

One Hour in the 405 Highway

WEATHER SHOCK is the feeling of discomfort which my husband Kamal and I experienced when we first landed on Minnesota on the first of January 2015. Living in Jeddah in Saudi Arabia whose climate is very hot and dry and suddenly moving to a place with the absolute opposite weather, very cold and freezing region, made us decide to spend the 2015 winter break outside of the state of Minnesota especially because our wedding anniversary falls in it. The first anniversary is an exquisite day and almost as significant as the wedding day. Hence, careful considerations were taken in planning this winter getaway in order to enjoy a lovely week away from any work or distraction. We thought about gorgeous romantic and warm destinations which also offer many fun activities. Moreover, we kept in mind the winter weather and climate conditions, and our choices were narrowed down to three options; Los Angeles, San Francisco or Miami. After long discussion, Los Angeles was the agreed upon destination as it has joyful and relaxing activities which are appropriate for a three months' pregnant woman like me to have fun and help me forget pregnancy cravings.

We arrived Los Angeles on January the first of 2015 at 6 pm, there were gray clouds covering the dark sky. The weather was rainy and miserable. This weather blurred vision for the captain of the plane who faced some difficulty land the plane on the earth. Because of the condition of the weather, we decided to spend the rest of the night inside and called it a night. We booked the finest place through the great bnb.com website, which offers infinite numbers of options, with the highest ratings and lowest price. It was a spacious comfortable room. Also, it has a fabulous jacuzzi tub which was very helpful for relaxation purposes particularly during the first two days. The owner of the house was very nice and friendly. He gave us our space and full privacy.

The third day, we woke up early in the morning filled with energy and enthusiasm. It was sunny and bright with some clouds scattered across the sky that look fluffy and white. We decided to have an outside activity, what a better activity to do than taking a walk and getting fresh air at the Getty Center and Villa. It contains the keen collection of art and antiquities of Mr. Jean Paul Getty, the founder of Getty Oil company and one of the richest American businessmen who ever lived.

Choosing the Getty Center is not a normal choice, it is to achieve one of the childhood dream. When I was a little, my aunt returned from the United States and she brought me a gift, it was a jigsaw puzzle. I love jigsaw puzzles, and with a child eagerness, I finished fitting all the pieces together in only four hours. Upon completion, I was stunned by the fascinating picture of the Getty Villa and since then, I've always dreamed of being to the center and villa. In addition, one day prior departure, I viewed one of my high school friends snapchat, she took a snap of the Getty center with is amazing architecture, marvelous gardens, and views that overlook the city of Los Angeles. All of these events made me eagerly await the moment of entering the center and the villa.

With strong excitement, we had our hurried breakfast: a plain and unheated croissant with a glass of milk. Then we hit the road. According Google maps, the estimated time to arrival of the shortest route was about half an hour. However, it was the longest 30 minutes in my entire life! The car was moving at a moderate pace with open windows; I enjoyed every single breath. I was so taken by the weather and fluffy clouds which looks like cotton candy, so I tried to capture these moment by my iPhone camera when we stopped at the red light. I was not able to capture the full scenery from where I sit. So, I passed the phone to my husband to take a picture from his side with

different angle. The traffic light turned green while Kamal was taking the picture, so he pressed the gas pedal and started to drive the car heading to the 405 highway in order not to slow the traffic.

Straight away, we noticed a police car approaching our car from the left side and stopped in a parallel position next to our car. Both officers had exchanged strange looks after they glanced at my husband. When we noticed that the police officers saw my husband was holding the phone while he was driving, he interpreted their looks as that they will give us a violation ticket. Thus, Kamal reduced his speed lower than the surrounding flow of traffic expecting the police at any time to give him the sign and stop us aside. However, they have not taken any action, so we continued our way to the 405 highway.

Oddly enough, the very same police car was following us in a very suspicious way which caught our attention but we have not panicked about it. A minute by minute, the number of police cars was increasing which elevated our puzzlement and wonder. We had a short discussion trying to understand the situation and the reason of why they are following us. “Why have not they stopped us so far?” I asked, “I have no clue honey” Kamal replied with a taut voice. “Do you feel that something wrong is going on?” I asked Kamal and he answered me with a one word “Yes”.

They say our utmost fear does not come from what we know but from what we do not know. Because I don't know how the American police deal with people, I started praying to Allah and asked for his protection and salvation, then an awful silence prevailed in the car. When we entered the 405 highway, I took a peak at the left mirror and there were more than five LAPD cars chasing us quietly. We heard a helicopter sound which was gradually amplifying. Suddenly, a very loud police siren broke our confusion and “PULL OVER” the police officer said through the speakers, my husband immediately slowed down and did as instructed. The police cars stopped about five yards behind our car. The officer added “turn off the engine”, my husband did so. looked at the

mirror and saw and throw the key outside from the window”. After Kamal stopped the engine, all officers stepped out of their cars wearing bullet-proof vests and carrying their shotguns and pistols, took their positions and were ready to fire! Kamal saw such a terrifying scene through the mirror and his face turned pale. Trying to protect our lives from any possible hazard, he stuck his hands out of the window, signaling and declaring our surrender.

At that moment, my heart was beating so rapidly and I was frightened to death so that I could not feel my hands and feet. Then, I had flashes of all the news reports of the incidents where innocent people were killed by the police. At that point, I started imagining horrible scenarios that could occur. The police officer told my husband to throw the keys out of the window as far as possible and he did so. Next, they ordered him to open his door from the outside and step out of the car with his hands up in the air. Once he got off the car, the officer shouted at him “turn around”, Kamal responded quickly to the order. Then, they told him to take three wide steps to the left, after he has done so, they made him take three more steps to the left side toward the middle of lane of the highway. “Down on your knees” the officer said, Kamal got down as they told him. Then, they made him lay on the ground facing the street with both of his arms and legs not touching the ground.

Seeing my husband laying down on the ground like that and the danger his life is in, I started to ask myself what would happen to my husband? How could I take care of my baby alone? How could possibly I take her father’s place and be both a father and mother in the same time? My mind was completely off, it was very occupied with the worst dreadful thoughts and on top of that, my English language was immature. Therefore, I did not hear or understand a word from what the officer was saying, I did not respond to any of the instructions, which made the police officer little

angry. It was like I was day dreaming of a real nightmare, and my husband's voice calling me woke me up.

He started helping me by interpreting what the officer said. "Does she understand English? If Yes, raise your right hand, if no raise the left one" the officer said asking Kamal, and he raised his right hand. The police officer ordered me to leave all my belongings inside the car, get out of it and walk slowly towards them with my hands up in the air. One of the police officers, who is old probably in his fifties I would say from his white hair, asked me if any of us is carrying a weapon, I replied negatively. He made me stand up and face the side of the road until a female police officer arrive to search me. She asked me respectfully to empty my pockets in order to make the search process easier and more efficient.

While I was being searched on the side of the road, four officers approached Kamal cuffed and searched him. They took Kamal's wallet and searched his name in the system. Also, they searched the car and all our belongings. The old officer interrogated us asking questions like "Where do you live? Why are you here? Where are you heading?". When they found no weapon or illegal stuff, they have realized that we are not who they think we are. They uncuffed my husband, released me and apologized about what happened. They explained to us that they mistakenly have mixed us up with someone else. That one happened to be a very dangerous armed serial killer. And because Kamal matched the descriptions of the suspect on their system, they commit this terrible mistake.

My husband's unlimited curiosity was not satisfied with their brief and simple justifications. He asked why the officer who first saw us and what are the signs that made them think he is the suspect. The officer spoke with him and explained that they have been after a Latino suspect who have committed a crime on that very same day prior to our incident. Also, the officer added that Kamal's facial structure and the brownish color of his skin made him more suspicious. On the

other side, I got into a hysterical state of mind, I could not really believe that what just happened to us was real, I felt like it was a part of an awful nightmare.

Because of the panic I had, we immediately changed our destination and went to the nearest Fairview hospital to check the health of the fetus as my heart was rattling and breathing was abnormal. When we arrived and after a long time of waiting at the emergency, the nurse has met us, I told her the whole story of the last two hours as the reason of the symptoms I am having. Moreover, I wanted to know if this could ever affect the baby. The first thing she did is that she tried to calm me down and change my mode by talking to me about some of the happiest moments in my life such as talking about my wedding day. She asked me how did I feel when I first knew that I got pregnant and how our life will look like after the baby is born.

After that, she checked my temperature and blood pressure to make sure that I am totally fine. Next, she took me to another room where she checked the baby's heart beat using the ultrasound device and asked me if I have had any bleeding at all. All the results were favorable and most importantly, at least to me, is that the baby was in a good and healthy shape. However, she advised me to take good care of myself, eat well, relax, and sleep well. Also, she recommended me, if I ever to see within the next three days any sign of blood I must call 911 immediately. Moreover, if I ever encounter such a panic attack, I must go to the hospital right away. She waved her palm in farewell and said "Good luck on your trip, I hope not to see you again". The day was near the end and the sun was setting while we were getting in the car. We drove back to the house to take a rest. We ended up not enjoying the Getty Center as expected and our day was ruined.

After this incident, I started developing some sort of police phobia. I feel scared whenever I see any police car or officer. If I saw that, my facial expressions changes instantly and I try to stay as far as I can from them. In my subconscious mind, the right picture of the police had

changed, I feel scared instead of safe. As we know, the difficult moments need a lot of patience because it will be a one of our memories. “What does not kill you makes you stronger” the process which makes you stronger takes time, I am still in the process of overcome of police phobia.