

another pSecret pSociety pshort pstory



Grandfathered by Mike Bozart (Agent 33) | MARCH 2017

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by Mike Bozart

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My ever-curious Siquijodnon (Philippines) wife, codename Monique (aka Agent 32 in this ongoing meta-real saga), had brought up the idea of a trip to Grandfather Mountain once again. She had queried me about the three-hundred-million-year-old, 5,946-foot-elevation (1,812 meters above sea level), forest-covered, craggy mountain ridge near Linville (NC, USA) for several years. On this milder Saturday (March 18, 2017) morning, we would finally go check it out together. And, as we pulled out of our east Charlotte driveway, I hoped that the change of scenery would evoke another short story. (It obviously did.)

Traffic was light and pleasantly uneventful on Interstate 85 and US 321, save for a lone throttlehead. We were parked in front of the Mellow Mushroom stone pizzatorium fortress in Blowing Rock at 11:11 AM, just two hours and two minutes later. Yes, the palindromic times were bookending us once again. *Racecar. Kayak. No lemon, no melon. Shaken not stirred, derrits ton nekahs. [sic]*

Our small Thai dye pizza hit the spot once again; it was as good as the one in Greenville, South Carolina (mentioned in *Greenville Jaunt*). I downed a vanilla porter microbrew with it. Monique stayed with ice water. We left just as the popular restaurant began to fill; we had beat the rush.

After a visit to the upstairs coffee shop across the street (Camp Coffee Roasters) for java and a refrigerator magnet, we were rolling south on US 221. The black-on-white highway-route sign tripped a switch in my no-lemon melon. *US highways 221, 321 and 421 all converge in Boone. [NC] That's three _21s. Wonder if that occurs anywhere else in America.*

After passing Bass Lake, we took a right for the Blue Ridge Parkway. Monique looked at the grassy hill on the left.

“Parkaar, [my ailing alias] is that where we went sledding a couple of winters ago?”

“Yes, that is the knoll, Monique,” I replied as I rubbed my sleep-encrusted right eyelashes. “You do indeed have a mouse’s memory.” *A what?!*

“Hey, I thought the saying was an elephant’s memory, Agent 33?” *Recording? Check. / I just know that he’s already recording.*

“Well, a mouse’s memory is even better. Think of all the predators that a rodent has to remember.” *Huh.*

“But, a mouse has a much smaller brain, Parkaar. Haven’t they done studies with various animals? I don’t think any rodent made the top 10.”

“Bumped to no. 11 by an octopus’ tentacle.” *Don’t even ask.*

The conversation ceased as we passed over Sims Creek. As we came upon a most-heavenly-tranquil Sims Pond on the left, I realized that I had forgotten where the entrance to Grandfather Mountain State Park was. *Is it on NC 105? I don’t think it’s on the [Blue Ridge] Parkway. Directions time.*

“Monique, could you activate Google Maps on your cell phone, and set Grandfather Mountain State Park as the destination?”

“Sure. Just a second.” *He doesn’t know where the access point is? But, he said that he had been there before with Agent 66. His memory is crumbling fast.*

Monique entered the data and then placed her smartphone in the middle air-conditioning-duct-attached clamp (an add-on accessory that we had bought at a Ross store).

We passed some vacant, wide-open, already green, barbed-wire-enclosed meadows. There was still some snow in the shaded areas from last Sunday’s winter storm. The air temperature was about 50° Fahrenheit (10° Celsius).

Soon we were passing Price Lake on our left. The sky was mostly cloudy, but rays of sun filtered through the cumulus clouds’ gray underbellies, glimmering on the slate-colored, not-quite-flat surface. *Still looks the same.*

“Agent 66 and I walked all the way around that lake in 2008,” I said while rubbing my right eye yet again. *Why does this one eye collect so much sleep? Does my left eye watch my right one in the mirror all night? What a crazy thought. / I wonder what nonsense my kano [Philippine slang for American] is thinking now.*

“Is it a hard hike, Parkaartrotski?” *[sic]*

“No, the trail pretty much hugs the shoreline. Not much elevation change. Maybe we can do it next time.”

Monique just nodded.

We continued, passing the campground entrance on the right. Then 6.2 miles (10 km) of rhododendron-lined transit transpired in silence. The deciduous trees were still leafless. *Sure would be nice to live up here one day. / I just know that my husband is fantasizing about living here someday. Wonder if my hunch is correct. Guess I'll find out soon enough. I just know that he will write up this excursion.*

When we rounded a southward-jutting flank of Grandfather Mountain, we saw it: the Linn Cove Viaduct. The elevated, curvy like a stretched letter S, concrete roadway section appeared to be hovering alongside the mountain. *Never gets old seeing that.*

"Well, Monique, that's where we're headed," I said as I pointed to the engineering feat with my left hand.

"We have to drive on that?" *Oy!*

"Yes. Don't worry; it's safe. No major issues since it was completed in 1987." *What were the minor issues?*

"Ok, but go slow."

"Certainly. I don't want us to land on US 221, [100 meters – 328 feet – below] either. Well, not yet." *What is he talking about?*

We passed over some curved bridges that spanned steep ravines before finally driving on the viaduct. When I looked to the left, it appeared that we were on some self-levitating road, as nothing but the ominous sky could be seen above the concrete guard wall. *Please, dear God, no earthquake. / Wonder if Monique is saying a silent prayer.*

About 1.3 miles (2.1 km) further, we were following the Google Maps prompt to exit onto US 221 South. In just a mile (.62 km), we were at the park's vehicular entrance. We used a pair of coupons from the free *High Country Visitor's Guide* copies that we had snagged at Mellow Mushroom in Blowing Rock. It saved us four bucks. (Total cost for both of us: \$36.)

The admission ticket came with a CD that was like an invisible tour guide for the ascent. First item of note: MacRae Meadows, home of the annual Scottish Highland Games. After some gentle curves and a sharp switchback, we arrived

at Split Rock and Sphinx Rock. Then we turned right to enter the parking lot for the Nature Museum. It wasn't very crowded. There was no problem getting a decent spot.

"Well, we picked a good day to come up here, Monique. The cool, showery weather has kept the hordes away." [It was 43° Fahrenheit; 6° Celsius.] *Gosh, he hates crowds so much.*

"I bet that you would love it if we were the only two up here, Parkaarsolitario." [sic] *Yes, I would.*

"Score! I'll use that one, Monique." *I'm sure that he will.*

Once inside the Grandfather Mountain Nature Museum (complete name on the exterior wall), we checked out the flora and fauna exhibits. Then we watched a looping, continuously playing, informative, short film in the small theater.

As we neared the restrooms, I made an announcement at a louder-than-normal volume: "They forgot to mention the ground waves, Agent 32."

Monique replied as if she already knew. "A strategic omission, Agent 33."

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw that we had intrigued a 30-something Caucasian female staff member and a middle-age Asian couple. *Triumph. Now they'll have something novel to talk about.*

We exited and checked out the fenced Wildlife Habitat. We went down to the bear area first. A black bear with a tawny coat was sunning herself on a large boulder. Monique got her cell phone out and started to take a video. (It's on the psecret psociety Facebook page.) Here's the transcript:

Monique: "Go!"

Parkaar: "Alright. Looks like a brown bear."

Unknown male: "Her name is Koko." *Or, Cocoa?*

[just the sound of wind and footsteps for several seconds]

Unknown male: "I've never seen her on the rock before. Not on this rock. I've never seen any of them on this rock."

Unknown female: "She's my baby."

Unknown male: "Koko's my favorite."

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