a lot internationally, don't you?" I would categorize the tone of this question as "accusatory."

"Well, I guess so, not that much, but I do. I was in London last December, and took a trip to Paris while I was there."

"What were you doing in Turkey?" I was so stunned by this question that my thoughts started rambling. *Oh, my God. They're trying to connect me to Al Qaeda. Turkey? What was I doing in Turkey? Let me think.*

At this point, though I was hearing Turkey, I was thinking

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they meant Hungary, since when I went there it was a communist country. (And that relates to Al Qaeda how?) I was a real mess by this point, and though I was in Turkey in October of 1999 with Rob for the last stop of our Greek Isles Cruise, which was in Istanbul, I answered the question about Hungary, which I visited 14 years earlier in June of 1985 with my ex-wife.

“I was in Europe with my wife, and we took a side trip to Turkey.” This was wrong, wrong, wrong. My wife and I were in Austria when we took that side trip, and it was to Budapest, which was “right next door” to Austria. Turkey, however, was three countries away — not at all a candidate for a side trip. Fortunately, I hadn’t said we were in Austria, but instead, Europe. And fortunately, there were no follow-up questions.

“What did you buy while you were here in Montreal this weekend, Mr. Martin?”

“Nothing. I didn’t buy a thing.” This wasn’t entirely true. I had purchased ten postcards, which I had mailed — so, yes, ten stamps, too; a bottle of Vick’s Chest Congestion syrup; and a bottle of Nyquil Cough Syrup. But, I didn’t think it was necessary to get into all that. Oh yeah, I bought a refrigerator magnet, too. So sue me!

“Put your bags up here please, and let’s go through them.”

He went to my laptop first. “You’re here on vacation, but you brought your laptop?”

“Yes. It’s my personal laptop, not my work one, and I just bought a digital camera, so I brought the laptop so that I could upload my pictures.”

While he was looking through that bag, I opened my “big” suitcase, and immediately reached for the Sam’s-Club-size bottle of Roloids lying on the top of my clothes. I saw Barney and Andy exchange a glance, and as I popped one in my mouth, I wondered if they thought I was tak-

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ing cyanide or something. I thought of shouting, "I'm just going to end it right here, rather than being wrongly accused of a crime!" But I knew this wasn't the appropriate time for melodrama.

"Sorry," I said, as I turned the Roloids label toward them, and chewed the one in my mouth. "This is very unnerving, even though I know I haven't done anything."

As Andy looked through my suitcase, he said, "Do you live in the city limits of Raleigh?"

"Yes, I do."

"You're probably wanting some good North Carolina barbecue right about now," he said, and smiled.

"Vinegar-based," I replied. And then, "Are you from that area?"

"I spent some time at Cherry Point," he replied.

"Oh! I spent a lot of time at Camp Lejeune. My dad was in the Marines. He did three tours in Vietnam, and we weren't invited to go along with him. I was at Cherry Point for a few years, too, went to grade school on the base." I was spewing forth now, happy to show that I'm a proud American with a patriotic background.

He finished, and said, "You can close up the suitcases, and you are free to go."

"Whew," I let out, with a hundred questions still swirling through my mind like, *What was that Aruba business all about?*

But, all I said was, "Thanks; it's very disconcerting to not know what's going on, though."

"Well, the country is on a Code Orange Security Alert, and we're just doing extra checking today."

I was spewing forth now, happy to show that I'm a proud American with a patriotic background.



John Martin works in Quality Assurance at IBM in Research Triangle Park. He is active in IBM's Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender employee group, and has just entered the evening graduate program at N.C. State to get a Master's Degree in Technical Communications. He is on the Board of Directors of Triangle Community Works, loves to read and write, and is an avid two-stepper and line dancer.

That's all he would say, and since I was being let go, I could appreciate that response.

"Thank you for your work," I said sincerely with a nod, as I have said and done since September 11 to each and every airline pilot who is at the door of the plane as I exit.

"Follow the red arrows out of this area, and into customs, and have a good flight."

I went through customs, which was uneventful, as I had nothing to declare. Next I went through the

regular security, taking out my laptop, and taking off everything that might set off the alarm. I walked through without incident, put my laptop back in its case, grabbed all my things and started walking toward Gate 89.

"Mr. Martin," I heard a call behind me. It was Andy again. "You left your book back in our area. Here you go."

"Thank you very much, sir. I appreciate that." And I did. It was good to have my lawyer back with me — just in case. •

Tea in Three Parts

Water!
Wars fought about
and within;
without, none can win.

Corrosion, erosion,
restless rising to the moon,
chopping to the wind,
dropping to earth,
carrying charge
marrying charge
with a flashy
rumble.

Bearing life.
Sharing life,
the seedling's birth
and girth,
the farmer's mirth
and worth,
... and my tea.

Turn a heated eye
to the kettle.
Impatiently
watch it boil.

See?

Shadow swirls
sway in the depth,
mirror impulse
to sister air
shimmering
above hot pavement.

See there?

Bubbles, first meek,
speak up,
seek
to escape;
streak
and roil
peak
in misty heat.

Hot, wet shimmers.
Swirls settle,
steam thins.

Pour steaming water
into the pot,
over fermented leaves;
seep.
No caffeine-free for me!
Aromatic.
Darkly dramatic.

Sweet,
dreamy, creamy,
tea.

B HOLROYD



Elizabeth "B" Holroyd lives in the farming area of southern Orange County with her husband, daughter, and various pets, and is dismayed to see suburbia oozing closer to her home. When not writing or developing Web sites, she is usually riding, working in the yard, or reading. Her story "Skid and Twister" was published in the September 2001 Urban Hiker.

