

休士頓最炎熱的夏天 The Hottest Summer in Houston

所以說，一個人不能太過自信。偏偏，我就是一個非常固執的人。

A person must not be over-confident. That is what the story is about which I am going to tell. It starts with the stubbornness of me.

那天，我到休士頓辦理綠卡換新。辦理處的地址是六號路南行的方向。我搬來南德州已經十八年半，雖然不是每周都上休士頓，至少也去過百次以上了吧。六號路往南，那還不簡單，就是到六號路的時候往右轉。這還錯得了嗎？

I went to Houston to renew my Green Card that day. According to the instructions I received, the Immigration Office was in the direction going south once I hit Highway 6. That should be simple. I had taken High 6 I didn't know how many times. How could I be wrong following the road so familiar to me?

我有一個提早出發的習慣。根據距離遠近，我會酌量提前出發，以防萬一。通知書寫的是下午兩點。從我們家到休士頓大約是兩個小時，假如是城南，那就更近了，一個小時四十五分就到了。所以我在十點出發，時間應該很充裕才對。

I did according to my habit of starting early. According to the length of the distance, I would adjust my departure time so that I could be early, just in case anything happens. According to the instructions written in the notice that I received, I should report to the Immigration Office at 2:00pm. From my house to Houston, the driving time for me was approximately 2 hours. If the destination was in the south of Houston, the distance would be even shorter, taking me about one hour and forty-five minutes. Therefore, I left my house at 10:00am, and that should allow me plenty of time to drive and rest.

我的計劃是在六號路轉角的那個大大的‘殖民地(Colony)’購物中心找個地方休息片刻，然後前往辦事處。偏偏，今天在這裏轉來轉去，就是找不到一個適合的休息地方。我就乾脆再往前走，停了一個小小的購物中心，那時候是十二點半。我把自己帶來的生菜沙拉喫了。這也是一個自己養成的小習慣，自己帶點東西，有時候很方便。

I planned to rest at the 1st Colony Shopping Mall for a while. For some reason, I drove around and could not find a proper place to rest. Therefore, I drove further on along Highway 6 and took a break at a small shopping center. The time was 12:30pm. I took out my lunch I had prepared for myself, a very simple salad. That was also one of my small habits, bringing something along to eat and saving a lot of troubles.

之後，我繼續前行，辦事處的地址是一萬兩千多號，我開始注意路旁建築物的號碼，六千多號。。。七千多號。。。八千多號。。。九千多號。。。然後過了一個路橋。一萬三千多號！怎麼會呢？

After having finished my lunch, I started again and drove further. I began to watch the street numbers of the buildings. The Immigration Office was at twelve thousand something. The street numbers showed six thousand something, ..., then seven thousand something, ..., eight thousand something, ..., nine thousand something, ... After that, I had to cross a road bridge. Thirteen thousand something! How could this be? Where was the twelve thousand something?

我打了個圈子繞了回來，又走了一次，還是一樣。這下糟糕了，通知書上面有沒有電話號碼！我把地址打進導航器，沒有顯示。我下了車，到一個區公所，進去問他們。辦事小姐看了地址也不知道在哪裏。有一個區公所的工人出來，跟我說，‘糖地 (Sugarland)’ 在往回七英里的地方。我說是呀，我就是這麼走來走去，就是找不到一萬兩千多號的門牌號碼！

So I took a U-turn and did it again. The same thing happened! Troubles! There was no telephone number in the notice I received from the Immigration Office. I keyed in the address into the navigator, no data shown. I got off my car, entered a municipality office and showed the lady inside that address I had. She had no idea. Then an employee came out and said, "Sugarland is seven miles back." I said that was exactly what I thought, but could not find the street number of twelve thousand something.

我有點開始急了，因為通知書上寫得很清楚，不按時辦理，就是放棄辦理機會。那還了得？！我就回到九千多號的那個大大的‘沃瑪’(Walmart)，開始求救了。那時候大約是一點十分左右，我拿了通知單，顧客服務臺排了人，我等不及，就出來。

Anxiety began to creep on me, being an nervous person by nature. According to the instructions in the notice, if I did not report to the office in time, I would be giving up my opportunity of renewing my Green Card! That would be really a big trouble! Then, I drove back to the Walmart at nine thousand something and began to get help. It was around 1:10pm. With the notice in my hand, I waited in line at the service counter for a while and left, because the line was too long for me.

前面街角有個加油站，我就要進出，在這之前，請一個人替我打電話叫警察來幫忙我，被拒絕了。另一個人站在那裏，我求他，他跟我說他是馬里蘭州來的，人生地不熟，大概是最不適合幫忙我的人。進到加油站的建築，在服務櫃檯等了一兩個人，輪到我的時候，我就跟服務員解釋，他說，抱歉，他不能幫這個忙！我又試了一，兩個人。出來的時候，那個站在外頭的馬里蘭州來的年輕人跟我說，有何運氣？我說沒有。

At the street corner, there was a gas-station. On my way in, I asked a gentleman to call the police for me for help and was refused. There was another gentleman standing there, I asked him also, he explained to me that he was from Maryland and not familiar with this area, probably the last person to go to for help. So I went into the building and waited for a little while. There were only a couple of people ahead of me in line. When it was my turn, I explained to the cashier my need and was refused again. On my way out, I tried once or twice more to ask people to help me with no result. The guy from Maryland asked me if I had any luck while I was out of the building. "Nope," I replied.

加油站背對背是個餐廳，有車子從他們的停車場旁邊的路經過，我攔下了一部車，跟她解釋我的困境，這位女士很熱心地幫忙我，把我給她的地址打進手機，但是也找不到，我跟她說，我也試過了。坐在她旁邊看起來是她母親，拿了一支筆給我，我謝了她，說我自己帶了筆。我請她替我叫警察，但是她沒有作聲，隨後，把警察局的電話號碼給我。她說，你有手機吧！我說在車上。

There was a restaurant in the back of the gas-station building, and a mini-van was driving by me from its parking lot. I stopped them. When I explained my emergency to the lady driver, she helped me in earnest. First, she punched in the address I gave her into her smart phone; however, nothing showed up. I told her I tried before. The other lady, who looked like the driver's mother, handed me a pen in case I needed to write down something. I thanked her and said that I brought along my own. I asked the driver lady if she could call the police for me. After a moment of silence, she gave me the number of the police station, and asked me if I had a cellphone. I said yes and that it was in my own car.

謝了她們之後，就回到停車的地方打電話到警察局。接綫員轉給 911，她說，你得往回走，過了 59 號路橋。我心裏想，怎麼可能？這邊才是往南的方向嘛。她跟我講那附近的幾個速食店的名字，然後跟我說那條街名。我請她把街名拼出來告訴我，那是沃斯(Voss)街，我就把它記了下來。心裏還是不相信她給的消息是正確的。最後，她跟我說，這樣子好了，我把你轉給辦事處，好不好？我說好呀，其實我大概知道一轉到辦事處，一定是電腦答話，然後又是一團糟！

After thanking her, I went back to my own car and began to call the police. The operator switched me to 911. The 911 operator told me to go backward toward downtown, pass Highway 59. I thought to myself how could that be! This direction was the going-south direction. Then she mentioned a few names, including a fast-food store close to the Immigration Office and also the name of the street it was in. It was 'Voss' street and I wrote it down, still not convinced that she was correct. Then she said she would transfer me to the Immigration Office. I said OK, expecting a flood of computerized announcements.

果然，電話一轉，開始電腦答話！我掛掉手機。想想，怎麼辦！已經一點四十分了。我試圖沉著下來。我想這麼好了，今天不要求辦好事情，能在他們下班之前找到地方，請他們准許我再來辦理，看看行得通行不通？我按住這個念頭在心裏。當然，我已經祈禱了好幾次，請老天幫忙我。心情比較沉穩下來。

As I had expected, a flood of computerized announcements came out. I hang up. Now, what should I do? The time was 1:40pm. I tried to calm myself down. Then I told myself: set today's goal as only try to get to the Immigration Office and ask them for a new appointment. The idea calmed me down a little, and of course, I had already prayed to God I didn't know how many times.

一瞬間，我跟自己說，“這麼好了，剛才一萬三千多號的地方有個小工廠，還不如到那裏問問看，有個真的人可以問問總是比和這些電腦交談在心理上著實的多！”我於是第三次又轉了回去。停在他們的第二個停車場。（他們的第一個停車場祇剩一個空位，那是給他們大老闆停的位置。）進去之後，小姐把地址打進電腦的時候，我心裏想，“又來了！”然後她說，你得往回走，很遠很遠！跟我講了幾個速食店的名字，然後說，Voss 街。又把街名寫在一張紙條上遞給我。

Then I remembered there was an office building of a small factory with street number thirteen thousand something. Why not go there; at least I could get some real people to talk to. So, for the third time, I went in that direction. I had to park my car in the second parking lot, because in the first parking lot, only one vacancy was left, which was reserved for their big boss. I went into the building; the lady helped me by entering the address I gave her. I told myself, "Here it goes again!" Then she said, "You have to go back, very, very far away!" Then she mentioned the fast-food store's name and also 'Voss' Street! In a piece of paper, she wrote down the street name and gave it to me.

我就開始有點相信了。兩個人不會講的完全一樣的！除非是正確的。也不知怎麼，我完全沒有超速。慢慢地開著我的吉普車，一條街挨過一條街，該走出口的時候，就走出去，遠遠看到一個購物中心，是有個什麼速食店，沒錯，然後一看 Voss 街！車子停好，進到辦事處。兩點十五分！

Now I began to be convinced, because two people could not say exactly the same thing, unless what they said was true. I again, calmed myself down, and drove without speeding, slowly but steadily, street after street, exit after exit. Then in the distance I saw a shopping center, and a fast-food store, and then 'Voss' Street! Thanks God All-Mighty! I rushed into the Immigration Office. The time was 2:15pm.

還有好多人等著呢！通知書寫的‘兩點’，並不是說‘那一刻’，而是‘那一段時刻’，我一看，就知道自己‘得救了！’

It turned out people were still waiting in line. I realized that I was assigned a block of time, not that I had to report to the office 2:00pm exactly on time. When I saw that, I knew my ass was saved!

謝天謝地！以後再不敢固執了。

Promise, I will never be stubborn again.