

Land of the Free, Home of the Brave

by Malu Laico

My sisters and brother were always reminding me not to keep spending so much because I didn't have a permanent job yet. So, whenever I would go to McDonald's or Burger King, I would get a lot of salt, pepper, paper napkins, and catsup. Then, there were also the hotel guest towels, so when we would go to either Reno or Lake Tahoe, I'd always stuff a set in my luggage. Hotels also had shampoo, hair conditioner, body lotion and soap. Later on, I noticed ball pens were given away in the banks. I would take more than three at a time--that way I had an ample supply. There's also 7-Eleven where you can buy coffee and they have free sugar and cream or half-and-half. In order not to go hungry, Costco and Price Club always have taste tests. Then try eating at Denny's, Carrows, Lyons, and IHOP--they always have free jams. And if you need extra money, just recycle the empty cans of soft drinks or do a garage sale. This is life in America!!!

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"Welcome" to America

by Rey David

My flight from Tokyo to New York on August 17, 1989, took nearly 13 hours. Before landing at the JFK airport, I strained to see the Statue of Liberty, and I was disappointed when I couldn't see it, unlike all the early immigrants who saw that fair lady as they arrived in this land of opportunity. From my window seat, I watched as men on the tarmac unloaded baggage from the cargo hold. Imagine that: Americans performing manual labor in service to me!

As I was claiming my baggage after passing through immigration, an unattractive lady who looked like a hard rock Grace Jones fan (only worse--at first I thought she might be a prostitute), called out to me, saying, "Hey, sweetheart, come here!" As I approached her, she arrogantly flashed her badge in my face, saying, "Customs Police." She took all my things out of my bags and laid them on the table. Then she frisked my blue coat, for which I had paid a small fortune. Unsatisfied, she took out a blade and slashed it in two places, each tear at least four inches wide! I was so angry! But at the same time very scared!

There were two of these customs police, and they were both big. They were the authorities, while I was a stranger in a strange land. I didn't even know if I had any rights at the time. And besides, I didn't want to risk deportation. So I kept my peace, and my anger inside. After they had had their way with my belongings--and to this day I can not understand nor excuse myself --I thanked them and left.

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LEFT: Rey and Jovits at the ancient Mayan ruins of Chichen Itza during a trip to Cancun, Mexico.

BELOW: Rey, Jovits and friend during a George W. Bush rally in Pleasanton.

