

A PSECRET PSOCIETY PSHORT PSTORY



by Mike Bozart (Agent 33) | APRIL 2015

We, Monique (Agent 32) and I (Agent 33), decided to check out San Francisco's second-most curvy street – the largely unheralded Vermont Street – before the Giants-Padres game on Wednesday, August 24, 2011. I remember thinking at that time: *A Psecret Psociety pshort pstory could come out of this.* And, of course, I had my DAR (Digital Audio Recorder) running on a fresh charge.

It was a quiet, uneventful, still-foggy, noontime, mid-week N Judah train ride from our two-star Outer Sunset motel to the subterranean Civic Center MUNI station. Once there we exited and walked up to Market Street to the sound of drums and the sight of beaming sunlight. *Darn, I preferred the fog and overcast sky.*

At the route 19 bus stop on 8th Street, we saw the source of the percussive reverberations: a bright-red-vested street musician with a dozen miniature drums of various types strapped to his body. *What an odd act. Only in San Francisco.*

The 40-something, brown-bearded, portly Caucasian dude billed himself as Beat the Con-Un-Drum. He actually seemed to have some rhythm. I placed several silver coins in his black top hat. *Maybe bring him to an MLS match.*

Then a mid-to-late-50-ish, white-haired, Caucasian guy of slight build, sporting an SF (Giants) baseball cap, walked up to the bus stop. Monique surveyed him. I spoke first.

“Going to the game tonight?”

“Yep, yep, yep. Malloy never misses a home game. Well, not since the big earthquake.”

“The one in 1906? Hey, I'm just kidding. Just having a laugh. We'll be there, too.”

“So, where are you two rascals going now?” Malloy asked.

“We're going to check out Vermont Street – the serpentine section,” I said. “Ever been there?”

“Many times. We used to roll old bowling balls down that street back in '79. We invented a game. Even had a league. The Potrero Hill Potatoes was our team's name.”

“What?! The Potrero Hill Potatoes?”

“Yep, we would call our heavily gouged bowling balls potatoes, as they would wobble like misshapen spuds. Yep, yep, yep.”

“Ok. So, how did the game work?”

“It was kind of like bowling, but with just one pin at the end of the run. Play would start about a hundred feet south of 20th Street, just before the switchbacking descent. Yep, yep, yep. We would chalk a foul line across the street. The object was to bowl your team's ball down the street, alternating bowlers, in as few bowls as possible to set up for the first easy shot at the lone pin. Whenever the ball touched – or jumped – the curb, it was out of bounds and a chalk mark was scratched where the ball struck or jumped the curb. The next bowl would then be from that spot, and so on until someone knocked down the pin at the bottom of the zig-zigging slope.”

“Sounds cool.”

“As in K-E-W-L? That's the hepcat way to spell it. I invented that spelling long before the hipsters of today.”

“Ok, I'll make a note of that.” I looked down and saw the green light on the DAR inside my shirt pocket. *Excellent. It's on. We got that recorded.*

“Let me tell ya something. [I immediately thought of the Durutti Column song when he said that.] It was a helluva game. We would hoot and holler. The neighbors despised us at first, but we won most of them over; they became all-leaguers.” *All-leaguers?*

“How did your team do?” *I bet Malloy was on the misfit team.*

“We won a few Saturday night extra-spatials.” *What the hell did he say?*

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