

another pSecret pSociety pshort pstory



OVERHEARD & OVERHEAD by **Mike**

Bozart (Agent 33) | May 2014 [tweaked in
August 2015 and then again in March 2016]

I had been craving – to the point of carving – a Taco Bell Cantina Bowl (yes, believe it or not) all the live-long May morning in east Charlotte. And, I know what you're thinking; well, actually, I don't – maybe Ernie the electronic earwig (the ringleader of psecret psociety) does. What's more, I know this opening paragraph is a bit obtuse, but hang on and bang on. Our little story gets more focused.

Ok, moreover than under, when I got back to our east Charlotte abode the puns ceased. I immediately commenced with some persuasive, steering-to-leading, questioning of my wife Monique, the gorgeous Agent 32.

"Say, how would you like to bike it over to Taco Bell, mahal? [mahal, love in Tagalog] It's less than two miles away."

"I don't know, 33; it's kind of hot outside, isn't it?" *I thought that he hated to ride in sauna weather.*

"Well, yeah, it is; but, it's only a 13-minute jaunt. We can outrun the sweat." *I doubt that. / It's a lie, but maybe she will believe me.*

"Thirteen minutes, Parkaar? [my ailing alias] Are you sure about that? Did you time our last trip there?"

"No, but my bike computer did, Monique." *Why, of course.*

"Oh, I should've known." *He's always measuring and logging everything. And, I'm sure he's already recording.*

“Aren’t you hungry for a Cantina Bowl? Remember how much you loved them in Asheboro? [mentioned in the *Zoo Are You?* short story] You devoured two a day.”

“They were bigger in Asheboro.” *What?*

“Well, I just know that this is our lucky day.”

“Our lucky day? A mass-produced fast-food dinner via bicycle in sweaty weather at a Taco Bell? Have you been sniffing rubber cement again, 33?” *Rubber cement?*

“Monique, you make it seem so ordinary. And, well, you know that I don’t allow anything to be ordinary, especially when the recorder is running.” *I knew it. He’s already switched on the digital audio recorder. I better watch what I say.*

“Now I’ve heard everything.” Monique then rolled her eyes.

“Ah, what do ya say? C’mon, let’s burn some calories.”

“And, then add several hundred more calories.”

“Which we will burn off on the ride back home.”

Monique sighed. “Ok, whatever, Parkaar; let’s do it. Can you get my bike out of the furnace room?”

“Yeah, sure.”

“Salamat, [Thank you in Tagalog and Cebuano] Agent 33.”
Yey! I convinced her to go.

I got Monique's pink Electra Townie bike out and checked the chain guard, which had come unbolted on a previous ride. It looked ok; the lock washer was doing the trick. *Seems secure.*

Then I wheeled our bikes out of the house and up the driveway. We were all set.

"Do we have everything, Parkaar?"

"I think so. We're good to go."

"Ok, let's hit it, artsy-sportsy." *She remembers.*

And with that, we were off and rolling down Kavanaugh Drive. No traffic was spotted on Somerdale Lane, so we just did a flying merge. We coasted to Abbeydale Drive and turned right. An immediate, heart-pumping incline greeted us.

"Time to pump those pedals, Agent 32!" I shouted like a football coach. Then I laughed.

Monique just looked at me as she shifted into first gear and began the ascent. Farther up we passed some tuggies, [*sic*] (as Monique calls them) of various races, who promptly yelled some nastiness at us. We didn't stop; we just kept on rolling.

After a long climb, we made a right turn onto busy North Sharon Amity Road. Well, actually, onto the western sidewalk, which is essentially an elevated bike lane, as there

is no planting strip (no blocked sightlines) and rarely any pedestrians to navigate.

I stayed on guard for turning cars as we crossed Sudbury Road. And then we passed Love Avenue. I noticed that the street sign was higher up the pole than most. *I bet that sign gets stolen a lot. That's why they have it set way up there.*

Next, we crossed Tarrywood Lane, and after that, Auburndale Road. And when I saw the cacti garden on the right, I knew it was time to stop. *End of this sideline.*

We dismounted our bikes. When there was a sufficient gap in the southbound traffic, we walked our bikes to the eight-foot-wide concrete median. There we waited for a break in the stream of two-lane northbound traffic. The feeling at this point was six or a half dozen.

When a large gap opened (after about a minute), we made the crossing to the other sidewalk like a wide receiver tiptoeing into the end zone after leaving a defender down on the field.

A quarter of a mile down the sidewalk, we turned to the left to enter a carless church parking lot. We exited the newly-paved asphalt lot onto Wilora Lake Drive. Next, we turned right onto Stilwell Oaks and rode it all the way down to the partially torn-down, four-foot-high, galvanization-failing, chain-link fence, narrowly evading a footloose and collar-free dog.

Using the concrete steps and adjacent dirt trail, we walked our bikes down to the back service road of the old, now-

rubble-ized [sic] Eastland Mall. *All those late-'70s and early-'80s memories ... now in the dust.*

We cut across the wide, weeds-in-the-cracks, parcelizing [sic] asphalt parking lot, and pumped it up the hill to the traffic light at Central Avenue.

Once across, we pedaled on the empty sidewalk to Burger King. I prepared to stop, while Monique kept going. She then looked back at me and I realized my mistake.

“Oh, yeah; we’re going to Taco Bell. Sorry, 32. My bad.”

She just grinned. Her facial expression seemed to suggest that she was thinking of something. Perhaps it was: *He’s tired. Those long 10-and-a-half-hour days are making him mentally unfocused. Hope he stays off a car’s hood. Or, doesn’t end up under one.*

We soon had the bikes locked up around a well-planted, sturdy *Handicapped Parking Only* metal signpost.

“You think it’s ok to lock them up to this signpost, Parkaar?”

Monique was concerned. She thought that the manager might impound them. Well, actually, I am not so sure what she was thinking.

“They should be ok here, Agent 32,” I replied. “They don’t have a bike rack proper.” *A bike rack proper? He’s speaking for future readers again.*

“But, it’s a handicapped sign. It’s kind of insulting to tie bicycles to it, when the person parking in front of it may not be able to walk.”

“Hey, I’m handicapped, Monique. Mentally handicapped. I have that shunt, you know. It affects my bike-mooring decisions.” *Bike-mooring decisions? He’s just being silly now.*

“Ok, that’s enough, Parkaar. I’m hungry. Let’s go inside and get something to eat.” *She needs to carb up, and quick.*

I nodded. “Stellar idea, Monique.”

Once inside the fast foodery, [*sic*] we moved right up to the counter. The only other customer was picking up their bag of grub and leaving. *Ah, perfect timing. No line.*

At the place-your-order-here register, a familiar face greeted us. It was the kewl, [*sic*] young, attentive black dude with the Rasta dreads. He, too, recognized us from past visits.

“Back again for Cantina Bowls?” he cheerfully asked in a very professional manner.

“You got it, man,” I said.

“We’re addicted,” Monique added and laughed. *This could be a commercial at this point.*

He noticed our bike helmets. “You guys biked it again, I see.” *Darn, forgot to lock the bike helmets up outside.*

“Yep, you know it,” I said.

Monique tacked on another line. "He loves to ride his bike everywhere in Charlotte." *I don't think I would ride to the airport.*

"Hey, I just got a bike," our Taco Bell Employee-of-the-Month said.

"Ah, most excellent," I said.

"I rode it to my mom's house last weekend," the lad said.

"And, where is that?" I asked, not sure of what place I would here.

"Off Barrington Drive."

"Ok," I said to show my interest was still there, as well as to keep the conversation flowing. "And whereabouts do you live?" *How far a way from Hampshire Hills?*

"Down on Village Lake Drive," he calmly stated.

"Wow, you rode your bike from Village Lake to Barrington?" I asked, somewhat stunned by the distance he travelled, while wondering what route he took.

"Yeah," he said with no sense of accomplishment.

"That's cranking it, dude!"

Then he let out a little laugh. "It was a ride, alright." He smiled. "Listen, I'll have your Cantina Bowls right out. You guys can go have a seat."

“Thanks,” Monique said.

“Appreciate that, man,” I said as we began to walk away.

Our Cantina Bowls soon arrived. They looked fresh and smelled pretty good for a fast-food behemoth.

Monique studied the size of the portions. “See, 33, these are not as big as the ones in Asheboro. Now, what did I say?”

Sometimes a low-hanging pun can't go unpicked; thus, I said, “See, 33, these are not as big as the ones in Asheboro.”

“Ah, very *Airplane*-ish, Parkaar.” (We had recently watched the movie *Airplane* on TV.)

“You got me there, 32.”

“I always get you.”

“Yep, yep, yep.”

“Hey, don't go Malloy [a character in the *Mysterieau of San Francisco* novella, and in the short stories *A Search for Sidle on N* and *Vermont Street*] on me, 33.”

“Ok, I won't. Say, did you like the movie *Airplane*, Agent 32?”

“Well, it pounds on the puns. That's for sure.”

“But, better than punning on the pounds.”

“Such excessive wordplay, 33. I guess it was right up your alley.”

“Yep.”

Our kind and now familiar Taco Bell employee returned to our table from behind the counter. “Need anything else?”

“No, we’re good, man,” I replied. “Thanks for asking, though.”

“Are you a writer, by chance?” he asked. *What a question? How did he know? Is he already in psecret psociety and all chummy with Ernie?*

“Well, I kind of slid into it. I had to shift gears after my *great* – feel free to chortle – wobble-a-dabble art career went a-thud.” *Wobble-a-dabble? He clearly said that for the microphone.*

He chuckled. *This guy is baked.*

“I wrote a novel titled *Gold, a summer story*, but it sells like ice in a Canadian snowstorm.”

“That’s funny stuff, man,” he said. “Do you do comedy?”

“No, that would be my brother in Florida. I primarily write little short stories, usually around two thousand words, give or take a few hundred.”

“Folded-up short stories?” he asked with a look of theory-confirming discovery.

“Did you find one of my quadra-folds?” *This is so unbelievable. I can’t believe what I’m hearing. My Parkaaroni*

[sic] has done it again. I guess it was a lucky day for him. Still like the Taco Bell in Asheboro better, though.

“A quadra-fold?” He looked puzzled by the term.

“Oh, a single sheet of paper folded into fourths. A horizontal fold and a vertical fold. And maybe in that order.” *No letting up with him today.*

“Yeah, I did. It was orange. Kind of weird. I forget what it was about.” He then chuckled.

“It was that good, huh?” I laughed, too.

“I remember that it involved recording. Any recording devices on now?”

“Step outside and smile for that red weather balloon,” I replied.