

Ray-Flections

Stories I haven't told the wife.

At any given social occasion, a conversation will key my memory of some past occurrence in my life. Being a social animal, I share the story with the group. Many times, my bride of twenty-five years will turn to me and say, "I never heard about that." She then raises her eyebrow and gives me a look that says, "You have been holding back from me, you... you...expletive." Now that we are enmeshed with fandom, these occurrences are food for our fanzine.

I no longer have an excuse for not writing for the fanzine. The week before publication, I get bombarded with, "Why don't you write about that time you...?" You'd think I'd learn to keep my big mouth shut, wouldn't you? Well, she does it out of love, so all I can say is, "Look out world, here come the life experiences of a beleaguered husband. "

The Rookie

Being in charge was not as much fun as I thought it would be. I was doing background investigations for the army for about a year. My boss, a warrant officer, liked my methods of relating with the references. A reference is someone who will say nice things about you when you are being considered for a security clearance. You are being considered for a sensitive position with the army, and the

position requires a background investigation. You fill out a pound of forms about the last 15 years of your life and send it off through channels. Somewhere, someone breaks that pile of paper into leads for the agents in the area you lived, worked, went to school or happened to be where one of your listed references resided.

I worked out of the city of Leavenworth, Kansas. Yep, the place where the army has its prison. I was a staff sergeant and "lived on the economy". We wore civilian clothes and had our office in the downtown post office. That office was responsible for thirteen counties in eastern Kansas and western Missouri. Anyone from that area who was getting a clearance, had part of their paperwork filtered through our office for our personal attention as personnel security investigators. Well, our titles were counterintelligence agents but that was a little too much like the sound of "revenueurs" to the folks in the back country.

I had a less than desirable job of breaking in a new agent. The army keeps training new agents as the older ones keep returning to civilian life. My trainee was from New Hampshire and enjoyed the role the army put him in.

We were introduced and sent out to run some character references in the wayback hills of Missouri. (That's pronounced Missura if you ever want to get served that second cup of coffee.) Off we went through the majestic hills of that fair state. Luckily, I was familiar with the area from past runs and had no difficulty navigating our trusty Operating Room Green Dodge Dart through the correct series of ruts the state called county roads. We pulled up a hill toward a gray two-story

farmhouse with a matching gray cow contentedly grazing in the front yard. I stopped the car about a hundred yards from the house, stuffed my notebook into my back pocket, took off my sport coat, undid my collar button and loosened my tie.

New Hampshire was shocked. This was not the image he felt represented the best of the counterintelligence corps. As he was only a stripe under me, I could only grin at him and say, "Trust me." He must have been raised rich back in the world because the three piece suit he wore easily cost two to three times the clothing allowance new agents were given to start their "careers".

I am a bit ashamed that I didn't warn him about one of the by-products of having a cow in your front yard. I waited with an amazingly straight face as he cleaned off his shoes in some tall grass. I then slung my coat over my shoulder and went up to the torn screen door. As New Hampshire was about to pound on the door, I waved him off and called in a passable southern/northern country voice, "Heilllo the house," From within a dark opening came a less than friendly, "Whoya want?"

New Hampshire reached into his coat and pulled out his credentials. (Small gold badge and all). "We are special agents with the..." That was all he had time to say before a very solid looking door slammed shut in our faces. The indignant look on my partner's face was replaced with one of great concern as we heard "schlick-schlak" from behind the door. Good, the boy was not totally ignorant. He backed off as he realized that it was the sound of a round was chambered in a pump shotgun.

I didn't like pulling rank but there are times when it became necessary. "From now on you let me do the talking or go sit in the car. Understand, Sergeant?" New Hampshire nodded dumbly, and I turned back to the door.

"I'm Sergeant Waldie with the army," I explained. "Billy-Bob Whatever joined the service a while back, and he is being considered for a real good job. He said that

we should talk to you about him cause you knew him quite well."

We waited. A few seconds passed before a thump was heard from inside the wall beside the door. The heavy door opened slowly, and a the voice spoke again. "Billy-Bob? In the army, ya say? Well come on in. Tell the dude to make sure he wipes his feet real good."

After about a half hour talk about Billy-Bob and downing some very fine fresh squeezed lemonade, New Hampshire and I started back to civilization. I didn't say anything for a while. I thought I'd let him mull over what had and what almost had happened.

"First," I said, steering the Dart around a rut the size of Virginia, "the reason for taking off the coat is to let these folks see that you are not carrying a weapon. Strangers are not looked on favorably in these parts. Secondly, you don't flash your gold badge at these people. It is a spitting image of those carried by another group - the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms."

It was a nice, quiet trip back.

Respectfully submitted by

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