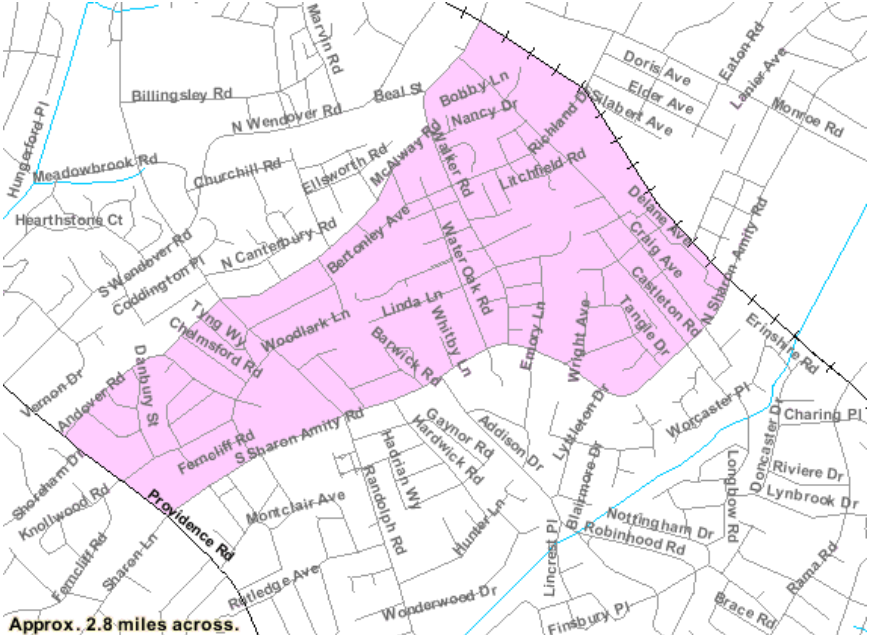


**another pSecret pSociety pshort pstory**



**CAUGHT WILD IN COTSWOLD**

by Mike Bozart (Agent 33) ..... April 2014

It was a mild early spring Saturday morning when I approached Agent 32 with an actionable question. “Monique, how would you like to bike it to Panera Bread in Cotswold?”

“How far is that, Parkaar?” [my ailing alias] she asked, knowing my penchant for long bike rides.

“Just a shade over six miles, one way,” I replied, hoping that she would consent to a pedaling adventure.

“Sure! I’ll pedal a dozen miles for that tasty broccoli cheddar soup.”

We got our cycling stuff packed and loaded drink bottles on the bikes. We were soon rolling out of the northeast quadrant of the large Windsor Park neighborhood in east Charlotte. *This low-50s-Fahrenheit weather sure feels great.*

Eight minutes later, we were at the Central Avenue intersection, waiting out the red light on Rosehaven Drive. I looked over at the crosswalk sign, and then at Monique.

“Six, five, four; get ready to go, mahal.” [love in Tagalog]

Monique nodded. “Ok, 33.”

The light turned green and we pedaled safely across Central. We stayed on Rosehaven until it came to a T-intersection. *So far, so good.*

We then made a left on Winterfield Place. Then a quick right on Driftwood Drive at the 4-way stop. We crossed Edwards Branch. (The short story, *The Edwards Branch Legend*, takes place on this creek about a mile downstream.)

Then we began to climb the hill. Next, we made a right on Campbell Drive, followed by a left on Greenbrook Drive, and a right on Briarfield Drive. We took a water break at the first speed hump.

“How do you feel, Monique?”

“Feeling great, Parkaar.”

“Excellent, 32. We’re already about halfway there.”

We recommenced our two-wheeled journey. At the 3-way stop, we made a soft right onto Pierson Drive. After a big descent and a steep rise, we were passing under the Independence Expressway. The new Super Walmart emerged on the other side of the overpass with the glistening Charlotte skyline behind it, about five miles to the west. *Man, this burg sure has grown over the past four decades.*

We stopped on the old metal footbridge that spanned an unnamed tributary and took another drink break. I began to clear some of the untrimmed vines that went from railing to railing, blocking our transit.

“Well, Monique, we’re a little past the halfway mark now.”

“How far past it?” she asked.

“Oh, we’re probably 3% past it.”

“So, we’re exactly 53% of the way there.”

“Yes, that would be my final answer.”

“Sorry, that wasn’t the big-money question, Parkaar.”

“The story of my life, 32.”

After guzzling down several fluid ounces of some energy concoction, we began walking our bikes up a steep, muddy, leaf-covered trail in the woods to the very short segment of Pierson Drive. We walked up to Seifert Circle, saddled up, and continued our ride. *This sure is great exercise.*

As we rolled onto Chippendale Road, I noticed an old, stone-and-mortar-housed, shrub-shrouded, granite sign that read: Amity Gardens 1936. *Wow. 1936. That was put up before World War 2.*

Soon we were crossing Monroe Road on Richland Drive in Oakhurst. We bounced over some railroad tracks. My bike’s steerer tube almost snapped. The headset lock nut had

worked its way loose again. *Those threads must be stripped. Need to fix it when we get back home.*

At the stop sign, we turned right onto Craig Avenue. Traffic was light. Less than a half-mile later, we turned left onto McAlway Road and had to deal with a few cars, but nothing too hairy. *This is going pretty good. Monique doesn't seem too fatigued.*

A couple of stop signs later and we were on Walker Road. We turned right onto Bertonley Avenue. Then we took a right onto Faulkner Place for a block, followed by a left back onto McAlway. Finally, a left onto Woodlark Lane got us to Randolph Road.

"Well, once we cross this street, we're essentially there, Monique."

"Let's not get run over just before the goal line, 33."

"Yes, let's not."

We waited a minute for a gap in the traffic. Then we dashed across the four lanes and rode the sidewalk up to the renovated Cotswold Shopping Center. *Ah, we made it.*

We rode past Harris-Teeter to Panera Bread, which had taken over a failed restaurant's space in the courtyard area.

We locked the bikes in front, went in, ordered, paid, and took a seat outside at a round, black, metal table that had a reeled-in parasol. I cranked it open for shade. The day was quickly warming. It was a cool 53° F when we left the house; now it felt like 83° F from all of the heart-pumping exertion.

Our soups arrived six minutes later. The 20-something Caucasian waiter - you guessed it - looked like a hipster. He was ogling the nearby olive-skinned waitress with an earnest eagle's eye.

"Looks like our boy is after some tail, Agent 32."

"You think they're pumping, Parkaar?"

"I think he is still in the size-up phase, Monique."

"How long will it take him to enter the approach-and-ask phase?"

"I don't think we have that much time, 32. Better eat up before your soup gets cold."

"I don't like it as hot as you do, 33."

"Oh, yeah."

"Your French onion soup does look delicious, though. Who invented such a strange soup with croutons and cheese

floating on top? And don't say, 'Oh, some Frenchman,' Parkaar."

"Maybe a Frenchwoman?" *Hmmm ... Frenchman is one word. I wonder if Frenchwoman is two words. That would be strange and sexist.*

I finished my cheesy soup and started chewing on the baguette slice, as Monique ended her word thoughts and started on her creamy soup. It wasn't Paris, but it wasn't Krapperville, either. And the language barrier was so much lower here.

"Sure is a nice April day, Monique, and it's even better because you are here."

"Why, salamat, [thank you in Tagalog and Cebuano] my dearest Parkaar. Mahal kita!" [I love you in Tagalog]

But, before we could get all googly goo-goo, a whiter-than-thou couple in their 60s took a seat next to us. Their attire could best be described as GS, Golf-Safari. I made sure my audio recorder was on, and then pointed it at them under our table.

"I don't know, darling; they may not have Texas fajitas here," the older fellow said.

"Oh, I just want a small burrito, love," the older lady pleaded. "Just one. I am utterly famished!"

I quickly realized that they were sitting in the wrong outdoor area. I caught the eye of the older gentleman and said: “I think you guys are looking for Salsarita’s. It’s just next door.”

“Oh?” The older man was surprised at their error.

“Yeah, it’s right over there.” I pointed to my left.

They got up and began to amble over to the adjacent Tex-Mex restaurant. As they passed our table, I couldn’t resist. I reached out with a short story – just like the one that you are reading right now – in my right hand.

“And here’s something to read while you wait for your chow,” I cheerfully said to the older man. “Some good, free, financial advice.”

He took my short story and looked at me with a not-so-sure-about-this expression. And soon they disappeared around the corner. *What did he just do? He’s feeling bold today.*

I returned my gaze to Monique, who was already staring at me. She looked stunned.

“Great performance there, 33. Bravo! But please, no encore. Not today.”



“Ok, you got my word. Hey, I just had this pictorial analogy in my mind, Agent 32.”

“Is it X-rated?” *What is she thinking?*

“No, it’s safe for this G-rated scene, Monique.”

“Well, please divulge the details. We both know that your digital audio recorder is running.” *She always knows.*

“Well, have you ever seen a cross-section of a telephone cable with all of those tiny, multicolored wires inside?”

“Yes, and ...”

“Well, 32, imagine a seemingly endless giant cable with seven billion wires inside.”

“Ok. Continue, 33.”

“However, unlike a telephone cable, some wires inside have different lengths and varying widths. Most are between seven and eight meters in length, but some are longer, up to twelve meters in rare instances. However, some are as short as one millimeter!”

“Eureka! I got it figured out: A meter equals ten years of a person’s life in your multi-stranded model. Am I correct?”

“Yep, you guessed it, Monique.”

“And, sadly, one millimeter equals a stillborn baby. Am I right again?”

“So right you are. You’re two for two.”

“And, let me guess again ... one millimeter of width equals a personal weight of 100 pounds.”

“Why, you are three for three! Swish, swish and swish. Nothing but net. Fishnet.”

“You are too much, Parkaar.”

“Think about it, Agent 32. The wires change in thickness over their length. And the cable itself is getting wider; it’s bulging due to the obesity epidemic. Now, will it explode?”

“I think that you have too much time on your strands, 33.”

“Score! Please play along, Monique.”

“And if I don’t?”

“Who will? Don’t early-terminate a possible short story for someone’s time-to-fill train commute.” *Time to fill in his brain.*

“Ok, 33; I’m still onboard. Go.”

“Look back to the very slender beginning of the cable, 32.”

“Is there a beginning?” *Hmmm, not sure.*

“Gouda won, Monique. Ultra-keen. Splendido in Escondido!”

“Have you ever even been to Escondido?”

“Knots for sure, but I bet Agent 49 has.”

“Shhh, quiet down. Here comes the waiter!”

Our waiter returned and asked us if we needed anything else. I politely told him that we were ok. He pushed a gray communications cable back into its track along the door frame, and then walked back inside.

“It’s all linked together, Agent 32. Ultimately, there are no non sequiturs.”

“You’ve already said that, Parkaar. You are starting to loop and lap. Look here.”

Monique handed me her tablet computer which was on the psecret psociety facebook page. A previous short story – yep, you guessed it, just like the one you are reading now – was on the screen. I read my repeated phrase. <gulp> *I am slipping worse than a lithium-greased clutch.*

“We’re a long way from that grassy, goat-pathed meadow. [reference to *A Tour to The Tower*] Doncha think?”

Monique just smiled and sighed. “Gosh, my dearest kano, [slang for American in Tagalog and Cebuano] you’re so silly, but I’ll take you over an always-serious type.”

Seven minutes later our waiter returned one final time. He glanced towards Monique, who was now checking her facebook page.

“That facebook sure is popular,” he said.

“It really is,” Monique replied. “I check mine several times an hour.”

“I tell ya, just about every device seems to be tuned to it here.”

I sensed an opening. “Have you ever taken part in a recursive facebook application?”

The waiter looked at me with a fair degree of bemusement. “Recursive?”

“Yeah, kind of like word fractals. Repeating sub-themes. Meta-memes. Zany stuff like that.”

“Uh, no, can’t say that I have. Sounds kinda interesting, though.”

I quickly handed him a psecret psociety business card. He took it and put it in his black money belt.

“Thanks, I’ll check it out later,” he said as he walked over to a distant table. He never returned.

“Do you think that he will submit any words or lines for the next story, Parkaar?”

“He doesn’t realize it right now, but he already has.”

“Oh, I mean, via the psecret psociety page.”

“I’m never quite sure of who will participate, Agent 32; there is no accurate profile.”

Soon we were off on our bicycles again, making the return trip to east Charlotte.

Walking our bikes down the muddy slope between the Pierson Drive segments was much trickier in descent mode. A red-clay slip-n-slide. *Wow. Must remember to bring a long saw next time to cut and clear this giant-azz fallen tree. The City seems to have no interest in removing it.*