

My Story: Part 4

"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

- Martin Luther King, Jr.

"I have always found that mercy bears richer fruits than strict justice."

- Abraham Lincoln

I spent ten days in the UK helping to clear my brother's dilapidated flat (a nightmare in itself) and cremating him.

One problem I did have though was that I slightly overstayed my 90 days. I went up to 96 or 97 days. Homeland Security regulations on immigration state clearly that in certain mitigating circumstances, this is allowed.

My mother wanted me to stay in the UK, but could not accept my wife being with me. I offered a perfect solution for all concerned, but it was turned down. So, after those painful ten days, I flew back to Chicago.

This should have been a breeze as well. I was through passport control without any mention of my previous (and slight) overstay. Fine. Then I stupidly went back to ask a perfectly harmless question about immigration and was pulled aside by a senior immigration officer.

He too was rather agitated. Must be something about the job that turns ordinary people into monsters with a pathological hatred of innocent travellers. He was aided and abetted by two other officers who then made my stay at the airport very uncomfortable. However, even after this tirade of threats and intimidation, I was still allowed through.

I was now connecting to Portland International Airport. I was happy to arrive and see my wife again. But we were still at square one with our housing needs.

It took about another five or six weeks before my wife insisted that we find an apartment at the village complex she had been living in with her work colleague. To my surprise, we were accepted. By December 1st we were signed-up and I returned with my belongings shortly afterwards.

I recall that when we signed this contract my wife put her hands together and praised God for his help. I was happy too. The apartment was not brilliant, but it was warm, reasonably quiet and dry. We were about content as we could be.

It was our first Christmas together. It was the only day off for 'Ling-Ling' at that time and it was not such a great day. 'Ling-Ling' had a bad headache and I let her sleep the entire morning while I cooked our Christmas.

But we were together and we had our own little Christmas tree, beautifully lit-up and decorated. 'Ling-Ling' likes the simple things in life and she was so proud to have her own little place which she could share with her devoted husband. I too was happy, but mindful of the predicament we had yet to face - our survival in the US or somewhere else.

My hopes were raised on Thanksgiving Day in 2007. I met by chance a guy Ling and I call 'Crazy John' at a Market of Choice in Eugene. 'Ling-Ling' were together that day to celebrate Thanksgiving with one of her Indonesian friends.

John and I stayed in touch for a while, but he was elusive. Eventually, he became offensive and that was that. But had it worked out, he was offering me the chance to work with or for him and stay in the US. If only that had happened. I would have had access to a good attorney (according to John) and he could have got me a work visa. By being legitimately in the country, I could then sponsor my wife who could also remain indefinitely.

It just wasn't meant to happen. Everything started turning sour at the start of 2008. No prospects and no chance of remaining in the US. It was time for 'Ling-Ling' and I to make other plans.

It was January 23rd and I was scheduled to return yet again to the UK. This time I was worried. I feared what may happen if I tried to return again - despite doing so quite legally. call it a premonition, but I had a bad feeling.

In line with my honesty in this matter, I was very tempted not to leave the US. I felt if we could hold out for another 6 months, we could resolve something. But my mother in the UK was desperate to see me. 'Ling-Ling' kept saying I should go and see my mother. I felt apprehensive as I knew my mother was somewhat manipulative. But I gave way to my wife's request to go.

I decided seven days in the UK would be enough. I would remain 'legal' and could return to my wife and work out a new future for us. I figured that if I could have two more 90-day stays, we could resolve something.

So, on January 23rd, I set off for the UK, but knowing that I would be counting every day until I saw my wife again.