

another pSecret pSociety pshort pstory



ZOO ARE YOU? by Mike Bozart (Agent 33) |May 2014; rev.
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A delightfully dank, overcast, April Monday found Monique (Agent 32) and I (Agent 33) motoring north up NC 49 towards the NC Zoo. It seemed like a good day to get some help from our animal friends for a short story.

“Parkaar, [my ailing alias] have you ever been to this zoo?” Agent 32 asked out of the gray.

“Not in a long, long time, Monique.”

“How long, 33?”

“Oh, I think it was 1977, the year after it opened.”

“That’s 37 years ago! It’s probably much different now.”
Those animals have probably died and been replaced.

“Yeah, maybe so, Monique. Maybe they’ve removed the walls and fences.” *I bet that he only said that because of that darn digital audio recorder. I just know that he has already switched it on.*

“Removed the walls and fences? Lions, tigers and elephants running free with the people? Are you crazy?!” *Maybe so.*

“Well, you know the answer to that question, Agent 32.”

Monique laughed for a few seconds. Then the conversation stopped. Our thoughts got lost in the passing forest.

After three or four news stories on the radio, we were passing a wooden sign that read:

Welcome to Asheboro – Home of the NC Zoo

“So, North Carolina has an Asheville and an Asheboro?” Monique suddenly asked.

“Yep, and neither one is in Ashe County. Figure that out.”

Monique shook her head. “You crazy kanos! [Filipino slang for Americans] What’s up with that?”

I scratched my chin. “I have no idea, Agent 32. I wasn’t around back then for the naming of places.”

Soon we were pulling into the zoo’s North American entrance parking lot. It wasn’t very crowded. We parked away from other vehicles. But, sure enough, one slid in right next to us, on my side.

“All these open spots, and this guy parks right next to us,” I griped. “Why? What is it with some people?”

“Oh, just calm down, 33. Don’t be a grouch today.”

We slugged down some energy fluids and marched on in. I noticed that the asphalt paths were not as smooth as before, as surface roots had created small ridges and cracks. *Looks kind of like the Campbell Creek Greenway in Charlotte, the section near the gristmill ruins.*

And then, for some unbeknownst reason, it made me think of a Korean American girl in my 7th grade class at a parochial school in Charlotte, who always put serifs on her 1s, so that they looked like giraffe heads. My calligraphic musing was broken by Monique’s question.

“Does this zoo have giraffes, Parkaar? And, if so, where are they?” *How odd that she should ask about giraffes just now. Psyche-psychronicity? [sic]*

“I think it does, 32. They’re over in the African section. We’ll make our way over there.”

We began our tour of the North American section. There were some non-moving American alligators in a cypress swamp, just lying in wait.

“Are they real?” Monique asked.

“Oh, yes, very real, Agent 32. You don’t want to fall in there. If you did, you would be amazed at how quickly they come to life.” *Yikes! Let me back a way from this fence.*

“They look like plastic props in a C-grade horror movie, Parkaar.” *She’s right; they do.*

“These ancient reptiles don’t waste energy, Monique; they wait for the right moment to attack.”

“Do you think that they would eat a cowhide-covered, three-inch-wide, white ball, commonly called a baseball?” *Now she’s playing for the recorder.*

“Ah, recycling and refining past lines are we, Monique?” *Dang. He remembers them all.*

We both had a laugh and threw out a few more past lines. And that’s about how it went as we passed the bored polar bear. *I bet that bear would love to eat us. Tasty human flesh.*

While continuing on our trek, we watched a seal effortlessly swim several underwater laps for us, as we viewed him/her through a subsurface window. *I wonder if any agents are here today.*

Then it really went to the bears: black, brown and grizzly. *I wonder if they know what I’m thinking. Oh, wait; what am I thinking?*

As we rounded a bend, we came upon a good view of some American bison. They were just lazily grazing on a field, passing time with large boulders.

Monique then chuckled. “Those two look like Blesseltone and the Suzaffalo! [of Group Z, the enemy camp] Let’s not get too close. We might get an epic anal spray.” *Major yuck!*

I laughed. “Gouda won, 32.”

“Nice coinage, 33. Spare change, dude?”

I chuckled. Monique had successfully imitated the intonation of the most recent aggressive panhandler that we had encountered in Plasma-Wigwood (hip slang for the Plaza-Midwood area of east Charlotte).

Next, there were a pair of red wolves trotting the same route over and over. Their narrow path was being worn bare, and quickly becoming an orange-clay gully. *Maybe these guys need a larger pen. They’re going nuts.*

Then it was the hot-and-oh-so-dry Sonora Desert enclosure, surrounded by copious prickly cacti. *What an environment.*

“Wow, what is that odor, 33? Did you heavenly utot? [fart in Tagalog] ... again?”

“No, it wasn’t me; well, not this time.”

From there, we kind of got lost and decided to sit down and take a break. We overheard some other zoo visitors talking behind us.

“So, whereabouts are y’all from?” an older white male asked.

“We’re from Nash County,” a large, white female said.

“Really? We are, too. Hey, did you hear about old Ed Bullinger?”

“No, what happened to him?”

“Well, he was sharpening his lawn mower blades and died.”

“Oh, my sweet Lord! How in the world did that happen?”

“He had the tractor-mower’s front-end hoisted up by an old rope – the one that he had been using for the past forty years – but, this time it broke. The coroner said blunt-force chest trauma.”

“Oh, darn. I hate to hear that. That’s a shame.”

“But, you know old Ed was always so darn stubborn. He had been warned by Margie-Lynn not to do that time and time again, but you couldn’t tell him anything.”

“Well, I suppose no one will be telling him anything now, except God. Rest his soul.”

My audio recorder suddenly chirped. *Darn. The battery is already low. Shouldn’t have bought those cheapo batteries.*

The people from Nash County stopped talking and looked at me.

I pointed at a buzzing overhead light-fixture ballast. “They really need to replace that before OSHA shows up.”

Then Monique and I got up and walked away. *I bet old Ed never knew that he’d get mentioned in a psecret psociety pshort pstory. His fatal stunt will be immortalized on facebook, in limited-edition print copies, and on e-book websites.*

“You know, Parkaar, if Kirk were here, he would say, ‘Awkward!’” *In Auckland?*

“Yeah, I know, Monique. I can hear his voice saying it right now.”

We passed through Junction Plaza and entered the African section. First up was the Forest Aviary, in which specific birds practiced general aviation and strafe-bombing without a license. *Should have worn that wide-brimmed Australian field hat.*

Then it was on to the baboons. *Oh, the baboonery [sic] of it all.*

“Agent 33, what’s the deal with their bright-pink-colored, bald butts?”

“Severe roid rage, Agent 32. Hemorrhoids on steroids.”

“Seriously, Parkaar.”

“Oh, I think it has something to do with mating. You know, keeping the species going.”

“Ew! It looks so gross! Is that supposed to be arousing?”

“Maybe to a baboon, Monique.”

“Let’s move along before I throw up.”

Next up was a large glade of elephants, gazelle, antelope, and a lone rhino off in the distance.

“Agent 32, I bet that lone rhino knows that it’s not Wednesday, July 29, 1992 in southeastern San Francisco.”

“What in the world are you talking about, 33?”

“For some odd reason, it seemed like the line to say nine seconds ago.”

“You just might need some professional help, Parkaar.”
Maybe so. Maybe so.

“Yeah? Well, who knows? Hey, I just added it for non-causal effect to keep you guessing, 32.” *He must have put some magic granules in his coffee this morning.*

We moved away from the wall, evading the lone rhino’s last charge, and ambled along to the Akiba Tram Stop. Good seats were still available.

“Want to jump aboard, Monique?”

“No, I’ve got my best walking shoes on. I’m doing fine. Still got a couple of miles left.”

“Ok, kewl deal, Agent 32. Let’s keep krushing [sic] those calories [sic] with hard K’s.” *What’s with his hard k kick?*

Just as we came around the bend at the African section entrance/exit, we saw a pair of giraffes and a zebra. Monique raced to the vista point and snapped some pics.

“Yey! I’m so happy that I got to see the giraffes! They are my favorite animals in the zoo.”

“I see.”

“Parkaar, the zoo in Manila didn’t have any. Well, at least not when I went. I was disappointed. I’m so glad to see them here today.”

“How much did the giraffe win the race by, Monique?”

“A neck.”

“How did you know the answer?”

“Really? Really, 33?”

We continued looping back towards Junction Plaza, stopping to see the chimps and lemurs.

“Agent 33, those chimpanzees were so loving of each other, but where were the lions?”

“They had the day off for good behavior.”

“Very funny, Parkaar. It says on the map that there are lions in this area.”

“In this area? On this side of the fence?!”

Monique laughed. “No, silly, back there.” She was now pointing at the brochure map.

“Remember that pen where we saw those men working, Agent 32?”

“Yes, Agent 33.” *I hope all this agent-number talk doesn't get us any unwarranted attention by security.*

“Well, that was the lions' pen, Agent 32.”

“Well, where did they put them?”

“Probably in the other parking lot, Monique.” I guffawed.

Monique was less than amused. “Why did I even ask?” *I knew that she was going to ask that rhetorical question. / He seems quite amused with himself now. Did he sell another copy of his 'Gold' novel? Probably those extra-spatial grains.*

Monique then noticed that I had become lost in my thoughts once again.

“What are you thinking, Parkaar?”

“Well, I can promise you that I wasn’t wondering who might have been at that particular NL [National League] West baseball game back in July of 1992. Not until now.”

“Give that meaningless baseball game a merciful rest, 33. Focus on the here and now, my bana. [bana is Cebuano for husband] Enjoy this amazing zoo.”

“Are you including the humans?” *Zoomans [sic]*

Monique just rolled her eyes and sighed.

Soon we were riding on the tram to the North American exit. The cool air felt perfectly refreshing as the three-car tram quietly rounded the curves and went up and down the Uwharrie hills like a senior citizens’ roller-coaster.

I bought Monique a fuchsia-on-black NC ZOO cap from the gift shop, which was strategically placed just before the exit.

Then we were out of the lioness-less parking lot and heading back on NC 159 to Asheboro. We grabbed some mid-afternoon grub at the Taco Bell on NC 49/US 64.

“The Cantina Bowls here have more food than those in Charlotte. [reference the *Overheard & Overhead* short story] Yey, I like it!”

“Are you sure about that, Monique?”

“Yes, 33, the plates are heavier here.” *Maybe it’s the plastic?*

After we were finished eating, we went dessert-seeking and landed at a strip-mall slot named Di’Lishi. A white, high-school-age lass took our order.

“Say, do you ever get tourists in here looking for the Biltmore House?” I asked.

She pounced. "Are you kidding? All the freakin' time."

"How is Asheboro?" Monique asked.

"Well, this is the coolest spot in town – a frozen yoghurt joint. Asheville's got a happening scene; Asheboro's yet to happen. Asheville's got the Blue Ridge Parkway; Asheboro's got the Zoo Parkway. Asheville's got the Blue Ridge Mountains; Asheboro's got the Uwharrie mounds."

"Well, everyone has been friendly here," I said. "It seems ok. I think you're knocking your town too hard. Just get some **Zoo Are You?** T-shirts printed and away you'll go." *Zoo are you? Who are these freaks?*

"Where are you all from, anyway?" she asked.

"Charlotte," Monique said.

"Yeah." *Why did she say 'Yeah'? That was odd.* She felt her necklace. "You came up for the zoo, right?"

"Yep," we said.

"And, let me guess ... an up and back, never to return again. NC Zoo box: check. One and done."

"We're staying the night, and we'll probably come back again," I said.

"For what?!" she exclaimed.

"Well, I'm always in need of fresh material," I said and smiled.

Monique started to giggle.