

another pSecret pSociety pshort pstory



WRIGHTSVILLE BEACHED

It all started out innocently enough one June day ...

by Mike Bozart (Agent 33) May 2013

It was back in the summer of 1985, I believe. Yeah, that was the year. (My long-term memory is a lot better than my short-term these days.) We, my brother Joe and several friends from Charlotte, were renting a two-story house on Pine Street in east Wilmington's Winter Park neighborhood. The address was 5002. (Don't ask me why I remember such trivial things.) Yeah, I'm fairly sure that was the number. <ding> I am now certain that was it.

It was – and still is, I believe – a two-story house on a sandy corner. It quickly became something of a flophouse for five white dudes, aged 17 to 23. Youthful partying and such. The last goof-off summer before everyone got serious about their *great* careers. <cough>

Well, anyway, once our other friends back in Charlotte got word that we had secured a party house near the beach, weekend arrivals were nonstop. I still remember an early morning when there were about twenty visitors passed-out throughout the house. Bodies were slumped over in recliners, on sofas, in sleeping bags on the floor, and even unconscious on the lower back roof. It looked like a deadly gas had been released. I think that was the 4th of July weekend. The big blowout.

However, before that mega-bash, back in late June (Friday, June 21st to be exact), a couple of close friends came down, namely Frank (future Agent 107) and Slim (who never would take an agent number; was always leery of randomly assigned numbers). Upon arrival, they almost immediately wanted to go to Wrightsville Beach to paddle around in the sound in their newly purchased inflatable boats. And, trust me, these were no Zodiacs.

I consented and we were soon on our way, going east on Oleander Drive as the gray-green smoke inside the cab went west. We crossed the two bridges with no delays to speak of (or type up). Traffic was still light.

We parked on North Lumina Avenue, near the intersection with Mallard Street. Our put-in was only thirty feet away. I made sure not to infringe on a driveway by even an inch, as aggressive towing was/is the norm at this upscale beach.

We quickly inflated the two cheap plastic boats on the sidewalk with foot pumps. Slim's boat was smaller, so I joined Frank in the inflation of the larger one. Eight minutes later, we were all set for sail (or paddle).

Slim got in the smaller one by himself. Frank and I shared the larger one. We started to paddle towards a marsh island in Little Lollipop Bay (real name). We could see cars going over the West Salisbury Street Bridge (US 74).

As we drew closer to the bridge, it seemed that some motorists were screaming at us. *Perhaps they got an early start on their vacation?* Such I thought.

And, oh, the wind on that morning. It was like a gale out of the southwest, which put it right in our faces. Frank then grabbed the binoculars. He corrected our course heading.

We paddled in earnest towards what looked to be a small beach on the south side of the marsh island. We would take a break there and chill out for a while. Slim had packed a thermos bottle full of *Elixium*, as he called it. He wouldn't tell us what it was. He assured us it was an all-natural

concoction of high quality. Well, we were young and ready for some high adventure.

We arrived safely and beached the air-filled vessels. The wind had grown so fierce that we had to sit on the boats to prevent them from flying away. I remember Slim joking about us never making it back. His dark brown hair was being ruffled by the wind, and his striped white-and-blue t-shirt looked like a flag (his skinny torso being the mast).

We passed the metallic jug around, taking a few gulps with each turn. It tasted like a mix of almonds, blackberry and mint with under-currants (punnery in motion), replete with a leathery finish. No, just jesting; it was more like steel wool. It did have a slightly emetic aftertaste. I wondered: *What in the world is this?*

I looked at Slim. “Hey, you didn’t just grind up 1,000 morning glory seeds and make tea with them, did you? I vomit on that stuff! Is this going to be another puke-a-thon?”

Slim replied in an assuring manner. “Relax, we’re all going to be ok. It’s not that or anything else you’ve had before, or even heard about.”

Then Frank had a question for Slim. “Hey, how long before the effects start?” The bangs on both sides of his middle-parted hair were flapping like wings in the brisk breeze.

“Usually between 45 and 50 minutes,” Slim scientifically replied.

“And then what happens?” I asked with some trepidation.

“Everything,” Slim nonchalantly said. *Oh, great. Focking great. What have I signed up for this time? How will this end? How many drownings?*

There was a Pizza Hut just on the other side of the bridge that caught Frank’s attention. “Hey guys, we’ve got time to paddle over to that Pizza Hut before we start zooming. Let’s get some food through our gullets before the cosmic onrush commences.”

“You’re kidding me!” I exclaimed. Frank was a known high-risk-taker.

Slim seemed unfazed by Frank’s idea. However, he had no intention of going in his boat. “Bring me back a Hawaiian pizza.” Slim then reached in his pocket. “Here’s the money, man. Keep the change as a delivery charge.”

And with that Frank was ready to disembark on the 375-yard transit. The wind had died down a little.

Frank looked at Slim. “Are you sure that you will be ok here alone?” *Oh, so Frank plans on me going with him. Already feeling disoriented. Their English words sound like a foreign language. Better try to keep my wits about me.*

“Go!” Slim shouted. “I’ll be perfectly fine. You guys will get there much faster with both of you paddling a single craft.” *Did he say ‘craft’?*

And with that, we, Frank and I, were off. The wind, fortunately, continued to lessen in intensity. The trek wasn’t too bad, actually. In fact, we were dockside in a mere fourteen minutes.

We tied up our plastic floatie and went inside the restaurant. Frank ordered the pizzas to-go. While waiting, we went out on the sound-side deck. Our little rubber dingy was ok (still pier-tethered).

Then I looked over the bridge back towards our little marsh island beach. I could see Slim. He was lying down with a towel over his face.

“I wonder if he is already getting off, Frank.”

“Who?”

“Slim. Look down there. See him?”

“Oh, yeah, I see him. Looks like he’s just chilling out before the launch.”

We walked back into the restaurant and picked up our pizzas. The aroma was like nothing that I had ever smelled before. At the dock, I noticed that my legs felt a little rubbery as we loaded the two pizzas into the boat. *Better watch my step. Feel like Plastic Man.*

We boarded the little rubber dingy. Then Frank untied our inflatable yacht-naught, and we began our return voyage.

“The trip back should be easier, Frank. The wind is at our back now.”

“Yeah, should be,” Frank said as he surveyed the sound.

“Hey, Frank, could I place you in a future short story?”

He gave me a puzzled look. "Since when did you become a writer?"

"Well, maybe at a later date. Just seeking advance permission."

"Listen, let's just focus on paddling for now. We can have nonsensical thoughts when we're back on that beach. We don't want to have a mishap out here." *Agreed.*

Slim saw us coming and waved. All was going swimmingly, as we weren't in the water, nor was the pizza. It was going to be a successful water delivery.

"Ahoy!" Frank shouted as he skidded the inflatable on the sand. We jumped out with the pizzas and handed them to Slim. *Ah, we made it back safely.*

"You guys made pretty good time," Slim said. "Elapsed time: 37 minutes."

"Anything noteworthy happen over here while we were gone?" I asked Slim.

"It's too fast for note-taking now," Slim said. *Wow! He's already zapped.*

We devoured the pizzas within twelve minutes while standing and chatting. Slim smiled at us. I could tell that he was already getting some mental elevation. It was evident from his facial expression ... and maniacal laughter.

"Get ready for lift-off, boys!" Slim yelled. And then he let out a guttural guffaw. "You guys are in for it now. The roller

coaster is getting ready to go over the apex. Buckle up – it's going to be a wild ride.”

After Slim's words decayed, I noticed that the bridge seemed to be getting farther away. In fact, wherever I looked seemed to be getting farther away from our little beach.

“Uh, guys, I don't think I'm going anywhere by boat for a while,” I said. I sat down on the sand. I felt a little dizzy.

Frank was just beginning to get zonked, too. He had this frozen smirk on his face as he looked at the turbulent sound. “Where are our boats?!” he suddenly asked.

We all looked around. Both boats had been blown into a tidal creek between our island and a larger marsh island to the west. The wind was blowing both of them farther away from our island. *Oh, crap! I knew things were going too smooth. Here's where the tragedy occurs.*

Slim ran and jumped into the water. He swam ferociously after the boats. He caught his boat about fifty feet from our beach. Luckily, a paddle was still in the oar rest. Slim got himself situated in his boat, rounded up the paddles, and towed the other boat back to the beach rather impressively.

“Well done, mate!” I said to him. “Excellent craft rescue.”

Frank looked at Slim. “Hey, what's that red stuff on your feet?”

“It's my blood!” Slim said. He freaked.

“Damn, you sliced your feet up pretty good, Slim,” I said while trying to gauge the severity of the cuts.

Frank then looked in the water where Slim had walked back on the beach. "I see what cut you, Slim. You stepped on an oyster bed."

"Those are razor sharp," I added.

We looked back at the soles of Slim's feet. (He was now sitting down in the sand with his feet up). They were a city map with the streets in blood-red ink. For a moment, unspoken panic.

"Looks like you're going to need stitches, Slim," I said like a TV doctor.

Slim now had a look of shock on his face. He never realized how bad he was cut.

"Everyone, just relax," Frank said. "I have some super glue. They use it in emergency rooms." And with that Frank glued Slim's sole slices shut. "Just continue to lie down with your feet up."

It seemed to work. The bleeding stopped.

"Thanks, doc," Slim said. His mind began to relax. "How much do I owe you?"

Frank chuckled. "Nichts. [German for nothing] Consider it a crisis averted."

Then a sudden gust of wind, and I swear it looked like the whole western shore was being blown north with the swells, all undulating up the Intracoastal Waterway. Once again, everything that I focused on was moving farther away. A

sailboat was 100 yards away. Now it was 200 yards away. Now it was ... *Where did it go?*

“Hey, Frank, are you getting any spatial distortions?”

“Extra-spatial, dude. This shite is keen.”

“See, I knew you guys would like it,” Slim said. “But, sit tight, the turbo phase is about to kick in.”

“A turbo phase, Slim?” I asked, wondering if I could take any more psychic voltage. “My mind is oscillating fast enough.”

“Oh, you’re gonna be speechless, guys.”

Frank lowered his dark shades and looked at Slim. “This won’t screw up my night, will it? I have a hot date at 8.”

“Funny that you should use the word *screw*, Frank,” I said. “My vision is being torqued.”

“Oh, go torque your dorque,” Frank humorously interjected.

Now, not only was everything that I focused on moving farther away, it was also beginning to rotate. Actually, a better word would be *spiralize*. As the object that I focused on began to move away, it also began to do barrel rolls, leaving a tracer trail that looked like a spiral. Surprisingly, I didn’t feel dizzy anymore. After a while, it slowed down. Finally it all came back to three guys on a tiny marsh island.

As the orange sun began to set, it all seemed to stop. No headache. No fatigue. Curiously, I felt somewhat refreshed.

Then I felt a wet sensation on my feet. They were in the water. High tide. I looked over to Slim to congratulate him on his amazing dynamic distancing serum. But, to my surprise, he was gone! And, so was Frank! The boats were gone, too! *Those dogs!* I thought almost aloud. *They've pranked me!*

I stood up on the damp sand and thought about what to do. It was dusk now. Soon it would be dark. Out of the corner of my eye, I caught a glimpse of the bottom of Slim's boat through the marsh plants on the backside of the little island. His boat was upside down. Then I noticed that Frank's boat was upside down, too. *Are they hiding under their boats?*

Even decades later, neither of them would agree with this ending. When shown my story notes, Frank remarked: "This story lacks a sockdolager." (Sockdolager is German for an exceptional person).

But, it was him.