

another pSecret pSociety pshort pstory



Greenville Jaunt by Mike Bozart (Agent 33) | FEB 2017

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by Mike Bozart

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After sitting through another agonizing LFC (Liverpool Football Club) underperformance (a 2-0 loss to lowly Hull City) at Valhalla Pub in uptown Charlotte (NC, USA) on Saturday, February 4th, Monique (my Filipina wife, aka Agent 32) and I were off to Greenville – the one in South Carolina. We had heard good things about this foothills town from friends. Also, one of my brothers had lived there for about a year in the mid-1990s. Moreover, we were curious to investigate. *Maybe a short story will emerge from this trip. Hope so.*

Soon we were scooting down I-85 (Interstate Highway 85) South in our Kia hatchback. It was a nice, sunny, cool-but-not-so-cold winter day. Traffic was light to moderate in the one o'clock hour. We were listening to Blackbird Blackbird's [sic] *Tangerine Sky* CD and didn't say much. Well, not until we rolled past Exit 13.

Monique then looked over at the ridge to the left. "There's Crowders Mountain, Parkaar!" [my ailing alias] *Recording? Check.*

"Yep, that's it, Monique. I'm sure that it's Crowded [sic] Mountain today."

"It's safer when other hikers are on the trail, Agent 33."

"Maybe so, Agent 32. But, hordes ruin the experience. That mountain is probably overrun right now with Charlotte weekend warriors." *And he's one of them.*

The song *Darlin' Dear* started playing as we passed Exit 5. *Oh, darlin' dear, you got nothing to fear ... Wonder where Mikey [Maramag] is playing tonight ...*

Monique glanced back at the ridgeline. The U-shaped Kings Pinnacle was a stark image in the forefront of a cerulean sky backdrop.

“So, that’s where your last short story [*Lake Montonia Gaze*] took place, 33?”

“Near there. A mile or so down from that rocky peak, 32.”

“What happens in that short story, Parkaar? Does anyone die or fall in love?”

“Oh, you’ll just have to sit down and read it, Monique.”

Disappointed with my answer, she gave me a playful frown.

In a few minutes we crossed the state line and entered South Carolina. Monique’s smartphone, which was set to Google Maps, added an audio welcome.

Fourteen minutes later we were approaching the somewhat-famous Gaffney Peachoid, a peach-shaped – and peach-painted – water tower just off the highway. Monique filmed the roadside attraction. (The short video is on the psecret psociety Facebook page.)

“What are the specs on that water tower, Parkaar?” *I’m sure that he has some numbers. He always does.*

“It holds a million gallons [3,785,412 liters] of water; was completed in 1981; is 135 feet [41.15 meters] tall; and is open for swimming only during the summer months.” *What?!*

“I’m calling tai [Cebauno for bullshit] on that last one, 33.”

I just laughed.

Monique then grinned. “How much farther to Greenville?”

“Forty-six miles, [74 km] Monique. We’re already more than halfway there. We should be in town around 2:20. However, check-in at the hotel is not until three o’clock.”

“We can just drive around to pass the time, 33. You know, get the lay of the land.” *Where in the world did she hear that Americanism?*

“Sure. Ok.”

Twenty-one minutes later we were approaching the I-26 interchange. *Hmmm ... Asheville is only an hour away. Should we try to squeeze it into this weekend? No, just stay solely focused on Greenville.*

Monique noticed the large green sign. “What is Spartanburg like, Parkaar?”

“I don’t know, 32. I’ve never been there. Maybe we’ll check it out on a future trip.”

Nineteen minutes later we were taking Exit 51 for I-385, a freeway that goes right into downtown Greenville. We were

moving right along until the last mile (1.61 km). That's when we came to a grinding halt. *I wonder what the cause of this backup is. Is there a college basketball game today?*

The bumper-to-bumper traffic crept to the end of the freeway. Now we were on East North Street. *Is there a North East Street in this burg? [There isn't.]*

When we got to North Academy Street, we saw the reason for the slowdown. Police were directing traffic for The Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus matinee show (Circus XTREME®). People were streaming into the Bon Secours ['Good Help' in French] Wellness Arena to our right. *Ah, Greenville is on the final tour, too. [Another show – Out of This World – was in Charlotte.]*

"What is going on, 33?" Monique asked, stunned by the throngs of people passing by.

"It's the last weekend for a venerable century-old American circus. Remember when we saw Ringling Brothers at Time Warner Arena [now Spectrum Center] in uptown Charlotte a few years ago?"

"Oh, it's the same circus?"

"Yep. It's their final go-round. I think the animal controversy did them in. Plus, I think that it's not high-tech enough for the kids of today. But, maybe in the future there will be a circus of robots." *Oh, boy ...*

“Sex robots?” [reference: *A Novella Idea*, a short story about such] Monique then giggled like an impish schoolgirl.

“That one will cost extra, 32.”

“For an autonomous happy ending?”

We both laughed as I took a forced right turn onto North Church Street. A block later, I turned left onto Beattie Place, a one-way street. We were certainly in the core downtown area now. A couple of blocks later, I made a left onto North Main Street. The first thing that struck me: the horizontal traffic lights (red on the left end) mounted next to the yellow-on-black overhead street signs. *Ah, very kewl. [sic] Well done, Greenville. Very stylishly done.*

The inviting, two-lane, tree-lined street was thriving with boutiques, restaurants, coffee shops, pubs and assorted offices. I didn't see a single boarded-up storefront. *This place has something going ... going in the right direction.*

We stayed on Main Street until I saw the soft left for Augusta Street. Less than a mile later we were pulling into the Quality Inn & Suites parking lot next to a Taco Bell. As soon as I parked the car, a black guy of about sixty-five years with only a left leg, sitting in a wheelchair, sped over to us. *Maybe he's a disabled Vietnam vet. I'll give him a couple of bucks.*

Monique was immediately wary and afraid of him. As I stepped out of our gray car to go to the hotel office, I saw the toe of his right shoe sticking out from under his lap blanket. *A con artist. It's just a hustle.*

He then said, "How much moh-nay [sic] you gonna gib [sic] me?" *Zilch, pal. He's just a drug addict or alcoholic, or both.*

I got Monique out of the car (was afraid to leave her in it), and we hightailed it to the office. And, he followed us. All the way to the front desk! *Oh, great! Is this hotel just a flophouse for derelicts? Won't ever stay here again. Should've paid a little more to stay at a downtown hotel. Live and learn.*

The African-American-Latina desk clerk told him to leave or she would call the cops. He did so, most reluctantly.

We then got settled into room 114, the Taco Bell-facing room at the end of the first-floor hallway. After unpacking the luggage, Monique was ready to explore the city.

"Do you really think it's safe to walk to Falls Park, mahal?" [love in Tagalog] Monique asked. "Or, should we just drive there?" *I don't want to drive after drinking.*

"I think we'll be just fine on foot, asawa. [wife in Cebuano] It's only .9 miles [1.45 km] and there will be daylight for another three hours. Enough time to explore, eat, drink, and return safely." *Return safely ... I sure hope so.*

"What about that guy in the wheelchair? He scares me!"

"Oh, he's harmless. He's probably already moved onto another area to work his ruse."

Monique then walked over to the window and parted the curtains. She looked back and forth. Then she looked at me. "Ok, I don't see him."

"See, he's already chasing a new wallet or purse."

We then exited the hotel via the back door. It was a refreshing 50° Fahrenheit (10° Celsius) and still mostly sunny with not much wind. We crossed Otis Street and began walking north on Augusta Street. *So far, so fair.*

Just before Woodfin Avenue was a Church's Chicken restaurant.

"If you'd like some fried chicken tonight, asawa, this place is pretty good. Or, so say my fried chicken-eating friends." *Fried friends.*

"No, that's ok. I'm hungry for some good pizza."

"Ok, I know just the place."

Just past Woodfin Avenue, we noticed an abandoned house with a high-pitched roof.

"I bet they have a nice inhabitable attic," I said.

"It looks like it was a business, Parkaar."

"An out-of-business business with an in-business attic." *Huh.*

"Are you recording again, 33?"

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