

# Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## Alien of Extraordinary Ability: Help Neil Aitken Get His Green Card

Chiwan Choi · Wednesday, May 6th, 2015

[UPDATE: 3/9/17]

***I recently received word that my petition to be recognized as an Alien of Extraordinary Ability has been granted!!***



*Q: Does this mean I have a green card?*

*A: No, not yet. This means that I have been given permission to apply for a green card as a self-employed artist/writer. Getting to this status is actually the hard part — the place where the outcome is most uncertain. With this status in hand, I can apply for a green card (permanent residency) with a near certainty of passing through the remaining hoops unhindered.*

*Q: What expenses and fees are left?*

*A: I still have to pay for the final paperwork (\$1225 processing fee for the temporary work permit and the green card that has to be paid upfront), plus an updated medical exam, and new set of photos. There may be some additional legal fees. All together, I'm anticipating roughly \$1900-\$2000.*

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Neil Aitken is extraordinary. As a poet. As a publisher. As a translator. As a community builder. There are times in the pursuit of Art, we lose sight of the individuals who make the art, the individuals who make up the bigger community. But this time, we can't. Neil [needs our help](#) and the poetry community in Los Angeles (and beyond) need him.

His must-read first book, [Lost Country of Sight](#), is a beautiful collection of poems and rightfully won the 2007 Philip Levine Prize. He continues to publish the much loved, much respected [Boxcar Poetry Review](#). And he even gathers other poets together to break bread at his home now and again through his Poetry Potluck.



Oh, and he's about to finish his PhD in Literature & Creative Writing at USC.

But. There's unfortunately a but.

Even though Neil's been in the US for most of his adult life (20 out of the last 23 years), he is still on a student visa. And time is running out for him to find a way to stay in the US and continue his great and tireless work.

It turns out that US immigration policy is very complicated. For the most part, if you're on a student visa, you can't apply for a green card other than through the lottery system. Obtaining work authorization is also tricky and requires that you find a single employer who can sponsor you for a full-time job in your field of study.

For most international students, this is not always feasible — especially in the humanities where it is far more common to pick up a number of adjunct positions from different schools in order to make ends meet.

Ordinarily I'd have to first find a company or university to sponsor me for a visa to teach/work in a full-time position doing something clearly related to my studies.

This would get me a 3-5 year work authorization visa. From there, I'd apply for a green card/permanent residency. And later, I could decide to apply for full citizenship. This whole process can easily take over 10 years. Just getting to the green card can take 5-8 years.

With advice from friends and colleagues, it seems Neil may have found a way to speed the process up. He has to qualify for the EB1A green card.

In other words, he has to be declared an Alien of Extraordinary Ability.

But there's a shortcut. If you happen to qualify for the EB1A category of green card (wonderfully titled "Alien of Extraordinary Ability"), you can bypass the visa stage and directly apply for permanent resident / green card status on the basis of your exceptional contributions and reputation within your field. This is what (with your help) I am doing.

With his accomplishments, Neil's odds are high that he will qualify.

However, like everything else, he needs money. More than he has available. And he's asking for help.

In the years that I have known Neil, I have not met one person who has expressed anything but affection for him. So let's help him stay here with us. There is still so much work he wants to do.

## Help Poet Neil Aitken Get Mutant Green Card

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