

## *From the immigration fraud notebook*

# The Violin Maker

by James Walsh

*[Once again we are privileged to print a true story of immigration fraud from the notebook of former INS employee James Walsh.]*

The post-Cold War era has inspired increasingly innovative applications for employment-based visas; but the Stradivarius violin repairman perhaps takes the cake. The quality and historic value of the violins, cellos, violas and other stringed instruments made by Antonio Stradivari in the 18<sup>th</sup> century have never been surpassed. About 650 of these instruments remain today. The value of a man trained to repair them would be unquestionable; and this was the thinking of an enterprising Polish national in the 1980s.

At the U.S. Consulate office in Krakow, he applied for the "O" category of U.S. employment visa, reserved for extraordinarily qualified persons. What was his extraordinary qualification? He claimed to be a repairer of Stradivarius violins. The young consular officer suggested the applicant come back in a week. The Polish national agreed and even left documents attesting to his craftsmanship.

The consular officer sent the application up the bureaucratic chain of command. At each level, the application was neither approved nor denied but bucked further up the chain for a decision — a decision for which no one would accept responsibility.

After the first week, the applicant was told to return in another week, as the matter was still under review. The weeks dragged on; and finally a Foreign Service Officer at the State Department made a decision using this reasoning — since there were no other applicants on file as Strad repairers,

then this applicant in Krakow must be genuine.

In the Chicago suburbs today there resides a young Polish man, his Polish wife, two Polish-born children, one U.S.-born child, and his in-laws. As gang foreman for an environmental clean-up crew, the young immigrant is providing service to his community. In his spare time he listens to classical music and is especially fond of Chopin. The question remains: if work as a Strad repairman ever came his way, would he be fit to do it? The State Department and the INS never attempted to verify his claim; but if they ever feel so inclined, the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. has an extensive Stradivarius collection.

**MORAL:** Especially in this time of downsizing, with U.S. citizens being laid off, the INS should verify every application by a foreign national for an employment visa. Otherwise, jobs that could be going to U.S. citizens will continue to be filled by foreign nationals, many of them using fraudulent documents.

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