

Immigration: Denying entry

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Love may be the international language, but it doesn't cut the mustard with Customs and Border Protection agents at Washington Dulles International Airport. That's where, according to The New York Times, Domenico Salerno, a 35-year-old Italian and recent law school graduate, was denied entry into the U.S.

His answers, given in broken English, failed to assure agents that he was on the up-and-up and so he was sent in shackles to a Virginia jail, where he remained for at least 10 days. If Canadian agents could quickly find a Tagalog speaker to deal with a lost tot at an airport there recently, why couldn't U.S. agents find an Italian one? In treating Salerno like a criminal, our government managed to inadvertently help Salerno's American sweetheart with her mission during this visit: To show him "another side" of America. The Italian, we're told, was locked up as an asylum seeker, in a barracks holding 75 others, including some who actually were asylum seekers and had been waiting there for a year. Salerno, who is from a well-off family in Italy, says he never asked for asylum and says that his requests to speak to his embassy were denied. As his girlfriend, Caitlin Cooper, put it, "Who on Earth would ever seek asylum from Italy?"

Salerno, who at one point was so shaken that he asked if Virginia has a *death penalty*, was released after an NY Times reporter made some calls upon hearing about his situation from Cooper. We can't help but agonize over all the innocent people who fall between the cracks simply because they don't have a resourceful advocate out there, one who can marshal the full weight of the NYT to help them. What becomes of them in our "system"?