

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?"

“As long as the battery light is bright, no static at all.” *What? I won't even ask.*

A couple of blocks farther, we were passing a new residential development called *Augusta Walk*. Red clay was still exposed, awaiting sod. It looked expensive. *Way out of our price range, I'm sure.*

After passing Thurston Street, we arrived at the microbrewery that I had seen on Google Maps: Upstate Craft Beer Co. *Time to slug down a cold, dark one.*

We stopped in. It was moderately crowded. I had a pecan-flavored porter that was pretty good. Monique just had a soft drink. *Pretty relaxed scene here. Nice woodwork. Someone sank a lot of money into this joint.*

We downed our drinks and were soon back on Augusta Street, heading north once again. As we neared Vardry Street, the railroad tracks inched closer, sandwiched between the high school and the sidewalk. We then crossed Augusta Street and soon passed Brick Street Café. *Maybe check this out next time.*

At Field Street, I looked over my left shoulder and saw a modest brick house across from Fluor Field (home of Greenville's minor league baseball team, the Drive) with a large *JOE* sign between windows. *Ah, there it is.*

I stopped and pointed at the sign. “Look over there, Agent 32. That's the museum for Shoeless Joe Jackson.” *We're stepping out.*

“The singer?”

“No, the baseball player from a century ago. He was quite a batter. In the 1911 season he hit an astonishing .408. His major league career ended in 1920, thanks to a harsh ruling against him by the commissioner [Kenesaw Mountain Landis] for his role in the fixed 1919 World Series. Though, many now think that he may have been innocent. He died in that house in 1951, probably still haunted by the Black Sox Scandal.” *Black socks scandal?*

“Did he forget to wash his socks, 33?” *Oh, just play along.*

I laughed. “And, he forgot his cleats, too, 32.” *Silly boy.*

“I can tell that you want to go there, bana. [husband in Cebuano] We have time.”

“Let’s check and see if it’s open on your phone. [Monique’s cell phone is smarter than mine.] I think that I read about it being open limited hours.”

Monique then looked it up on her Samsung phone. “It closed at two o’clock, Parkaar. And, it’s closed on Sunday.” *An hour late and a day off. Story of my life.*

“Darn! Well, maybe on the next trip, 32.”

We continued our peripatetic journey on Augusta Street, passing a colorful establishment called Funnelicious. *Bet they sell funnel cakes. / Do they sell funny funnels?*

Then we started to pass a series of party-walled boutiques. When we got to the Eggs Up Grill, I knew that we were close. *I bet that we can cut through this parking lot.*

“Monique, we can take a shortcut to Falls Park. Follow me.” *I sure hope he knows where he’s going.*

We walked through the small parking lot, and then down a narrow alley to arrive at ... another parking lot. But, on the other side of it was our intended destination: Falls Park. *Ah, this is nice. / Wow! We made it.*

We followed a rivulet downstream to the Reedy River, where we then saw the impressive, crescent-shaped Liberty Bridge towering ahead. *Yee-hee! / Wow! That is much higher than I imagined.*

“I can’t wait to walk on that bridge, Agent 33!”

“Same here, Agent 32.”

There were families of every color roaming around. One older Caucasian gentleman overheard our agentspeak, [*sic*] and gave us a wry look. *Whoops!*

We wound our way up to the western entrance of the unique pedestrian bridge. Once we were on it, we felt the slight shaking associated with suspension bridges. *What a clever design. And excellent execution of such.*

“Let’s go out to the middle, Agent 33.”

“Sure, Agent 32.” *I hope that no one thinks that we’re part of some nefarious group, sent to blow up this bridge.*

We made our way to the middle of the concrete bridge deck’s arc. The view of the waterfalls was spectacular. Monique took some pics and videos. *Wow! We are really up here. I bet that we’re over 40 feet [12.2 meters] above that shallow stream. Even a belly dive would be a fatal splat!*

“Certain death if you fall from here, Monique. Don’t lean on the railing. You never know when a bolt might shear off.” *Gosh, he’s so paranoid.*

“Don’t worry, Mr. Safety; I’m not even going to touch the railing.” *Good.*

We walked the whole 344-foot [104.85 meters] curvilinear length to the Camperdown Mill site. Then we passed under South Main Street. The next feature that we came upon: a bowstring bridge across the Reedy River. It wasn’t a tall bridge, but it did cross the river at an odd 45-degree angle. And then I saw why. There were a series of ten concrete spillways to our left, strategically placed on a slant. We stopped to take some pics. *They really have made the most of this watercourse. Many American cities would kill to have something like this.*

We then began walking back on the other side of the Reedy River. There were some new condos/apartments going up. *Wow! That would be the place to live, alright. A nice balcony overlooking the falls and the greenway. Sweet digs if you can swing it.*

Monique reminded me that she was hungry for pizza, just as I saw the rear balcony of the Mellow Mushroom. We sauntered up the steps and were promptly seated. It wasn't too crowded; we were ahead of the dinner rush.

The Thai-dye grilled chicken pizza was just as good as the one that we had in Blowing Rock (NC, USA), perhaps even more succulent. I washed it down with a Duck Rabbit Milk Stout (an excellent porter from eastern North Carolina). Monique just went with ice water.

We finished up thirty-four minutes later. Of – and on – course, I left a *Gold* card (a coupon for a free download of my 2013 e-novel *Gold, a summer story*) under the tip. *She has tattoos. Maybe she will like the risqué desperation in it.*

“Want to go back a different way?” I asked Monique as we exited down the steps.

“Sure! You know me, 33; I love to see new things in America.” *Indeed she does.*

We took the trail to Howe Street, and were soon passing the Greenville County office complex on our left. On the corner of Bradshaw Street, we noticed Chef Manigault's La Vieille Maison ('The Old House' in French) restaurant. *Wonder if Simon Mignolet has ever eaten there? Whence did that thought come? / I wonder what nonsense my bana is thinking now.*

We stayed on Howe until it ended at Haynie Street. There we made a right, followed by a quick left onto Chicora

Avenue, a lane of residences and vacant lots. When it ended at McKay Street, we turned right. After walking past some large asphalt parking lots, we were back at Augusta Street. *Ah, that wasn't too bad. A nice little calorie-burn. / Glad that we didn't encounter that wheelchair loko. [crazy in Cebuano]*

After skipping across the not-too-busy four-lane road, we were only two blocks from our hotel. As we approached the Taco Bell, I asked Monique if she wanted a Cantina Bowl for a late-night feast. She said that she was full.

We safely got back to our hotel room. Monique breathed a sigh of relief and then laid her slender 5'-3" (160 cm) frame down on the king-size bed. She was out like a lamb in four minutes. Her battery had gone dead.

I watched the local news while sipping a Blue Moon Cappuccino Oatmeal Stout beer. (We had brought some from Charlotte.) Drowsiness soon overtook me as well. I think that the last time I spied the digital alarm clock, its red numerals were 7:43. *Seven equals four plus three. Seven minus four equals three. Seven goes into forty-three ... six times ... and one seventh. Six point one-four something. Approximately six point one-four-three. Six plus one and four-three. Seven four-three. Bet on seven, four and three tomorrow. [I would forget to do such.]*

We both awoke at 2:02 AM – imagine that – and serviced the accounts. Monique was back asleep by 2:45. *Lucky her.*

I then turned the TV on to get drowsy. Finally, at 3:15, I fell asleep. An intense series of three dreams ensued. One after

another. Always in a dicey life-threatening situation, awaking just before the fatal misstep. *These nightmares are going to be the death of me.*

At 7:06 I awoke and hit the kapper-krapper. [sic] Monique was twelve minutes behind me. She took a long hot shower.

Next, we walked to the lounge across from the office for the complimentary continental breakfast. The spread was actually pretty impressive: bagels, toast, cereal, waffles, muffins, juices, teas, and several urns of coffee. *Not bad.*

There was only one person present at 8:14 AM. He was a Caucasian fellow in his mid-30s, feasting on a bowl of Frosted Flakes® and milk.

I snatched some lemon poppy seed muffins and poured a tall cup of coffee. I then sat down at a table along the wall. Monique soon parked across from me with her haul.

“Can you help me with the waffle machine?” she asked.

“Sure, asawa.”

I got up and sprayed the already-quite-hot waffle griddle with a non-stick spray. Then I looked around for the waffle batter. I was reaching for the oatmeal porridge when the man suddenly spoke.

“No, that’s not the waffle batter. It’s on the other side.”

I immediately saw it and felt foolish. “Thanks, man. I haven’t had my coffee yet.”

He laughed. “Don’t feel bad. I’ve watched many people make the same mistake over the past two months.”

“You’ve been in this hotel for two months?” *He must have some contract work.*

“Yeah, and one more month to go. I install patented building foundations. This is my third stint in Greenville. I always like coming here. It’s a nice town. Today is my lone day off this week. I’m going fishing with a local.”

“Ah, very nice. Where are you from?”

“The thumb of Michigan.”

“It’s a right thumb, isn’t it?” *Hope my map memory is correct.*

“Unless you see it palm-down. I’m from a little town called Bad Axe.” *A bad azz [sic] with a bad axe from Bad Axe. A horror movie in the offing.*

“I see. You’re a long way south.”

“A thirteen-hour drive if traffic is good. It’s nice country up there – nothing like Detroit.”

“I hear ya.”

“Have you guys checked out Falls Park yet?”

“Yes, we have!” Monique interjected. “We walked across the amazing Liberty Bridge!”

“Yeah, it’s nice,” he concurred. “You guys should also check out Paris Mountain. Hike to the old reservoir. [We would.] There’s a cool old dam up there.”

“Thanks for the tip,” I said as I pried out the cooked waffle.

“Sure. Now, about this psecret psociety ...”

