

The Bag

In early 2019 Alexandre Barde came across a leather bag in the corner of a small warehouse in Nyon, Switzerland. The bag with other chattels such as cutlery, crockery, coffee machines and tables and chairs had been transferred to the warehouse when a local cafe closed its doors some 18 months before. When Barbar, as his friends call him, opened the bag he found an Apple Mac laptop inside as well as a couple of SD card back up devices and a pair of noise cancelling headphones. In the bottom of the bag was also a cap, some marketing stickers and most importantly of all - a passport. When he looked inside the passport he reasoned immediately that the owner of the bag was a seasoned traveler. It had an American and a Chinese work visa glued inside as well as entry and exit stamps from over 20 countries. Barde was mystified as to why the bag was here at all. He was particularly keen to reunite the bag with its owner and wondered why this had not been done before now. Although he was not familiar with the passport owner's name he did recognise the brand name on the cap (which had a number of signed autographs) and the multiple stickers he found in the bottom of the bag. The stickers and cap were from a Swiss company well known in recreational quadcopter circles. Barbar rang a friend who flew drones and asked if he knew the person on the passport.

When Sacha Vandermeulen got the call he was flabbergasted. He told Barbar to immediately contact the proprietor of the Swiss drone company - ImmersionRC. Tony Cake, who happened to also live in Nyon, received Barbar's call early the next day. Tony realised straight away whose bag it was. He quickly drove over to pick the bag up. Barbar inquired about the back story and was told the bag had been missing for almost 2 years. Barbar mistakenly assumed that the person on the passport had somehow left the bag in the cafe and had never come back to pick it up. It mystified him why someone would forget such an important asset, particularly the passport. Tony told him that Chad Nowak, the bag's owner, had certainly never been in the cafe in question and that there had been an extensive search for the bag after it was reported stolen to police. How and why this bag had ended up in the cafe and then in the warehouse was a complete mystery.

18 months earlier (July 2017)

Chad Nowak, a high profile internationally renowned mini quadcopter celebrity pilot, and co-producer of Rotor Riot, had reluctantly agreed to join the ImmersionRC sponsored racing team to compete in the Drone Racing League premier race around the famous Champs Elysee in Paris. Chad had announced publicly some months prior, that despite being very successful in the sport, he was retiring from it altogether. Racing was not something that continued to excite him but Tony persuaded him to race just one more time. The team was made up of fellow Rotor Riot drone celebrity Tommy Tibajia, multiple world drone racing champion Shaun Taylor, and well known German female pilot Julie Muller. Together they made up a very competitive team.

In the weeks before rushing off to Switzerland to race, Chad was forced to face down a number of issues with the organisation he was "working" for - Rotor Riot - the highly popular recreational mini quadcopter social media based business he helped start in Jan 2016. The extent of these disagreements had unsettled him and made him question both his future in the organisation itself and the hobby he loved. These disagreements stemmed from 3 things.

1. As a co-producer of Rotor Riot's video channel, Chad did not approve of the group creating videos that were deliberately scripted to shock the audience, particularly when he knew how much Rotor Riot (and their videos) were viewed as role models within the rapidly growing hobby. When the video, Flying a Drone Drunk, was released, it created a public storm and quickly polarised opinions. Chad had disagreed vehemently about the video's content on moral grounds but he lost the argument. People were quick to tell Chad that he was a prude. The owner of Rotor Riot, Chad Kapper, confided in him that "creating drama was good for any future growth of the organisation." The word RIOT was there for a reason.

2. The second issue that was causing great anguish for Chad was Rotor Riot's FaceBook page. Membership had soared in the 6 months since it was released. Its popularity attracted a wide audience ranging from experienced pilots to novices who were new to the hobby. What was starting to annoy everyone was that a number of well known social media serial offenders had begun to use the forum to push their extreme views on topics that had nothing to do with mini drones - guns, sexism, politics and religion. Chad was the main force behind the setting up of the FB page. He wanted this particular public forum to be one where experienced pilots would assist people coming into the hobby. He was keen to demonstrate how Rotor Riot could harness a sense of community support. The number of administrators and moderators grew to cope with the rising numbers of posts - many of a technical nature. So did the number of awful and inappropriate comments that spewed out of a number of keyboard warriors. It is important to note here that apart from Chad, the Rotor Riot celebrity pilots did not involve themselves in any discussion. Chad felt a responsibility for making the forum work effectively and as a result he blocked a number of members for their repugnant comments especially when they were totally off topic. Many of his fellow administrators/auditors also blocked some people. Unfortunately the owner of Rotor Riot disagreed with Chad's censoring policy. He was happy to allow people to express whatever views they wished, irrespective of whether it was related to quadcopters or not. Each time a person was blocked and they complained privately to the owner of Rotor Riot, he allowed that person back in with a personal public apology. He admonished Chad for blocking people on an open forum claiming Chad was not interested in free speech. Many administrators approached Chad to complain about the owner's attitude. Many administrators left in disgust at being given responsibility only to have it taken away from them for no valid reason. Chad decided to hit back and used the same colourful language on the cretins as they had used publicly. This did not go down well and disagreements between the lead group and the owner of RR escalated. Chad left the group in disgust (a number of times but was always asked to come back). What happened

after the race in Paris needs to be inserted here.

3. The third issue stemmed from the fact that Chad received only miniscule financial recompense from any of the companies he spent time on commercial projects with over the previous 12 months - particularly Rotor Riot. The owner, Chad Kapper, negotiated a couple of technical consulting projects with associate businesses including a sponsorship payment deal with Pepsi (payment was not made till 18mths after the contract). Nowak seldom saw any payment direct from Rotor Riot despite Rotor Riot employing 6 full time staff during that first 18 months. The reason given was that payment could only be made when Nowak got a working visa (* **see note below**) yet the consulting jobs he completed (eg: Teal Drones etc) were billed out as legitimate consulting work. Nowak also completed numerous consulting jobs for ImmersionRC, ImpulseRC, Flyduino, HQ Props and other small startup businesses but no contracts were ever signed and he naively seldom pushed for even a small financial recompense. Suffice to say each company did give him verbal promises to recompense him for his time and effort in the future when "profitability" improved. Chad did not pursue the issue of payment with any firm until his father stepped in to become his business advisor (some 3 weeks after he eventually arrived home from Paris).

*** Note - see previous paragraph: USA Working Visa.**

It took almost 18mths for Chad to get his USA working visa. The delay was exasperated by President Trump's crackdown on foreign workers. The process was extremely time-consuming and costly via American administration and very frustrating for Chad personally because there were lengthy delays in having to book time with the USA Embassy and fly to Canberra Australia. When the work visa finally came through the visa was linked to Flite Test (Lauren International) and not Rotor Riot (because Chad Kapper had purchased RR from Lauren during that time) - something that could have proved difficult in the future. At the same time, Chad had also been granted a long term Chinese visitor entry visa - not at all easy to get. Long term Chinese visas were only given out to visitors if they have entered China many times over the

years. Both the USA and the Chinese visas were glued inside his passport. Chad found out to his chagrin that if you lose your passport you are forced to go through all the processes all over again. Visitor visas for USA only last 3 months and Chinese visas only last 1 month so landing long term working visas (3 years for USA and 12 months for China) was a god send.

The DRL Paris Race

Chad left USA in a hurry with no quad with him to race. Tony greeted him warmly, telling him not to worry about a racing quad. He desperately needed Chad's skills to tune and perfect ImmersionRC's new product - the mini 4" Mojo quad - to be released asap. Chad took up a valuable day to concentrate his energies on this project before he jumped into the car to drive to Paris overnight. On arrival Chad had to build a race quad in the 4 hours of daylight he had and also to get in some tuning practice before the race. He was skilled enough to do that in the short time he had and with the basic components at his disposal.



Unfortunately the race turned out to be a complete disaster. All 4 members of the team crashed out early due to radio problems. Many other teams had the same issues. Lots of pilots never finished their races. Racing 8 quads down the Champs Elysees with its metal fronted shops and covered colonnades was a nightmare. Chad predicted disaster would most likely happen early and it left a sour taste in his mouth that so many pilots were complaining about untested systems. He put the blame squarely on TBS and its rush to cash in on the racing scene - something that left a long and lasting rift between him and Trappy. The team left very disappointed and Chad confirmed that this race was definitely

his last race. He and Tony drove back to Nyon for some more last minute Mojo final testing, where a verbal contract was made to seal in commission on sales, and a half day of rare recreation (sleep). Even though the Mojo today is seen as an innovative product Chad never made a penny on any sales because many were manufactured but few were sold. It almost bought on the downfall of ImmersionRC but Chad was never recompensed for his efforts.



A Perfect Storm

When Chad checked his prebooked online air ticket he realised the departure time was expressed in non local time and that he would be hard pressed to catch his flight. The rush in Tony's car to catch the train to the airport proved to be disastrous.

They arrived just as the train was coming into the station. Tony jumped out of the car to buy a ticket while Chad took out his luggage - his computer bag on one side of the car, backpack out the other side and his large luggage out the back. There were lots of people milling about catching the train. A rapid transfer of the luggage into the carriage, the handing over of his train ticket, and a rushed goodbye. The doors closed and Chad sat down. When he eventually reached for his computer he realised his computer bag was missing. He remembered distinctly taking it

out of the car but had no recollection of it being transferred into the carriage. After many months on the road he had learned to be meticulous in his processes but the rush caused untold harm. Chad's had also left his local SIM card in the computer bag leaving him with no way of communicating with Tony. It took quite some time for him to find a fellow passenger with a mobile phone to make an urgent call to Tony. Tony had not seen his bag when he drove away from the station. On return to the station the search by a bevy of friends for Chad's bag went well into the night and then the next day. Police reports were filled out, Lost Property posters were placed around Nyon and replacement photos/documents were sent for.

It took a week before Chad was able to get issued an emergency temporary passport. The shock of losing his computer, irreplaceable footage, backup files, passport with 2 international work visas and expensive travel gear was huge but it was nothing like the shock of what happened next.

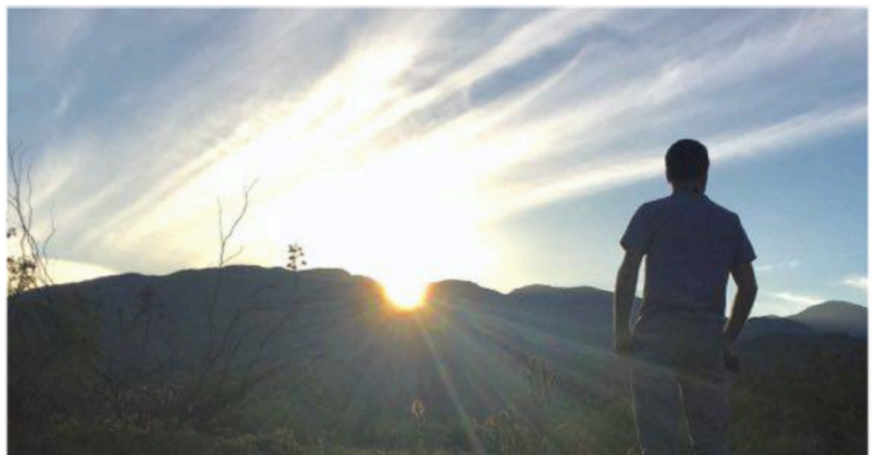
With no financial reserves whatsoever, limited coverage allowed by his travel insurance (his computer receipt was bizarrely in the hands of Steele Davis who refused to go find it) and too proud to ever ask for help, this sad episode was the lowest ebb in Chad's life. Thankfully, his girlfriend at that time, Kathleen Hickey, to her credit, created a GoFundMe account and along with dad Siggy (who opened a PayPal appeal account) together they sent out a public appeal to the various FPV forums asking for generosity in this time of need. Thankfully, within a very brief period of time, the money poured in. 1/3rd of the donations were in small amounts averaging \$5. The rest came from organisations that Chad had helped over the years - Rotor Riot, ImmersionRC, ImpulseRC, Flyduino, Fat Shark, HQ Prop to name a few. But when Chad went on FB to thank his donors the cynicism and unwarranted vitriol that came out of some people was unbelievable - comments which showed that many of these commentators had no idea about Chad's dire situation. Many believed Chad was well off financially earning an generous salary while "living the dream"; some thought Chad would get all his gear replaced under insurance; some were incredulous that

Chad did not deserve such generous support from people who could ill afford to give even a penny - in fact some cynical claimed he should transfer the majority of his "ill gotten" funds to more worthier causes (like themselves!). When Chad did thank his supporters publicly for their amazing generosity on a FB post he burst into tears. Bitter sweet. The majority of the funds deposited were from business owners who felt embarrassed they had not recompensed him earlier.

Few people truly understand how totally inconvenient and majorly emotional this whole episode was. Chad never ever got his USA work visa or his China work visa back. The mammoth amount of hours spent just to replace the small things on his insurance was ridiculous. He did replace his lost computer and backup devices and travel gear with GoFundMe/PayPal funding but his photos and footage were gone forever. Very few people understand how sad this can make anyone. Those sorts of memories are irreplaceable. Now they were simply memories in his mind.

A Complete Rethink

Once Chad got back to Australia he decided to reappraise where he wanted to go with his life. The only tie he had to USA was his American girlfriend. As it turned out, after make enormous efforts to be there for her and getting very little positive feedback in return (he flew to LA a number of times but came back unhappy), the short story is that he decided to step away from the limelight and life in USA living out of a suitcase. Specifically he realised that his time was valuable and he demanded to be compensated - not by free board and travel expenses paid for - but by a monthly and regular amount so he could cover his family expenses (such as his two boys education expenses) and his car and mortgage back home. Besides, Rotor Riot employed 6-9 full time staff - so why not him?



Fast Forward Feb 2019

One morning in early 2019 Chad received an astonishing call from Tony. The stolen bag and its contents were intact!! Joy to the world!! Chad looked forward so expectantly to getting his beloved footage and photos back asap. He extended a thank you to everyone who was involved in finding the bag.

But the sad part is that it took over 8 months of waiting, and, only after a major push by a number of key people in the hobby, for the bag to be sent and finally arrive in Australia. But by the time the bag did arrive (November 2019) Chad had become utterly despondant and totally pissed off with everything to do with the FPV world, especially the very people who generate wealth from the hobby. Chad would have walked over water for many of the entrepreneurs and they all told him that his loyalty, work ethic and high morals were something that the hobby desperately needed - especially Tony Cake!! 8 months to send a bag was totally unacceptable.

Huge thanks needs to extended to Sacha Vandemeulen, Seth Eakin and Mark Cocquio for their unrelenting pressure and offers to go to Switzerland personally or to send a trusted friend to pick the bag up.

So what about bag - the footage, the family photos and the other gear? Chad is extremely reluctant to tell anyone that the bag is now in his possession. He refuses to be ostracised by the public again. He is convinced there will be a bevy of cretins who will demand he give back his "ill gotten gains". He believes it is not worth sharing the news with anyone for fear that the nasties will go to town. And can anyone blame him? One day in the future he might tell-all, but currently there are other more important priorities in life to concern himself with - like overcoming his serious health issues and trying to play catch up on 3 years of bringing home very little income.



Postscript

In August 2017, while on a house swap in Nyon (as it happens), Heather and Siggie Nowak (Chad's parents) accepted Tony Cake's offer to house sit Tony's mansion that overlooked Lake Geneva with Mt Blanc and the Alps as a backdrop. Tony needed someone to look after the family's two dogs and maintain the pool etc. The mansion was a magnificent place to spend two relaxing weeks while Tony and his family holidayed in England. The families became close friends as a result.

The "bag affair" has soured that relationship.

ImmersionRC is today only a token of its former glory - a one man business.