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New Media Photojournalism, Blog 1

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UCI 111 – An Unexpected Encounter

A day after I took this photo in Downtown Richmond, someone knocked on my door. I opened it. Three men were standing.

“We are the FBI. May we come in?”

So they entered my room. A white police officer closed the door.

Then a moment of silence.

Two men in casual clothes wore wireless earbuds. One was black, the other white. They scanned my room, my bed and my wall.

Maps and schedule of the race scattered on my table. I used them to know which locations and time to take photos.

The laptop was on. I was editing a blogpost titled “Vantage point” with a description “this will be a great spot when the real race starts.”

The white FBI agent asked:

“What were you doing yesterday in Downtown?”

“Oh, I was taking photos of the bike race, but from different angles. I can show you the photos,” I replied with all the calmness left.

So I started showing them the photos, explaining to them that this is for a short course from my school.

The black FBI agent asked me more questions. The other two took notes.

“What’s the course name? Is this the code for the course?”

“What’s your teacher’s name?”

“What’s your ID?”

“Where are your parents? Where do they live? What’s your father’s last name?”

And when it seemed that there wasn’t anything else they needed to know about me, the white FBI agent explained,

“We’re here because your actions were suspicious. You were taking photos of everything and we couldn’t understand what you’re trying to do.”

“So can I still take photos?”

“Just make sure people know what you’re doing.”

Then, they shook my hand, “thank you for being candid,” and left the room.

What a morning.



The afternoon that day, I saw the FBI agents again. They were sitting in a coffee shop, observing spectators. So I waved, and signalled to ask if I could take a photo of them. Surprisingly, they smiled and agreed.

However, I think it's best for me not to disclose their faces if I don't want to see them again.

October 13, 2015 In newmedia photos

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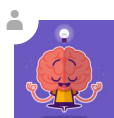
Tom Woodward

OCTOBER 13, 2015

That is insane. I take pictures all over Richmond at least five days a week and have not gotten a single FBI interview.

I know the race resulted in increased security but this seems way over the top.

REPLY



hungrybrain

OCTOBER 17, 2015

Hi Tom, yes, I think it was insane. But also, I think it was partly because I was wearing a black jacket, wearing a black pair of jeans, taking photos secretly using my earphones at weird angles, pretending to talk on the phone to get a desired shot, and ... probably, just probably, looking like a "Chinese spy."