

WALKING INTO AMERICA.

By James Collins.

In the late 1990s, my wife and I took a trip to Québec. We spent the week in Canada and had a wonderful time. We bought many trinkets and souvenirs, presents for our family members' and in doing so we acquired VAT (the Canadian tax on goods bought by anyone in Canada), which upon leaving Canada is a refund for tourists. We spent a fair amount of money and the VAT was the order of \$40.

Returning to the United States, we stopped at the Canadian side of the border, went through a lot of paperwork and had coffee and sandwiches. We got back into the car and drove about a quarter-mile to the American side of the border. Before we passed through, I went into a little office presented my VAT vouchers and requested a refund.

"I'm sorry," said the clerk, "We don't handle VAT refunds. You have to do that back on the Canadian side of the border."

"What's the easiest way to get around and go back?" I asked.

"You have to go through American customs up ahead, then just go straight ahead about a half a mile; make a U-turn and get back on the line of traffic on the other side of the road."

I looked across the road, saw over 100 cars on line, and figured I would lose a half hour to 45 min. just to get back to the Canadian side of the border then I would have to replicate all the tasks I just completed.

"Eileen, I'm going to leave you here in the car, walk back to the Canadian complex, get this taken care and I'll return back here. It will save us a lot of time."

I walked back to the Canadian complex had a lovely discussion with the woman there. Received my \$40 refund and started back to the American side to my car and my wife, Eileen. As I got within 100 yards of my car, I encountered a very large American border patrol officer, coming towards me, wearing a ranger hat and carrying a large 45-caliber automatic in a holster. I kept walking. He stopped, raised his left hand straight out from his shoulder with his palm extended at a right angle to me with his fingers splayed and his right hand on his holster.

"Sir, please stop right there and explain to me why you're walking into America," said the very large officer as he reached down and unhooked the lock on his 45 caliber handgun. He signaled to me clearly, I was not welcome.

"I'm walking into America because I live here."

"Do you have any identification such as a passport or a birth certificate which would verify that claim?"

"As a matter of fact I have my birth certificate in my coat pocket."

"Using only two fingers, reach into your pockets, extract the birth certificate; lay it down on the ground and backup 10 paces."

I complied and realized this officer was not messing around. I did as he asked as he walked forward and picked up the birth certificate. He then asked a number of questions about the information thereon and apparently was satisfied.

"Where are you coming from and why don't you have a car?"

I then related my story and pointed to my car off to the side with my wife, Eileen.

Then, at his insistence, we walked over to the car and while he still kept the birth certificate in his hand. He interrogated Eileen as to who I was. Luckily, Eileen was in a good mood and did not play any tricks otherwise; I would have ended up in a detention cell. The officer returned my birth certificate and advised me not to take shortcuts anymore especially on an international border.

I was very glad to enter American soil and to proceed with the border at my back.

THE END