

Give Us Your Terrorists

Canadian traveler learns the passport game

by Licia Corbella

In December of 1981, I found myself traveling through the North African country of Morocco. I was 18, and pretty naive at the time, but grew considerably wiser by the time my one-year traveling binge came to an end the following September.

During my travels, there were two things I treasured above all else and guarded with much diligence — my Canadian passport and my airline ticket home. Those two items went everywhere with me, in a special travel pouch under my clothes. I felt my Canadian passport was a rare and, therefore, valuable item — available to Canadian citizens only — and only those of good repute. No criminals or terrorists need apply. It was a couple of days before Christmas when that belief was turned on its ear.

Not wanting to spend Christmas in a Muslim country, I made my way north from Fez back to Tetouan, where I planned to catch the ferry back to Spain. In Tetouan, I met up again with a Japanese girl I had spent time with in Marrakesh,

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and she introduced me to two Dutch fellows she was chatting with in the teahouse.

Upon learning that I was a Canadian, one of the Dutch fellows informed me in his halting English that he, too, was Canadian. To prove it, he pulled out his Canadian passport.

“Oh,” I said. “Where are you from?”

“Holland,” he replied.

“Right, but where do you live,” I asked.

“In Amsterdam.”

“Oh,” I said, perplexed, “how is it you have a Canadian passport?”

He told me a story that seemed so implausible to me at the time that, had I not inspected the legitimate Canadian passport, I would have called him a liar on the spot.

He said since he had a criminal record in Holland which caused him grief as he traveled around Europe, he decided to get himself the best open-sesame the world had at the time — a Canadian passport.

Several years earlier, this fellow spent some time traveling around Canada, working in various cities and eventually spending about three years in Toronto. He forged a birth or baptismal certificate with an alias name, applied for and received landed immigrant status in Canada under that alias, and then applied for and received a Canadian passport. Suddenly, that passport I was guarding with my very being

didn't seem quite so valuable any more.

My guess is that most Canadians are coming to the same realization this week [late December 1999] as I did all those years ago in Morocco. Despite the feeble assurances of Prime Minister Jean Chretien to the contrary, most Canadians are rightly appalled by the circumstances surrounding two separate incidents at the Canada-U.S. border in which two suspected Algerian terrorists tried to enter the U.S. in recent days.

Despite the fact that Ahmed Ressam had been declared a terrorist in his native Algeria and despite the fact that he entered Canada in February 1994 with a false French passport, he was not arrested or detained.

When his refugee claim was denied and he was ordered deported, he simply disappeared from view and remained in Canada, working and hob-nobbing with others who have ties to violent terrorist organizations, which have vowed to maim and murder our U.S. neighbors.

But it gets worse. Even though Ressam had been arrested twice and spent two weeks in jail for theft while in Montreal, he was not deported at that time either. Instead, he used an alias, got a baptismal certificate and obtained a Canadian passport — this despite the fact he has been twice arrested and fingerprinted.

Notwithstanding his Canadian passport, which was legitimately issued, U.S. authorities in Port Angeles, Washington, stopped Ressay on a hunch as he drove off a ferry from Victoria and found a trunkload of nitroglycerin and other bomb-making materials. Ressay had booked a room in a hotel near Seattle's Space Needle where millennium celebrations were expected to take place.

As a result of this and other incidents, Canada is being soundly lambasted by critics on both sides of the world's longest undefended border, who say that Canada is a safe haven for terrorist groups. As a result, the U.S. has beefed up surveillance at all border crossings, causing delays for all who wish to cross, including legitimate Canadian passport holders.

Indeed, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service has been warning the Liberal government repeatedly that some 60 terrorist groups are active in Canada and even allowed, under our tax laws, to raise funds here as charitable organizations.

Canada-based terrorists have played a role in the World Trade Center bombing in New York, suicide bombings in Israel, U.S. embassy bombings in Africa, assassinations in India and the Al Khobar Towers attack in Saudi Arabia. Last year, a terrorist living in Canada was arrested when his plan to blow up the New York subway system was intercepted.

And yet, when asked why Ressay was not detained and deported when his refugee claim was denied, all we hear from the Prime Minister and other officials

are platitudes — that even suspected terrorists have the “right to due process” simply by setting foot on our soil. Incidents like these not only devalue our passport, they devalue what it means to be Canadian.

Pretty soon, if more suspected Algerian terrorists or others who are denied refugee status get their hands on Canadian passports, the rest of us can expect to start being treated like suspected Algerian terrorists.

The time has come for our immigration rules to be toughened up so that those who plan to hurt us — or our closest neighbor to the South — are given the option of either leaving the country or waiting for our painfully slow “due process” immigration system from behind bars. Then again, one taste of the Club Fed life, which includes golf and horseback riding, and they might choose the latter.

On second thought, just kick them out!

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