

My Passport Renewal Trip 2010

It all started at 6:00 AM that morning when Keeb and I pulled into our gas station and filled up with diesel for our trip to Point Fortin. He announced to me that we could now go to Icacos and back TWICE if necessary. I do not like to brand people "goat mouths" without anecdotal evidence but as it turned out we drove 200 miles that day to get my passport so one wonders...

I should also point out before leaving home I told Keeb that maybe I need to take my previous passport and he airily dismissed the idea since he was thinking that I did not need additional identification. He also shared his definition of a passport: "A copybook with your picture in it."

As we set off so early, we had time to stop in Chaguanas for breakfast. We stopped on a side street with a prominent sign saying, "Car Park". Keeb admitted it was the first time he had seen a car park there, but we drove in and asked the man there if it was a paid car park and he looked at Keeb as if he was mad. He then said no. There was a large dog pacing a small kennel behind the man, so we were not about to stay where we were not wanted. So, we drove back out, baffled by what exactly was the intended purpose of the car park sign.

Keeb and I walked toward the thoroughfare to a little patisserie with a huge glass case facing the road with the requisite rock cakes, current rolls, and thick, sticky slices of cassava pone. Despite the local cuisine, the place felt like one of those tiny diners in New York as it was nestled under a staircase and opened directly onto the road. Keeb asked the woman behind the counter if they had whole wheat sada roti and she gruffly reply "NO!". He then asked if they had white sada and she replied, "What you want in it?" I had buljol and fried potato in my sada and while eating breakfast noted that she was very gruff to all her customers. She even told one man to take off his shades if he wanted to see the food!

We resumed our road trip and made great time, so we stopped off at the Pitch Lake to use their facilities. As we were debating if we should drive in (only one half of the double gates was open) a man called out to us from the outside. We drove over to him and he asked if we wanted a tour but left us alone once I told him we were only after the toilets.

When we arrived at the Passport office in Point Fortin, I proffered my official blue slip of paper. At that point they asked me about my previous passport. I told them the officer I saw originally did not say I had to bring it back. They said that I could not get my new passport without the old one. They were unmoved by my plea that I had come all the way from Santa Cruz and I asked if it were possible for the new passport to be sent to the Port of Spain office for me to collect in future. Keeb realized there was no point pleading with them and as we walked out, he said we had time to make the round trip to Santa Cruz for the old

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passport. I was upset but he just said it was his "bad" for not encouraging me to bring the old passport.

When we arrived back at Santa Cruz, Keeb's Dad's backhoe was on the property next to ours with two of his Dad's employees. One was driving the backhoe and the other was standing in the scoop part more than six feet in the air elevating the cable that is strung across the property. Keeb glanced over and said "Oh, there's Steve and Angel, you should give them a cold drink". Apparently, Angel was the one in midair. Nobody seemed to think this was extraordinary behaviour except me, so I got the drinks and kept quiet.

We headed back out, had lunch in Grand Bazaar and by then I had a migraine. Luckily, I had my eye-mask (yes, I walk around with an eye-mask in my handbag for when I go for massages because my masseuse likes having the lights on but that's a whole other story). So, I put the mask on, reclined the seat and slept for most of the trip back to Point Fortin. We got there just a few minutes after three. Keeb advised me to grovel if necessary to get in the door. It turned out they were still open so I did in fact get the passport.

Returning home was without incident and I have some good news, the Mosquito Creek Road (typically very accident prone) now has a very roughened strip down the centre of the road to dissuade people from overtaking. I hope there will be a positive outcome to that paving action.

Passport Photo Trip 2021

Now, it only took the passport office 9 months to let me know that the photo I took in February 2020 was unacceptable and I needed to have the photo re-taken. My sister had tried to pick up my passport in the same trip as hers and was told mine was not ready. And no, I could not re-take the photo at the nearest passport office to me. I had to go back to the original office which was in Point Fortin i.e. on the other side of the island. I had chosen Point Fortin in the first place as they had the shortest lead time to get an appointment last year. That was in the pre COVID19 world. Back when getting one's passport renewed as soon as possible seemed important.

So, I hitched a ride with a friend to Point Fortin. When she dropped me off, I was one of two people at the passport office. They made me fill out all the forms again. When I asked why I could not have done that at the Port of Spain office, the officer said I started in Point Fortin, so I had to continue at Point Fortin. Well, a lot had happened since last February: I had retired, my phone number had changed, and our postal service changed our mailing address. The only information that remained the same was my name, date of birth and my references.

Before taking my photo, I went outside to the sink at which we had washed our hands prior to entering the building and I wet my hair so my fringe was pushed up on my forehead. When I sat to take the photo, the officer said my hair was not sufficiently away from my face. I tried smoothing it back. He then reached down under his desk and pulled out a liter bottle of transparent gel. I asked him if it was hand sanitiser and in my defense, I could not read the label. He sighed and said in a patient voice that it was hair gel and I was to use it. I plastered my hair down, without the help of a mirror. My Mum had urged me to take a hair band that I refused to bring because (1) I never wear one normally and (2) I thought I would look like a knob, but now I was pretty sure I was a close match to Adolph Hitler.

After taking the photo, I pulled out my Kindle in the waiting area while I waited for my friend. I had already gone outside to call her as I knew I was not allowed to use my mobile in the office. The security guard then came and informed me I could not use any electronic device. I showed him the screen to prove all I was doing was reading a book, but he was adamant. So, I packed up my stuff, walked across the road to the deserted tent outside the health centre and waited for my friend while reading my Kindle.

When my friend picked me up, she obligingly made a quick stop at the pitch lake for me to get a photo for my website.

And the silver lining? I got email the next morning to say my new passport has been mailed out to me.