

## Humor Me

By Ronald P. Culberson

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### **“I’m not cut out to be a fugitive”**

I was off to Vancouver. I arrived at the airport excited about the opportunity to see Canadian bacon in its natural habitat. I handed my passport to the ticket agent and she said, “Your passport has expired.”

I looked at her as only someone who was blinded by his own self confidence and lack of insight would, and replied, “Oh, no it’s not.”

Ignoring the fact that she had done this for years, and that it was certainly not her first expired passport, and that she knew an imbecile when she saw one, she very politely said, “No, it expired on March 26, 2008, almost a year ago.”

I felt the bottom of my stomach twist and drop about seven inches. That was accompanied by a shot of reflux in the back of my throat.

I knew I had checked my passport in early January. But I also knew that in early January, I was routinely writing 2008 on my checks because my brain had almost, but not completely, made the leap into the new year. Clearly I had misread the date.

The best response I could muster was, “Oh.”

I could feel my heart beating through the large vein on the side of my head. I thought, *HOLY CRAP. HOLY CRAP. WHAT AM I GOING TO DO NOW? WHAT AM I GOING TO DO NOW?*

Luckily, I said none of this out loud as I did the night I smashed my sister’s car into a tree when I was 16. Instead, I looked at the ticket agent and in a slightly mousy voice said, “So, what are my options?”

She said, “Well, sometimes, you can travel with an expired passport.” She turned her focus to the computer screen and her fingers tapped across the keys.

“Uh, yep, you’re good to go.”

Most people would have breathed a sigh of relief. I did not. Some people would have lost control of both their bowels and their bladder. I did not. Somehow it wasn’t right. I got my ticket but had this nagging feeling that I was skirting the law. I felt like an

international fugitive and at any moment, the alarms could go off and I'd be thrown in a Turkish prison.

Nonetheless, I boarded my plane.

I got into Canada easily enough. In fact the Customs' agent laughed and said, "It's pretty easy to get into Canada."

The word "into" stuck in my mind. What did he mean by that?

When I got to my hotel, I went [www.GetTheHellOutOfCanada.com](http://www.GetTheHellOutOfCanada.com) to get more information. I learned that the US Government requires anyone *flying* into the US to have a valid passport – which I assumed meant one that had *not* expired in March of 2008. Now, I was nervous again. I was in another country without proper documentation. I could end up looking for work every day outside the 7-9 (in Canada, they're not open until 11). I didn't even know the words to "O Canada."

An email from my travel agent assured me that I *would* get back home...eventually. I wasn't comfortable with that. So, I contacted a friend who worked for a major travel association. He made a few calls. Eventually, someone, codenamed Badger, put a note in my airline record that allowed me to get a boarding pass. Then, I just had to get through Customs.

At the Vancouver airport, I walked up to the U.S. Customs agent and said, "Well, I'm you're idiot of the day. Huh, huh. My passport expired."

No response.

He looked at my passport and then back at me. He told me that the airline should have never issued me a boarding pass.

I thought I might throw up.

In a vague, I-hope-he-thinks-I-know-the-President way, I said that a friend in D.C. had made some calls on my behalf. He just shook his head and said, "Alright. Normally, we'd take you into the back room for a little talk. But we won't. Just remember to get a new passport."

My entire body relaxed.

I grabbed my paperwork and headed for the baggage scanner. All of the sudden, from behind, I heard the Customs agent yell, "Sir, Sir?"

My heart stopped.

I turned slowly expecting to see a pack of Canadian Mounties. The agent said, "You forgot your boarding pass."

A bit of sweat dropped off my lip. All I could muster was, "Oh."

I arrived at Washington Dulles airport at 6:00 p.m. At 9:00 a.m. the following morning I wrote out a check for a new passport. And I even got the year right.

Until next time, just humor me.

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*Ron Culberson, MSW, CSP, CPAE is a speaker, humorist, and author of four books including Do it Well. Make it Fun. The Key to Success in Life, Death, and Almost Everything in Between. His mission is to change the workplace culture so that organizations are more productive and staff are more content. He shows people how to have more FUN while preserving the integrity of the work they do and the lives they lead. For more information, visit [www.RonCulberson.com](http://www.RonCulberson.com).*