

One Day of Surprises and Joy: a Side View of CAC Picnic 2008

By Victor Zhong

Many years after I was moved by the movie “Forrest Gump”, one piece of script is still resonating in me, “Life is like a box of chocolate, you never know what you're gonna get”. It came to my mind all of sudden, when I was driving home from the CAC picnic 2008.

I got to know the event very serendipitously. Just one and a half days before the event, one of my friends mentioned it to me by chance. I was very excited to know about it, because I was eager to know more about insurance field and actuaries.

“What can I do for this event?” I asked myself. The answer is quite obvious: to prepare some Sichuan-style chicken wings. I am proud of my chicken wings since almost all my friends who tasted them like them. It will be perfect for me present them in a BBQ party.

On Friday night, observing the chicken wings fermenting with Victor Zhong’s secret sauces in the fridge, I was dreaming of the picnic scene: in the soft sunshine and breeze, many actuaries are enjoying the picnic, especially my chicken wings; they are chatting, playing chess or cards, taking pictures, singing, and laughing.

I didn’t worry about the weather or check the weather forecast on-line, because I believe that meteorologists usually can’t predict the weather as accurately as actuaries do in insurance field. However, the moment I started driving at 11 o’clock, I realized the weather could be a big problem for the picnic. The thick and dark clouds showed clearly to me that it would rain heavily, but I couldn’t predict when it would start and how long it would last. I could not get an answer from the weather forecast, either. You can imagine that, at 12:00, when the picnic was supposed to start and when I was stuck in both the heavy rain and the terrible traffic jam in front of Holland Tunnel, my feeling was as bad as the weather and traffic.

Since I had zero experience with CAC events, I couldn’t build a model and calculate the probability that the event would be cancelled given such a circumstance. I called my friend and asked him to visit the CAC website and see whether there’s notification of cancelling. The answer was no. Still, there were at least three conditional probabilities: the organizers were unable to get access to internet although they decided to cancel it; the organizers assumed that due to the bad weather, people with common sense would know the picnic was cancelled; we would go ahead with the picnic although we couldn’t light the charcoal in the heavy rain. I had to admit with the limited data on hand, in my mind, the probability of the third situation is as low as zero.

“Shall I go ahead into the Holland Tunnel or turn back home?” I was debating with myself. The heavy rain in the air and the water on the street said “Home”, but my chicken wings said “Tunnel”. I stood with my chicken wings, because they are nicer to me.

When I was driving through the Holland Tunnel smoothly, I was thinking about the current tough job market for entry-level actuarial students. I guessed, the Holland Tunnel for drivers, in essence, is as the job market for applicants: it’s very hard to get in, but once you get in, it will be much easier to go on.

I was about 30 minutes late when I arrived in the picnic area. I was so excited to see that there were scores of people there, and the rain stopped. So I got out of my car quickly and walked toward the crowd. I saw benches covered by plastic. I saw people holding plates and food.

Yeah! They were actuaries for the CAC picnic, because some of them were wearing name tags! “I will get a name tag, too.” I thought. Then the second round of heavy rain came. The rain was so heavy that

under a small camp, it was raining. It's worthwhile to stand in the cold rain under the camp, because soon I got a chance to talk a gentleman named Mr. Peter Cliche.

The rain stopped after I prayed one hundred times. There is a Chinese song, saying that "You can't see a beautiful rainbow before you experience heavy wind and rain." (I know this is not absolutely accurate for people studying optics or probability, but let's forgive the author, who had not visited the Great Niagara Fall and only focus on the beauty of this song.) My experience of the CAC picnic after the rain stopped is as wonderful as seeing a beautiful rainbow:

There my earlier dream of the weather came true at last: there came soft sunshine and breeze.

There I met some old friends and made many new friends. Surprisingly, from a new friend, I got to know that one of my old friends would soon be a father.

There I got to know organizers and volunteers contributing a lot to this picnic. I enjoyed the food and fruits, especially the oranges.

There I talked with several actuaries working in big-name companies, and benefited from their kind advice.

There I enjoyed talking with the family members of the actuaries.

There I took care of the BBQ for a while and some people really like my chicken wings.

There I participated in a game with collaboration from Ms. Julia Zhu and won a golden "Winner's medal", which currently is the favorite toy of my daughter.

There Two Steves from DW Simpson came as representatives to support CAC picnic, and I talked with them about the Beijing Olympics, NBA and table tennis.

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When I drove home, it was already 6 o'clock. I hadn't expected that I would stay so long before I left home. I asked myself, "If I had checked the weather forecast or had known there would be two episodes of such heavy rain, would I still choose to leave my sweet home for the picnic at high risk?" I couldn't answer this question.

On the contrary, there's no question that, I will attend the next CAC event.

Victor Jiayu Zhong was born in Sichuan, China, the hometown of Great Pandas and spicy food. In late 2007, he got to know the career of actuaries. To seek happy life and help others to get happiness at the same time, he decided to switch his career goal to being a FSA/FCAS and work in insurance industry.