

## Canada: You Can Come Any Time You Want

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I was in Canada from about 3:30 p.m. to about 5:15 p.m. this afternoon. I was trying to get into Canada to go to my book reading in Winnipeg tonight at Mondragon Books. They asked me at the window who I was, what I was doing, where I was going, what kind of books did I write, what I was thinking.

Umm, political fiction.

Why?

Then they sent me inside. Park under the ramp.

Talk to the customs people, no, go over there instead, to the immigration folks.

I can do that. How you doing, eh? How about that Red Green Show, huh? I mean, eh? You know him? I love that show. I want to move to Canada sometime. You folks seem like nice people. You count your votes, here, right? How do you feel about anthrax?

Do you have a passport?

Umm, know, I didn't think you had ... I thought that was next yea ...

Birth certificate? How do I know you are really an American citizen if all you have is an Iowa driver's license.

Hey. How about those Maple Leafs, huh? You skate? I can't skate. I wish I could skate ...

Have you ever been arrested?

... But I never learned.

... Yeah, I guess. Hey, lots of ducks around here, eh? I used to hunt. I don't hunt anymore. Bet it gets cold up here.

Sit down. There.

Here?

Well, I guess you guys are stuck with me now. I always thought Canada was kind of an option. You know, go up there and sit in the park, feed bread crumbs to the moose.

But now it looks like this is kind of it.

Canada kicked me out because I have been to prison for protesting against the United States military at Offutt Air Force Base.

I thought they would appreciate something like that. I thought Canadians were different.

Hmmm.

Well, the young woman immigration officer, agent, takes my papers, Iowa driver's license, back to some room down the immigration hall and disappears for about half an hour, while Mom & Pop Back To Winnipeg From The Winter In Miami get high-fives from the immigration and customs staff, and I'm sitting over in the corner on the Group W bench.

The young woman Canadian person came back and told me to come through the swinging doors with her and please step into the second open door on the right.

One, two.

We sit down and she explains that I can pay \$200 to make an application to get considered to enter Canada. Then the application will be studied and a determination will be made as to whether I have been "rehabilitated" enough to sit in a borrowed rowboat and drink Moosehead Beer.

Then I am escorted out of the building — young immigration woman keeps my dissolute Iowa driver's license in her hand and tells me where I need to turn around to head back to wherever the hell I came from.

She will only hand me back my license as I pass by her on the sidewalk.

I then drive back the quarter mile or so to the United States immigration complex, a crew whose acquaintance I cannot wait to make.

The American immigration window woman asks me why Canada won't take me.

She directs me to Garage Number Two, where I wait until the door opens and American immigration man motions me inside.

He asks me why Canada won't take me.

Mrs. American Immigration Woman stands close by. They both have on fresh protective gloves, kind of a robins-egg-blue.

He asks what air force base I protested at that got me sent to prison. I tell him.

He asks if I have ever been to Fort Benning, the School of the Americas.

I say no, but I would like to go there sometime. Mr. American immigration man, young fat blond boy with crewcut, does not smile.

He is fingering, smelling, the money in my billfold.

He directs me to "the waiting room." I know that's what it is because it says "The Waiting Room" on the door. I can see the chairs inside.

I go sit down in one of the chairs and look toward where Mr. & Mrs. American Immigration Persons are ruffling through my undies and political fiction books.

I can't see them.

Because of the one-way window.

You can't watch them as they search your vehicle.

I can hear slamming and clanking and something like dirty socks being sniffed by a drug-smelling Mrs. Immigration American Woman, and I try not to imagine her walking into The Waiting Room with a smile on her face holding a bag of marijuana.

And then they have me. They can put me in Leavenworth or Butterworth or whatever new below-ground federal prison they have these days, and they never have to hear me talking about how Bush did 9-11 and killed Wellstone, ever again.

The door opens.

Mr. New Immigration Man, the other one must have gone home for the day, says that I'm set to go.

Turn right and head back to wherever the hell you came from.

Can I have the paper from The Country Of Canada that says why I can't come in?

No, we keep that.

I turn right, head back to Grand Forks.

I look at the sheet on my passenger seat that Miss Immigration Canadian Person Woman gave me.

It's a list of Canadian Consulates in the United States.

That is where I need to send the \$200 to get them to study me to see if I am rehabilitated enough to fish in a decent lake.

I wonder how they would make their determination.

Are you glad you broke the law? Yes.

Do you support the United States. No, not really. We suck. Our military is a bunch of thugs, paid killers. No money should go to them. In fact, I sent in a crossed-out tax form to the IRS in Kansas City before I left home on this book tour.

Well, son, looks like you will never see Thunder Bay — ever, in your lifetime. I think we are through here. We'll take those flapjacks with us, and the flannel shirt, the cedar logs.

I told the woman with a smile that I was not rehabilitated, while we were sitting inside the second open door on the right. I thought, being Canadian and all, she would understand what I meant. I wouldn't even try that line down the road with the Americans.

They'd be like, what? Go Packers.

I really thought Canada would be different.

You know, like another country.

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