



Ian Giles, Close Encounters Chair's choice

In 1985, I had a mid-life crisis. I gave up my job, sold my house and flew to the USA with my French girlfriend Michelle and spent the next year travelling 33,000 miles around the USA and Canada in a motorhome.

At the end of the trip, we wanted to stay on in California but found ourselves in a Catch 22 situation. In order to get a job, you needed a Green Card (work permit). But in order to get a Green Card, you needed a job!

Scanning the classified ad pages in the Los Angeles Times, we noticed there were many vacancies for live-in couples to work as housekeepers for rich, LA families. This could work as not only would it provide us with a roof over our heads while we looked for more suitable employment, but there was a possibility our employers could sponsor us in our applications for Green Cards. Amongst the many advertisements, one stood out – “Live-in couple required to work for famous film star”. It turned out to be for Richard Dreyfuss, star of Close Encounters of the Third Kind and Jaws, etc!

The Dreyfuss’ house was located at the end of a cul-de-sac, off Laurel Canyon, a famous road in LA’s Hollywood Hills. We drove up to large, solid, white gates bearing the warnings “Armed guard in residence” and “Beware of the dog”. I announced our arrival by means of the video system on the gate and quickly jumped back in the motorhome as the electronic gate swung open. I needn’t have worried about the dog. We were greeted by an old Labrador, which sauntered slowly out, wagging its tail!

We drove into a large Spanish style courtyard, with a central fountain, beyond which was parked a brand new Chevrolet Camaro, which was for the exclusive use of the successful applicants. The hacienda-style house did not appear to be particularly large from the outside, being only single storey. However, it was built into the side of the canyon and extended downwards for several floors.

As we were shown into a dining room by the secretary, an English lady from Manchester, we passed the whitest, most perfectly groomed cat I had ever seen. "How on earth do you keep it looking like that?" I enquired. "That's the indoor cat. It's never allowed outside. We have a door to door shampooing service twice a week!"

We sat down with the secretary and Mrs Dreyfuss, who was pregnant with their second child, and were asked about various aspects of our lives. I mentioned that I played tennis. "Richard and I have just taken up tennis – we play with the Spielbergs". "Well Ian can help you there" suggested Michelle. I began to visualise myself playing tennis with all these Hollywood celebrities and who knows, maybe getting a few parts in films?

Our duties would mainly be food preparation and driving, as most chores were covered by other servants - a Welsh nanny, a housemaid and a security guard. The pool and garden were looked after by a "whole army of Mexicans". All food would be included, use of the swimming pool during our time off, a brand new car to drive and \$35,000 per year between us.

"How are you with children?" asked Mrs Dreyfuss. "I'm fine - I have a 10 year old daughter myself" I answered. "Well that's great. Maybe you could be the father that Richard's never been!" she joked. At least, I assume she was joking! "You guys would be great. I think I'm going to take you down to the studio to meet Richard straight away".

During this chat, the secretary had been fairly quiet and very deferential to her employer, while we had been very casual, as if talking to a friend. She seemed to be getting edgy, probably because we were getting on so well with her employer and at this point asked the question I was dreading. "Have you guys got Green Cards?". I realised that if I lied and said "yes", they would ask to see them, but if I said "no" then the interview would probably be over. I said "No, but we have applied for them", hoping that the Dreyfusses might sponsor us in our applications.

We were then shown around the house by the secretary while Mrs Dreyfuss called her husband to discuss the situation. At the end of the tour, Mrs Dreyfuss reluctantly explained that as they were already sponsoring the Welsh nanny in her Green Card application, they could not help anyone else and therefore could not employ us. We were shattered.

We realised that without Green Cards, there was no point in continuing our search for jobs in the USA and reluctantly returned to the UK.

So near, yet so far!