

My Daughter's Passport

by Chazda Albright -

<http://chazda.com/my-daughters-passport/>

So Thursday morning, the day before Good Friday and just 3 days before we fly to Italy, I checked inside my daughter's passport and gasped so hard I nearly choked, because it was no longer valid. It expired five months ago.

Being in Europe on Holy Thursday means that if you have any errands or shopping to be done, you better get it done right away, because on Friday everything will be closed.

As luck would have it, I needed the government on a sort-of holiday. I thought, "If we're lucky, there will be somebody there until 11AM today."

Steffan and I walked to [Town Hall](#) as quickly as possible. I asked the Help Clerk where we should go to renew my daughter's German passport, and he told us – just around the corner.

Without my daughter's passport the trip won't happen.

There was a bit of a wait, but not too long. Still, I was nervous. I only hoped there was maybe some sort of sticker or stamp they could plunk into my daughter's passport so that it could be renewed, revalidated or something. Anything.

"We're flying on Monday, we're flying on Monday." The words kept running through my head, even though I really didn't know any longer if they were true. The long, 3-day weekend stretched before me like a black hole, when the government shuts down and nothing happens. Nothing could happen on those days. We fly Monday, early.

A lady waved us over to her desk. I had the distinct impression that she was one of the few government employees who actually, seriously works.

I sat down, and said (in German), "I've done something really stupid."

She smiled right away, and I took that as a good sign. Then she asked how she could help, and that was even better. If you've ever needed something quickly from any government department, you know exactly what I mean.

I told her the problem, and showed her the passport that my daughter has been using since she was in diapers. Her biometric picture makes her look like a miniature villain, recently escaped from prison - or a really boring party. She looks *tough* in her passport, not *two*.

"No, you definitely can't use this anymore," she said.

“Not even in an emergency?” I asked.

“You need a new one, but we can do that today,” she said.

“Today?” I repeated. I couldn’t believe it. TODAY? That’s like saying I can teleport. OK, maybe not *that* cool, but close.

Then she listed all the things we would need to do that day. It was quite a list, and would involve calling my ex-husband for some last-minute favors. It was a typically thorough listing of all the sorts of details you need to provide at a border. Fortunately (and again, much to my surprise), this woman was going to be working a full workday. She said she would be there until 5:00PM - but I didn’t really have that much time.

At 4:00PM I would be at the local library, reading a book and doing crafts with kids for the [Happy Palmtree](#) event. This had to get done quickly. With much luck and cooperation from everyone involved, it happened - *but only because we had an "out"* - we didn't need to get another Adult Passport for Roxy. We could get a Child Passport.

I had never heard of a Child Passport before, so this was new to me.

A Child Passport is a vinyl-bound passport (like what I have as an American adult, actually) instead of a hardback bound passport (EU adult passports feel like mini-hardback-books, pictured left), and it costs about a fourth of the price.

A regular “Adult Passport” in the EU costs about €70. A Child Passport is €18.

The woman explained to me that the EU offers parents the option of getting their children Child Passports because they’re cheaper and are expected to be renewed more frequently than a passport for grown-ups, who don’t really change that much.

There is only one country that does not accept a child passport. Mine. The US requires that children abroad get an adult passport, which really – I’m sorry, but it really does not make any sense. The picture is biometric. The binding and cover is exactly what I have in my own American Passport. The information – the fancy sticker, all the bells and whistles – it’s exactly what Roxy had in her previous, Adult Passport.

Maybe I’m missing something, but I can’t see any major differences – none that should require the more expensive option. The differences between Roxy’s old passport and her brand new one can be (at least visually) whittled down to these three things:

- the binding
- the cost, and
- the speed with which we can get it.

When we last flew to the US, we got some strange looks at the Security Check, because there stood my 8

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year-old girl showing a picture of herself as a toddler. The adult passports are valid for far too long when you consider how much a child changes in a few years.

So I think this is strange, and I think it should be changed. I just don't know yet whom to write about that. If you happen to know or have any ideas, let me know.

In the meantime, I'll be looking for a little Thank You Gift for the wonderful woman at the Town Hall, [something from Bologna](#) to spruce up her desk. I owe her – Big Time! (Yes, I know she was "just doing her job." I want her to know it isn't a thankless one.)

Happy Easter to you and yours, wherever you may be.
