

Timing is All

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I have not posted anything in a while, mainly because I was busy moving from one house to another, schlepping a puppy as I did so, and then heading back to Maine overnight in order to go to a 50th anniversary party for my wonderful friends...I've known them 40 years...Sylvia and Tony.

And now there has been a series of ...well, I could say unfortunate...events that bring to mind the way a story unfolds, when the writer pays attention to the pacing and the way things fit together. (*No, this has to happen BEFORE this, and then THIS can happen next*) I will try to tell this as if I were writing it as a story and so I must start out with some background, which is that:

1. Martin and I are planning a trip to Europe quite soon. We are scheduled to leave September 17th, with friends, headed to Vienna, Prague, and Budapest. I've made arrangements for the dog, and let people know I'd be away, and all of that, so things have been proceeding in that realm... but at the same time:

2. I was scheduled for fairly big oral surgery, designed to increase bone in the upper right side of my jaw. This was to take place two days ago...Wednesday...leaving me time to see the doctor for a follow-up NEXT Wednesday, the 13th of September, before leaving for Europe four days later.

3. Tuesday evening I started organizing some stuff for the trip to Europe. I took out our passports, noted that they were due to expire February 2, 2007, so (I told myself) after this trip, we should get them renewed. Then I went to the US passport website so see how I could go about doing that, say in November. On that website I discovered that some countries require travelers to have passports that are valid for 6 months after they enter the country. Hmm, I thought. Ours are only valid for four-plus months. I clicked through the list of countries and discovered that Hungary has the 6-month requirement. Uh-oh. I panicked. I told Martin to make phone calls, see what we could do, and off I went, the next morning for:

4. Surgery on my jaw. This is not for sissies. folks. It takes a long time and involves a lot of whining-noise machinery as your jawbone is re-shaped. But I came home, started taking antibiotics and gulping painkillers, while Martin researched what we could do about the passports. He discovered that in order to get "expedited passports" we must make an appointment to go to the US Passport Office in Boston. We called, and the next available appointment was the next morning (yesterday) at 9 AM. We should bring our airline tickets, proving that we were scheduled to leave within 14 days, and two 2"x2" recent photographs. So:

5. I looked through what was on my computer and carefully printed 2"x2" photos of each of us, taken in July. (See photo #1) Then:

6. Yesterday morning we (me still gulping Advil and antibiotics) went to the passport office in the Federal Building in Boston. (It cost \$14.00 to park, but this is an extraneous detail which, if I were really writing this for publication, I would omit). The woman there rejected our photos. Yes, they were 2"x2" as prescribed. But it turns out that the face has to be 1.3" from top of head to chin... Our faces were too big. *But ma'am, look at my real-life face. It is all swollen and purple.* Did she care? No. She directed us to a passport photo place nearby. And so:

7. For \$254, if you have airline tickets proving that you're leaving within 14 days, and if you have 2"x2" photos with your face the correct size, you can get expedited passports, and so we do not have to cancel our trip to Europe. BUT:

8. For the next ten years, every time I travel, I will have to look at my post-surgical face. I am a balloon-head with a lot of brown and purple bruises. (See photo #2) Photo #2 is not my actual passport photo (the new passport is still being processed) but it IS my actual face at the current time. If I were a guy at Passport Control, I would think "terrorist" when I examine that passport.

Oh, well. Nothing to be done. And now I am going to go take a little more Advil and watch the US Open. You have probably noticed that Maria Sharapova has a very pretty face.



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