

**another pSecret pSociety pshort pstory**



BALL IN THE CREEK by Mike Bozart (Agent 33) | OCT 2016

It was yet another warmer-than-normal day in Charlotte (NC, USA) – Friday, September 30, 2016 – that found me, Agent 33, walking southward on the Little Sugar Creek Greenway – going with the flow – from Elizabeth Avenue. It was almost 11:00 AM and the sun was already blasting, as if still in scummer [sic] mode. I was headed to the nearby Target to pick up some lunch items, when I saw a small, plastic, azure-colored playground ball in the creek near the bank. It was caught in an eddy. *Ah, why not snag it? It would be perfect for indoor soccer/football with my son and wife in the hotel room in Lumberton [NC, USA] tomorrow. Yeah, let's go down there and get it.*

I parted the tall streamside grasses with my black, steel-toed safety shoes, while continuously looking down, staying on the lookout for a possible copperhead (the only venomous snake – presumably – in Mecklenburg County). However, once I had reached the bank, I quickly noticed that the little ball had sprung free from the countercurrent, and was now floating merrily downstream again.

I ran down to the concrete weir to intercept it. However, I was too late; the ball eluded my grasp. It was now heading towards the East 4<sup>th</sup> Street overpass. *What the hell am I doing? I'm a 52-year-old man in dress clothes trying to catch a 79-cent ball in a swollen urban creek. Shouldn't I just let it go? No, this a challenge. We're going to get that evasive little orb. This is future-story critical. Mustn't let it escape.*

I then dashed through the greenway tunnel below the one-way street. When I looked back into the middle culvert, I saw the small blue ball bobbing in the main current. With a four-foot-long (1.22 meters) branch that I found in the washed-up

silt next to the sidewalk, I was able to corral it and then pluck it from the caramel brown, sediment-rich, turgid stream.

The little ball didn't have a leak; it was still at maximum air pressure. As I rotated the slightly translucent cerulean orb in my right hand, I saw some writing on it:

$$V = \frac{4}{3}\pi r^3$$

My brain's now-cracked-and-missing-teeth-in-a-few-places mathematical gears started grinding. *That's a geometric formula. I know it is. I've seen that before. But, a formula for what? Something involving pi would be round, I bet. What is V? Voilà! V is for volume – the volume of a sphere, like this little ball. It must have come from a school upstream. The recent heavy rains probably washed it into the creek.*

I brushed it off in the dew-covered grass. Then I continued my trek to Target. But, I now had a minor dilemma. *I can't bring this ball into Target. What should I do with it? I need to hide it somewhere and then retrieve it on the way back. But, where?*

Nothing on the Wendy's side of Target looked suitable. I marched up the two flights of steps. When I arrived at the Kings Drive front corner of Target, I saw the solution to my quandary. I discreetly placed the little blue ball under a small bush. *I don't think anyone saw me. If so, I'm sure that it looked suspicious. I'll have to write this up in the near future.*

I went into the store and expeditiously got my groceries. Seven minutes later I was approaching the same bush again. *Wonder if it's still there. Why would it not be? Maybe*

*security cameras saw me. Maybe security then disposed of it, thinking it was something nefarious. That's nuts!*

I was now looking down at the diminutive, insignificant, tiny-leaved bush. I didn't see the ball. I bent down and reached under the nondescript shrub. *Hope I don't get bit by a snake, like a copperhead. That would suck. Even with insurance, I don't have the money for a trip to the ER. [Emergency Room]*

My right hand didn't have to feel around for long. I soon felt the small ball and retrieved it. *Perfect. Got it!*

A 40-something, sandy-haired, Caucasian lady in a pink jogging outfit, who was rounding the corner, saw me grab it. *How did he know that there was a ball under that bush? There's no way that he could have seen it. Did someone in a passing car throw it at him? Strange world.*

I smiled at her and moved along, heading north up Kings Drive on the sidewalk. *I bet that woman is wondering how I knew that there was a ball under that shrub. And, I am sure that she does not know that there is the formula for the volume of a sphere written on it. Or, is she a math teacher upstream? Probably not, but who knows? I won't.*

Soon I was at 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, waiting for the traffic light to change. I noticed that a 50-ish, white, baldheaded man in a stopped Audi sedan was staring at the blue ball in my left hand. I felt awkward and looked skyward. *Might he be a math teacher? And, might this be one of his teaching aids that got away? I wonder what he is thinking.*

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