

How I got to Boca Raton

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As I sit here pondering the meaning of *“stepping out on faith”*, and the perceived risk of doing so, I am continuously awe-struck by how God has, and is moving in my life. Yet again, God has graciously chosen to shower me with His boundless mercy and grace, even though I acknowledge the fact that I am not worthy of them. Only because I decided to *“walk by faith and not by sight”* am I currently living in Delray Beach, FL and working in Boca Raton, FL. I’m here on a 2+ month contract assignment as a Sharepoint Developer, and at the end of this project will be traveling to Princeton, NJ to become involved on a project there which should take about 5 months to complete. This situation will place me in New Jersey for the remainder of the winter, which is not a comforting prospect but an essential one.

The very idea that I am in this situation is not what is relevant about this testimony. What is actually relevant is how it all unfolded, about how I decided to step out on faith when offered the position, and about how God performed yet another miracle in my life to make it all happen. I stand astonished by the way God chooses to work in my life and making me endlessly humbled by His mercy towards me. Dear reader, I would ask you to consider with open mind and spirit this report describing my latest experience of God’s hand moving in my life simply because I decided that ***God can!***

I was initially asked to interview for this position with HCL International by way of a Skype interview, which means that the interview would have been conducted with the aid of a web camera and microphone attached to a computer, typically a laptop. It would not be a face to face meeting. This method of interviewing is widely acceptable and is quickly becoming the de facto phone interview technique. Long gone are the days when the phone interview was a very convenient way of interviewing for a job wearing only your pajamas or night gown. Those were the days when more emphasis was placed on what a person knew rather than how a person looked.

A big benefit for Blacks and people of color was being able to speak English well enough to be mistaken for a White person, and ultimately being offered the job because of it. You might think that Skype is yet another device that can be used for the purposes of discrimination, and you may be right, but the expression, “guns don’t kill people, people do” would present a formidable argument. However, truth be told, over the phone I have been practically offered the job where the only thing left for me to do was go to the office as a formality and speak with such and such. On several occasions, when I would arrive and have my true appearance known, I would be spoken to as if I had never even had a phone interview to begin with. Now, that’s hard to argue against, even if you are so-called color blind!

Unfortunately, my laptop, which had did have the capability to support such an interview, was in the pawn shop and there was no other laptop I could use. I told the recruiter about this situation and he said that he would try to get the Skype interview canceled so I could simply interview by phone. I eventually interviewed for the position but was not convinced that the person I spoke with wanted to consider me for the position because of the type of questions he asked me. It seemed as though he wanted to know

if I was familiar with a particular application he was using but I wasn't. I told this to the recruiter and continued on with my job search, not thinking I would ever hear from the recruiter again about this job.

The recruiter called me a couple of weeks later and told me I had been selected to perform another phone interview and that chances were good I would be offered the position. At this point, I felt it was time I told the recruiter what was really going on with me. I told him that even if I got the job I would have no way of getting to Princeton, NJ on my own. I went on to tell him that I would at least need to get an advance on my salary to go there and to live there until I could get paid some money. He told me he could advance me the cost of the plane ticket only, and that I would have to come up with the money to live there until they advanced me the money in about 15 days after I started. I said to myself that at least it was a start, and by the grace of God maybe I could come up with the rest of the money. Either way, I was not going to let this opportunity slip through my hands. Unfortunately, my hopes faded when I received another call from the recruiter telling me the position had been filled. I was so let down.

At the time of this phase of my job search, I was actually living in my car. The money I had saved from my last assignment was all gone and I was living by borrowing money from friends and other means. My options were running out fast, really fast, and I really needed a job like yesterday. Since I didn't have a dark suit I could wear to an in-person interview, I had to borrow one from a dear friend of mine. I ended up wearing that suit, and shirt, to 3 separate interviews without having them dry cleaned at all. I simply could not afford to do that. Most of the money I got went into keeping my 1999 Cadillac Eldorado moving, and could not be used for such luxuries as dry cleaning. I would simply dress for the interview and change clothes immediately once the interview was completed I would hang my clothes on hangers in my car.

Over a period of 3 weeks, God was making it possible for me to continue my job search but it was getting harder to find money to support it. I had no shortage of interest from recruiters and hiring managers alike but I couldn't put their interest in my gas tank, nor take it to the food store. It seemed they were all telling me that they were close to making a decision, without actually making the decision. I began to become impatient with them, and more urgent with my job search in terms of the types of jobs I would focus on. I decided not to "waste" time on pursuing direct employment because those types of jobs could involve multiple in-person interviews, and simply took too long to complete the hiring process, even after they have made a decision on a candidate. My strategy would be focus on out of town, short contract positions where the urgency to start the project would eliminate any lengthy hiring process. Also, where the recruiter or hiring company would pay any expenses involved with relocation. This would be my plan, or so I thought.

While waiting for the jobs I had interviewed for to contact me with the news of their decision to hire me, I received a call from the HCL recruiter telling me that I had been shortlisted and the company was interested in hiring me. I thought it very strange that this would be the case, especially when I didn't think my interview with the guy went particularly well for me. Anyway, who was I to look a gifted horse in the mouth? At this point, it shouldn't matter if the horse had all its teeth or not if the horse if a winner. I guess you could say I was excited but in a very strange kind of way because I really was more interested in the "permanent" jobs I had interviewed with, and which were actually all located in the

Atlanta area. This means I would be at home and even worshipping at my own church instead of a church out of town.

It also made me feel guarded, as well as ungrateful, for not being as excited as I should have been by getting this renewed interest. I had to pray for God to forgive my ungratefulness in the matter and started to give it the respect and appreciation it deserved. However, I was still prayerful that God would certainly give me one of those jobs as well, and while I was at it, why not all of them. I would constantly contact the recruiters to find out the status of the decisions but was, in every single case, told I was still being considered for each one. This is not what I wanted to hear. What I wanted to hear was that I had been passed over for the positions so that I could detach myself from the very thought of them. I wondered why they would not give me the satisfaction of doing this, but seemed to want to keep me on the hook, so to speak.

The HCL recruiter sent me the paperwork to complete in order to begin work in New Jersey but at that time I still did not have a start date, which is very important if one expects to start working. I didn't want to be involved in a situation where, although I had a contract to work for a company, I was still not working. The recruiter later called me back and told me that instead of going to work in Princeton, NJ as planned, I would be going to Boca Raton, FL and would be getting a call from the person heading up the project sometime that day to cement the deal. Well, after about 4 days, I finally got the call from the guy on a Thursday and asked to start the following Monday. Now I was really excited, and made lots of calls to my friends telling them I would be starting work on my new job. However, as fate would have it, I got a call from another person from HCL who told me that I could not start until my background check had cleared with them, which left me confused because the background check should have already been returned to them. I contacted the recruiter and he told me that the check had been overlooked but he would get it done ASAP. I was so disappointed by their oversight that I almost told them so, but God helped me to hold my peace.

On Tuesday of the next week, I decided to contact the recruiter to find out the status of the job. He finally told me that it was a go, and that I needed to start on Thursday of that same week. I was now officially ecstatic about the blessing God had given me because I had finally run out of options. I had even been forced to abandon living out of my car because the alternator had failed and the car would not run without it. I ended up having the car towed to a safe location at a friend's house and lived with them waiting, and hoping, for my start date, which had finally arrived. In spite of this new development, I still could not be absolutely sure about starting until I had been sent the flight ticket, which was a more definite sign that the company meant business. That evening I was in receipt of the flight ticket and even more ecstatic about the fact that I was on my way to Boca Raton.

Although I was in receipt of the ticket, I still did not have the money to pay the shuttle taxi to take me from Fort Lauderdale, FL to Boca Raton, which was \$22.00 and payable by me because the recruiter told me they could not get a reservation on such short notice and pay by credit card. Since they could not wire the money directly into my account, I would have to pay it myself. Well, I was not going to tell them I didn't have the money so I agreed. Since I would be flying on a discount air carrier, I decided to find out if I would have to pay for any carry-on baggage. According to the CSR, I would have to pay \$25 for 1

carry-on baggage. I was heartbroken. That would mean I could not afford to pay for any food during my flight, or after I got to Boca. Ok, now I indeed did have the flight ticket but no money to pay for the shuttle service or for food. It wasn't as bad as it could be, especially since I was expecting to get some monies from my friend whom I had told I would need travel money to get to Boca, but nothing in detail. That Wednesday as I prepared to leave, my friend came through with \$50 bucks, enough for me to take the shuttle to Boca but not enough for me to get food and pay for the overhead baggage. I was determined not to let this stop me from going to Boca.

I decided to travel with only 1 carry-on bag and 1 back pack because according to the airline I could carry only 1 bag onto the aircraft without paying for it but was unsure about which bag. Since I had no "business casual" clothes to carry with me to Boca, I would have to wear my jeans and a polo shirt. My plan was to abandon the bigger bag I had by placing as much of my clothes as I could into the smaller bag. Realizing that the work environment would be a "business casual" one, I had to take the risk of simply showing up ready to work regardless of what I had on, and hoping they would understand. I would wear my jeans and a polo shirt on Thursday morning and sacrifice all the other clothing. To my delight, I was able to carry both bags onto the aircraft for free. God was indeed beginning to work things out for me. When I got to Ft Lauderdale I slept in the airport until the following morning, took the shuttle to Boca, and reported to work as scheduled. Other than a look of concern on the face of my boss about the way I was dressed, I was able to work with him throughout the day, although he did remind me that the dressed code was business casual but on Friday I could dress down and wear jeans.

That Friday, when it was clear that I would need to share my concerns with my boss, I told him what my situation was, and that I would appreciate any assistance I could get from him in bringing my situation to the attention of HCL. But then I decided that it would be better if I contacted the recruiter and tried to get the company the recruiter worked for to do something. I did contact the recruiter and told him what was actually going on with me and that I would need him to do something immediately. He later contacted me back and told me that a wire transfer would be deposit \$1000 into my account to take care of my needs until I got the 1 weeks advance of my salary. Ok, now things were getting better but not until the money was available on my debit card, and I found out that wouldn't be the case until 2-3 business days later. That Saturday, I received a money gram from a friend of mine for \$100 to take care of my transportation and food needs but I would still have to sleep in a bus stop shelter at night because rooms around Boca are around \$80 and up. Needless to say, sleeping under the shelters is frowned on by the police and you can claim to have missed the last bus only so many times. I had to find other means of spending the night, and fast. Now, at least, I could get around and feed myself until my money was process.

As I decided to go to the Goodwill Thrift store to get a pair of casual pants and a shirt with a collar to wear until my money cleared, I later walked over to the bus stop to catch the bus and go to the beach. By chance, I met a gentleman there asked him if he knew of discount hotels around Boca. He said he had stayed at one that was about \$55 night before he decided to try other options. He said he had just gotten out of jail and had to sell his car to see him through. He then told me a friend of his had connected him with a transition house where he was paying \$600 per month in rent. He said the house was a recovery Christian facility, forbidding alcohol and drug use. It was mandatory to attend church and

to participate in the recovery and bible study meetings. I was thinking to myself that this situation would be perfect for what I needed it for. I didn't necessarily want to be alone in Boca and this house was complete with a church as well to guarantee that I would not be alone. However, he did mention that I would most likely have to wait until a space became available because he wasn't sure one was available at the time.

I started to feel that our "chance" encounter was anything but coincidence, and was actually a moving of the hand of God in performing a miracle in my life. I jumped at the opportunity to give the guy my phone number and have the people at the transition house to give me a call. We both had a lot in common regarding our struggles with life, and very quickly established the kind of mutual exchange that would suggest we had known each other for years. After we boarded the bus, I later got off at my stop and headed down to the beach. While there, I began to plan out how I would sleep there later that night. I then went back down to the bus stop to wait until night fall. As I pondered the decision I had made to sleep at the beach, and understanding the element of danger involved by doing so, I offered a prayer to God in hopes He would step in and remedy my situation immediately. I was very much aware of the risk I was taking by sleeping at the beach. In addition to the prospect of being noticed by drunken kids or adults alike who might want to taunt me or do me harm, there was also the looming prospect of being hammered by the rains pouring from tropical storm Isaac, just off the shore of Boca Raton. The only shelter from the rains were the life-guard stations that dotted the beach, but since I would not be able to go inside of them and close the door, I would have to make a bed behind the compartment that could be entered. This would leave me totally exposed to any swirling winds carrying the rain. In short, I would be totally drenched by the rains. Shortly, I received a call on my phone from a number I was not familiar with and it was a guy calling me about the transition house.

I almost held my breath as I brought things into perspective, realizing that God was answering my prayer. I spoke at length with the guy, telling him why I was down here and what my situation was. My heart was pounding, and I waited with baited breath as he continued with his discourse regarding what the transition house was all about. He then said that a guy would be leaving on Monday and then his spot would be available, but then, almost as if he had been prodded by God himself, he asked me what I would do until then. I said I was planning to sleep at the beach until I could come there. He then started to entertain the possibility of bringing me in immediately and asked me if I would mind sleeping on the sofa until a bed became available. I excitedly, and quickly, told him I would not mind at all, and wanted to know what I had to do to get there. He gave me instructions for getting to the point where he would come to pick me up, and at hearing that, I could not wait to hang up the phone. After we finished speaking I began to praise the Lord. I started off quiet at first but then convinced myself that this miracle was deserving of praise much greater than what I was giving it so I shouted out loud my praises.

On the way to the point where the guy would pick me up, I couldn't help but think how the house environment would actually be, and look, whether it would have cable TV or an internet connection. I've actually seen some transition houses that were not what they should have been, and in really bad shape appearance-wise. I decided that I would give God the benefit of the doubt regarding the house and be satisfied with whatever turned out. The guy came and picked me up and took me into an upscale environment to a house that looked very nice. To my delight, the place is well-kept, spacious, clean, and

air-conditioned. It has a 60 inch cable TV, computer, printer/scanner, and wireless internet connection. It has 2 refrigerators loaded with donated food, and another one dedicated for personal use. It has a washer/dryer, and most importantly - ***I never even had to sleep on the sofa!***

When I first got here to the transition house, I was still trying to wrap what has happened to me around my mind. I am still trying to fully comprehend what has happened for me, as well as why it happened. This was certainly not the first time I had stepped out on faith and trusted God to provide what I needed but it is always a process that initially goes against the natural man in me, and forces me to allow my spiritual self to take charge of the situation with ***walking by faith, and not by sight!*** God is so good, and so worthy to be praised! At least for the moment, my situation is under control, and my success with this project, at least I feel, is certain. As I continue to live my life, I sometimes think that I would not be the least bit surprised by what God can do but every time God does it, I am at a loss for words or understanding! All I can say is, ***“Our God is an awesome God. He reigns from heaven above. With wisdom, power, and love. Our God is an awesome God.”***