

Esther Chiu

Lost Passport!

“May I see your passport, please,” asked the airline agent at the counter on the Island of Bocolad.

“Sure,” I replied, reaching for my ticket folder where I kept all my travel documents. Not there. Then I searched my handbag and tote and started to panic. The agent waited patiently. Behind me were friends travelling on our Short-Term Mission to the Philippines.

“I suggest you report your loss to the Lost and Found at the Manila Airport upon arrival there. If they do not have it, you must report to the police immediately.”

That was the start of 5 days of pain and frustration to get an emergency Canadian passport in Philippines.

On the plane, I tried to flash back to what had happened after I checked in at the Philippine Airline counter on my flight from Manila to the Island of Bocolad 3 days earlier. I had been sitting in front of the gate waiting to board the plane and suddenly became very thirsty.

As I put down my passport and boarding pass to free my right hand to remove the cap of my water bottle in my other hand, my nose started to bleed profusely. I covered my nose and dashed to the Comfort Room as fast as I could.

The massive nosebleed would not stop! Everyone was giving advice on how to stop the bleeding. Eventually, the Mission Doctor, Dr. Sandra, sat me down and instructed me to squeeze the middle section of my nose as hard as I could to put pressure on the main vein of the nose.

I was wheeled onto the plane, paper towels covering most of my face.

Airport staff were preparing a wheelchair to transport me into the plane. “Esther, hold tight to your nose bridge,” Dr. Sandra ordered. “The change of altitude and air pressure as the plane takes off can cause your nose to bleed again!” I was wheeled onto the plane, paper towels covering most of my face.

No one asked for my boarding pass or passport.

My main concern for the next few days concentrated on being very good to my poor nose.

I found that no one had turned in my passport to the lost and found at the Manila Airport. I wanted to make a report to the police at the airport at once but Kang, the Mission Team Leader, advised me to return to the hotel first. In the meantime, he would arrange for a Filipino staff person from the Mission Agent’s Office to accompany me to the police station because conditions there are not the

same as in Canada. I did what I was told, although I questioned what someone without a Filipino connection would have done.

“Esther, you don’t even look excited. Do you realize you need your passport to go home tomorrow?” Kang observed. “Well,” I responded, “it’s just a matter of money. Getting excited will not help anything. It’s all in God’s hands.”

Marlyn from the Mission Agent’s Office finally showed up at my hotel at 2:30 PM and we took a cab to the nearest police station. The traffic was incredible. My flight was departing at 2:40 PM the next day for Vancouver via Tokyo. I had less than 24 hours to get my emergency passport.

Marlyn said I should not have waited for her to take me to the police station but that I should have gone straight to the one near the airport right after my arrival. That would have been the faster route.

I was happy to see the policewoman at the front counter of the police station smiling at me as we entered. We were told I first had to see a lawyer to have an Affidavit of Loss sworn before I could report my loss to the police.

Marlyn took me to a nearby municipal office packed with people. To speed things up, I drafted my own affidavit but was advised that City Hall had a standard form in the computer. I needed only pay a nominal fee of 50 pesos and have the



affidavit sworn before one of their in-house commissioners for another 150 pesos. It cost me a total of about \$5 Canadian to get all that looked after.

We rushed back to the police station with the affidavit. The only officer in charge was taking the report of a local person who had lost his vehicle. It seemed ages before he was finished. Then the police officer looked straight into my eyes and mumbled something I didn't understand. Marlyn said to the police officer, "She is not Filipino; she is Canadian."

I related my painful story in English to the officer who accepted and processed the report quickly so I could take it to the Canadian Embassy in downtown Manila.

Our cab wriggled swiftly through the narrow streets and we were soon approaching RCBC Plaza and the Embassy on Ayala Avenue that intersects the famous Makati Street. As our taxi entered the vehicle entrance, at least 6 soldiers—all armed with machine guns—came up to the car, searched the trunk, and interrogated us as to the purpose of our visit. We were then allowed into the driveway.

After paying the driver, we got out of the cab and ran into the building. It was about 4:35 PM. Marlyn told me earlier that the Embassy was open until 5. Before we could proceed to the Embassy's information booth, we had to be searched by another two sets of security guards, 1 male and 1 female each time.

We arrived at the Embassy info counter at 4:40 only to discover it had closed at 3 PM and would reopen the next morning at 7:30. Disappointed, we joined our Mission friends at the hotel. Marlyn stayed with me in my hotel room that night to facilitate our early arrival at the Canadian Embassy.

Optimistic I would obtain my emergency passport that morning, before I left the hotel I made arrangements for my big piece of luggage to be delivered to the airport from the hotel and carried my hand luggage to the Embassy.

We went through the same security procedures we had

experienced the previous day but, because of my hand luggage, had to wait for the police dog to sniff it before we could enter the building. At the Embassy info booth, again we were asked the purpose of our visit, which was duly recorded and we signed our names to the document.

Marlyn had to leave her ID, which she carried around her neck, with the officer at the booth. I was not about to part with my BC Driver's Licence—the only picture ID I had left. We each were given a tag—#8—to hang down our necks. We were to go up to the 8th floor where the Canadian Embassy is located.

At 7:10 AM, we were met by two more security guards (1 male and 1 female) who both carried handguns. We were asked why we were there and were required to deposit our camera and cellular phone with them. They gave us a body search before admitting us into the Embassy Office.

I was not about to part with my BC Driver's Licence—the only picture ID I had left.

The male security guard was friendlier. He told us the office actually was not open until 9 but we could relax in the air-conditioned waiting room furnished with black leather chesterfields and chairs, even filtered water in a cooler with paper cups. He gave me tag #1 to show the information clerk.

Knowing I would need photos for my emergency passport, I inquired where I could find a photo store and what time it would be open for business. He said the store should be open already and that I could go get my photo taken now. We had to take with us all our belongings and hurried out.

The photo store was not yet open and there was no indication anywhere of its business hours. We went around the next building and found a security guard who was not much help. I was getting more and more frustrated. I wished someone somewhere could give us some accurate information.

We decided to hurry back to the Embassy to wait. I was the first customer. After listening to my problem, the clerk gave me a passport application form to complete, similar to what we have in Vancouver, and told me to see the Canadian Consul at 9 AM. I was given another tag—#C1.

I completed the form but had no guarantor and no Citizenship Card to prove my Canadian citizenship—not even a copy of my lost passport. But I did have my passport number. I was hoping they could easily look up my name in their computer records and use my passport number to call up my personal information.

At 9 AM sharp, I was summoned to see a clerk behind closed doors. I handed over all the documents I had—my passport application, my Affidavit of Loss, the police report, and my return air ticket to Vancouver, together with my BC Driver's Licence, my BC Care Card, even my BC Notary Membership Card in the hope they would believe my story more because I am a Notary Public.

To my great surprise, the clerk informed me it would take at least 24 hours to process an emergency passport and, in my case, it might take as long as 5 days. I begged her to have it done that morning because my flight was leaving at 2:40 that afternoon. She had no sympathy for my situation. "You just have to postpone your flight. I will let the Consul review your papers. Please wait outside. You will be called."

I told Marlyn what had happened. We could not understand why it would take 5 days for them to issue me an emergency passport.

At that point, I needed to use the restroom and asked the guard where it was. He directed me to the 6th floor. I found my way to the entrance of the Immigration Department on the 6th floor, which also was manned with security guards, 1 male and 1 female. An x-ray machine at the entrance checked my handbag and I was body-searched again before allowed to go to the Comfort Room.

It was now 10 AM. I felt like an ant in a pot of boiling oil, waiting to

Esther's Scrapbook



be called. The couple who had gone in before me was coming out and I quickly grabbed the opportunity to enter the clerk's small room. She said the Consul had not finished reviewing my case.

Ridiculous! How could he be taking so long? At 10:30, the door opened. The clerk broke the news that they could not issue me an emergency passport because I would be having a stopover in Tokyo. What I needed was an air ticket to return straight to Canada or with a stopover in another country for connection only. I must return to Canada all in one day.

All the documents I had given to her were returned to me. I needed to make another appointment to return ASAP with an itinerary for my direct flight home on January 30. They said they needed time to investigate me because I could not produce the required documentation to apply for a passport.

"If I can get a copy of my passport, may I fax it to you?" I asked. The clerk gave me the fax number. I had no choice but to do what I was told.

We were interrogated again by a guard armed with a handgun...

After telling Marlyn the bad news, I phoned Japan Airlines to postpone my flight. Because my ticket was purchased with reward points and any changes had to be made at least 24 hours before flight time, it became null and void.

I asked Marlyn to call my hotel with the hope my Mission friends were still there, to try to find and fax the copy of my passport, which I had submitted to them before I left Canada. Marlyn learned that Era, Mission Assistant Team Leader, had the copy but she was still on the Island of Bocolad. It would take some time to track her down.

Nieves, one of the Filipino Mission friends who was staying longer in the Philippines, said I could stay with her folks in Bulacan for the extra days I was detained in the Philippines to wait for the issuance of my passport.

She was returning to Vancouver on January 29 and urged that I try to fly back with her on the same flight.

With all our belongings, Marlyn and I hurried to Philippine Airlines, which I thought would be the only Asian airline to have a seat for my return to Vancouver on such short notice because of Chinese New Year.

We were questioned and searched again before we could enter the building. I found it extremely hard to swallow this silly security system in the Philippines. It appeared to me the whole country lives in distrust. "I only come to buy an air ticket. Why do I have to go through so much hassle?"

In the past 2 weeks, wherever we went, travelling from one island to another within the country, we were searched in the same manner, even when we went into stores. It was worse than what I experienced in the Middle East in 2005 where people believe most terrorists congregate.

We were interrogated again by a guard armed with a handgun as to the reason for our visit, then we were admitted into the airline office packed with customers on the 2nd floor. Two numbered tags were given to me—one for seeing the agent to buy an air ticket and one for payment. I hurried to the counter when my first number was called and explained briefly to the agent my urgent need to secure a ticket to Vancouver for January 30.

She said there was no flight to Vancouver that day but there was one flight on the 29th, departing at 4:50 PM. She said she could issue me a Certificate of Itinerary (for 120 pesos—\$3 Canadian) to show to the Canadian Embassy and was kind enough to tell me I could still make a change before 12 noon the next day in the event the Embassy would not issue me a passport for the 29th. But if I did not leave on the 29th, I would encounter another problem—overstaying my 21-day free visa period in the Philippines. I decided to take a chance and made the reservation.

After I made payment at another counter, we hopped a cab to the Embassy but found it was closed from 11:30 AM to 1 PM. We were so pressed

for time, we did not feel hungry and decided to get my passport photo taken.

The girl at the photo store told me she could do it when she finished with her current customer. After a 15-minute wait, she said she could not do the photo with the photo specifications set out in the passport application form.

We did find a store nearby where I could have my photo done. We got back to the Embassy shortly after 1 PM. Two parties were ahead of me. We sat tight, patiently waiting for my turn.

About 2, I went in to see the same clerk behind the closed doors. I produced all the documents she required, one by one. She told me the passport would be available on the 29th by 11 AM, if all their investigations about me were favourable. But I had to produce a valid air ticket because the Certificate from the airline did not indicate the flight number, day, and time, which must be indicated on the emergency passport.

A guarantor was also required for my application. Unlike the rules in BC, in the Philippines the Mission pastor would not be accepted by the Canadian Embassy as my guarantor. The only alternative was to swear a Statutory Declaration in Lieu of Guarantor.

Another Affidavit of Loss in their prescribed form was also required. Fees for these two affidavits were \$50, which I could pay in Canadian currency in addition to the processing fee of the passport, to be paid in pesos, equivalent to \$34.

Application for an emergency passport in the Philippines requires the same documentation as a regular passport application except, in my case, for the production of proof of Canadian Citizenship. I supplied names and phone numbers of four of my Canadian friends still in Manila.

As references, I gave them another eight names and contact numbers of Canadian friends in Vancouver, including Wayne Braid, our Society's Secretary and Executive Director. The Consul, a Frenchman, appeared and interviewed me. I signed the two affidavits in his presence.

He apologized that they had made a mistake when they had said the passport could not be issued until the 30th. It should have been next Tuesday, the 29th. For some strange reason, the calendar they used started the week on Monday instead of Sunday. At least he was brave enough to admit the error.

He said I must return with my air ticket by 4 PM that day or by 9 the next morning, at the latest, to allow them ample time to process my passport for the 29th.

We rushed back to the airline office by 3:30 PM. The guard said I had no chance of getting a ticket that afternoon because of the large crowd of customers ahead of me. Closing time was 4:30. I decided to take a chance. Marlyn noticed the agent who issued me the Certificate in the morning was without a customer at that moment and urged me to go up to her right away, telling her the mistake she had made. Marlyn was sure the agent would feel bad and might speed things up for me. The embarrassed agent issued me my ticket and facilitated my immediate payment at the other counter without further delay.

We made it back to the Embassy just before 4. Almost immediately, I got to see the Consular Assistant at the information counter. She was a lot friendlier to me and advised she had received a faxed copy of my lost passport and wondered where it came from. I told her it was from my Mission friend who had a copy of it.

I was told my emergency passport should be ready the next morning at 11. When I said I was told it would not be ready until next Tuesday, she changed her story and said, "Yes, the 29th at 11 AM."

Nieves was to wait for me to take me to her folks' home in Bulacan that afternoon so Marlyn gave her a call. Nieves was already on her way home but arranged to meet me at an out-of-town bus station the next morning at 9.

We did not have to rush anymore and finally had our lunch about 5 PM at the French restaurant on the street level of the building.



I decided to stay at the Mission Agent's Office, New Hope Ministries, for the night because they have a room for overnight guests. On our way, Marlyn received a call from Kang, the Mission Team Leader, that someone from the Embassy called to say I forgot to give them the police report that must be submitted by 9 the next morning. I was truly not impressed by the efficiency of the Canadian Embassy staff because I had given them all that they asked for and now I was blamed for forgetting to give them the police report.

Marian and Rose of New Hope Ministries' Office were happy to see me again and tried to make me feel comfortable. The little room where I spent the night was furnished with a small bed, a night table, and a table light that shone throughout the night to drive away mosquitoes; the window without a screen had to be kept open for better ventilation. An electric fan created more cool air.

Marlyn volunteered to sleep on a piece of foam in the narrow space by my bed to keep me company. I was very touched by the love shown to me by these godly women.

We rose about 5 the next morning and rushed back to the Embassy at 8. We went through the same security measures. I wondered if the lady guard on the street level dreamt about me the night before because I was searched by her umpteen times the day before. Marlyn waited for me at the same French restaurant and had breakfast while I went up to the Embassy alone. I was asked to leave my picture ID at the Info Counter.

But my only picture ID—my driver's licence—together with my Care Card had been retained by the Embassy. The guard remembered me from the previous day and accepted my business card instead. A #8 tag again was given to me to go to the 8th Floor Embassy Office. The same male security guard at the entrance to the Embassy Office recognized me but was reluctant to take delivery of my police report and insisted I see the

Information clerk. After being searched again, I was allowed in.

As I approached the counter, the same Consul Assistant appeared and told me she was able to conduct a successful character and identity check on me. My emergency passport would be available for pickup next Tuesday, the 29th.

Should they require anything more from me, she would contact me. I was really upset to hear these final words and retorted bluntly, "I already gave you all I could give. I have nothing more to give to you." After thanking the male guard at the door, I left.

"I already gave you all I could give. I have nothing more to give to you."

I spent 4 days at Bulacan, enjoying a taste of the Filipino way of life, seeing all the mango trees and receiving the royal treatment from Nieves' folks and neighbours. I finally secured my emergency Canadian passport on Tuesday, the 29th day of January 2008. With Nieves, I took the 4:50 PM flight on Philippine Airlines to fly home to Canada.

On arrival at the Vancouver airport, I sailed through with my precious emergency passport and, as instructed by the Consular Assistant in Philippines, turned in the original at the Immigration Counter. I retained the photocopy she made for me to use when I apply for a regular passport at a later date.

After this horrible experience in the Philippines, here is my advice to all Canadian travellers to foreign countries.

1. Take with you at least one copy each of your Canadian Citizenship Card and passport, which should be kept in a secure spot in your suitcase, separate from your travel documents. It would be better to take notarized true copies of them.
2. Make a note of the numbers of those two documents and put the numbers in a safe place, such as your wallet.

3. Get a waterproof pouch big enough for your passport and use it as your money bag. Hang it down your neck and carry it with you.
4. Don't carry your passport with your boarding pass in your hand after you have checked in at the airline counter. Put it back in your pouch, if you have one, or keep it in your bag where it's easy to reach when you need to produce it again.
5. Take with you a list of telephone numbers and addresses of a few of your friends who are Canadian citizens.

In the event you are unfortunate enough to lose your passport, report to the local police station as soon as possible. Follow their procedures and take the police report, your Affidavit of Loss, and your return air ticket to Canada to the Canadian Embassy or Consulate.

It will speed up matters tremendously if you have a notarized copy or even just a photocopy of each of your Citizenship Card and passport.

The other required documents are the same as when you apply for a regular Canadian passport.

1. Completed application form with two photos taken within 1 year prior to the date of application
2. Affidavit of Loss on the Canadian Passport Office prescribed form
3. Statutory Declaration in Lieu of Guarantor if you have no guarantor to sign for you

You will be required to pay the prescribed processing fee and any extra fee for the loss affidavit and Statutory Declaration in Lieu of Guarantor. If you prefer, you can see a lawyer to swear those documents. Doing it at the Embassy/Consulate is more convenient and probably at a lower cost.

- An emergency passport can be used only once. The original must be surrendered to the Immigration Counter at the port of entry in Canada.
- A copy of that emergency passport must be kept by you

for future use when you submit your application for a regular passport. Mind you, the agent at the passport office might ask you to swear another Affidavit of Loss on their prescribed form. That was required of me when I applied for my regular passport after my return to Canada, despite my argument that it was already done in the Philippines before my emergency passport was issued to me by the Embassy. This process might depend on the experience of the agent who serves you at the Vancouver Passport Office.



An update on the recent changes for Canadian passport applications

1. If you are applying for a passport for the first time, you will need a guarantor who falls into the category of professionals prescribed in the application form. A Statutory Declaration in Lieu of Guarantor is mandatory if you do not know anyone qualified to be your guarantor.
2. If you have lost or damaged your passport, in addition to getting a loss/damage affidavit, you will need a qualified guarantor, as prescribed, to sign for your application.
3. If you apply for a new passport 6 years after the issuance date of your last passport, a qualified guarantor, as prescribed, is required to sign for your application.
4. Anyone who has known you for 2 years or more and who is a Canadian citizen is now qualified to be your guarantor for passport application.
5. A qualified guarantor, as prescribed, is not required when you renew your passport, if you can surrender your current passport or expired passport issued to you within the last 6 years.

All guarantors must also hold a valid Canadian passport. The guarantor's passport number is now a requirement in the Declaration by Guarantor.

I hope this article will help you prepare yourselves before travelling abroad.

Bon voyage! ▲