

The illusion of gray created  
by an arrangement of  
alternating black and white dots



This is Grayscale #18, a zine for *Intercourse*, and an Obsessive Press Publication #235, from Jeanne Gomoll, 2825 Union Street, Madison Wisconsin 53704-5136. 608-246-8857. ArtBrau@globaldialog.com

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Usually after WisCon, my schedule is completely free for a couple weeks. That's because I desperately need it to be free; I tend to act turn into a hermit after an intense and/or long con with lots of social interactions. But my post-con schedule stays open for another reason too: because for months prior to the convention, I tend not to be able to think much past it. My at-con commitments feel so overwhelming to me that I tend to avoid making others.

Well, this year was different in a number of ways. First of all, I was surprised to find that I didn't experience an overwhelming urge to withdraw. Indeed, the con seems to have actually *re-charged* me this year. A friend suggested that maybe it isn't the intense socializing that does me in, but rather that my involvement in planning and con-organizing burns me out. That may be true, though I've also experienced the same thing after a long visiting-vacation and intense worldcons which have not involved much work on my behalf. So I think there's something about all the good stuff happened to me as a guests-of-honor that may have been instrumental in my post-con energy. For instance, despite the fact that writing my speech was one of the most difficult things I've ever attempted, *giving* my speech was all exhilaration. Nevertheless, for whatever reason, I didn't need any "recovery" time this year, but instead got involved in several enthusiastic conversations about next year's WisCon and even volunteered to get started on a couple projects related to it. Amazing.

The other thing that's different this year is that I've been aware of a big commitment following immediately upon the heels of WisCon 24. My parents' 50th wedding anniversary party is scheduled for June 18, a mere two weeks after WisCon. I designed the invitation a few months ago, along with a gift card and splash screen for the new computer we got them as a gift, but I've been largely uninvolved with the planning of the party. My brothers, sister, and sisters-in-law have been sending email back and forth about it, but I've only had time to apologize and promise to get to work on my part right after the con. My part was to design a bunch of segue graphics for the video my brother is putting together with family photos, and to write a script for a skit we're going to put on at the party. My brothers play the parts of my parents, one cross-dressing for the role, and my nieces and nephews play the parts of my brothers and sister. I thought you all might be amused by the script, so I'm including it in the margins of this zine. There are lots of inside family jokes embedded in it, but the main events described — the only two "family meetings" we ever had, both held to announce and discuss the births of my youngest sister and brother (Julie and Dan) — actually happened.

©

But back to WisCon. A limo was sent to pick me up at home, which was a complete surprise to me. In retrospect, I understood some of the weird things Scott did to maneuver me to be ready to go to the hotel at precisely 10 A.M. Friday morning. And the silly discussion we had about limos a couple weeks earlier is now rather hilarious.

"Look at that limo, Jeanne. What do you think?"

"Pretty ugly," I answered.

**"FAMILY MEETINGS"**

A skit for Inez & Augie Gomoll's 50th Wedding Anniversary Party

by Jeanne Gomoll

Cast:

AUGIE	Danny Gomoll
INEZ	Steve Gomoll
JEANNE	Sara Gomoll
RICK	Amanda Gomoll
STEVE	Eric Gomoll
JULIE	Julie Gomoll (?)
NARRATORS	Julie & Jeanne Gomoll

[JEANNE, RICK and STEVE enter carrying banner with title, "A Family Meeting" and then retreat to corner where they pretend to be extremely well behaved children. They pantomime sharing and smiling and kissing one another on their cheeks, etc. INEZ and AUGIE are sitting side-by-side. JULIE steps in front of them and says:]

JULIE: Jeanne, Rick and Steve were all born two years apart in 1951, 1953 and 1955 – almost as if they were planned. I came along quite a bit later, seven years after Steve was born, in fact, in 1962. My arrival came as a bit of a surprise to dad when mom gave him the news... [Julie walks off-stage]

[INEZ and AUGIE sit side-by-side, holding hands. INEZ sneezes frequently into Kleenex. Each time she sneezes she tosses the used Kleenex over her shoulder. She is visibly pregnant, though AUGIE doesn't seem to notice. AUGIE is smoking a corncob pipe.]

AUGIE: Wow, I can't believe it! Little Stevie will be starting school this year. That means that you and I will get a little more time to ourselves now. I know you've been thinking of going back to work, Inez.

INEZ: We could sure use the money...

AUGIE: And I was thinking maybe we could do a little traveling. I've always wanted to go to Canada. We could drive up to Ontario. And, hey, I've got an idea! I could make cardboard suitcases for us! A different color for each person...

INEZ: [smiling fondly] Yes, and every time the kids ask how long it is till we get there, we'll say "two hours."

AUGIE: And I'll have time to do something with the back yard now! I could lay down some cement for a tennis court, and Stevie would love to have a baseball diamond back there...

"But it's cool, don't you think?"

"No, I think it's pretty ugly. It's stretched all out of proportion," I insisted.

"I bet it's pretty cool inside, though," Scott laughed, and if I remember, I looked at him like he was being crazy. But I didn't catch on.

On Thursday morning, Scott seemed a little nervous, but then he always gets nervous before a WisCon when he's got lots of responsibilities. He gets nervous before parties we throw, too. So I didn't suspect anything out of the ordinary. It was a little weird that he got pale when I decided to make the dip for the party and frost the Swedish Pastry for the Tiptree Bake Sale before I took a shower and got dressed. I remember him standing in the kitchen just watching me as I worked in my night shirt. Knowing he wanted to leave at 10 A.M. — something he'd announced earlier in the week and seemed to think was very important (I figured he had a schedule and needed me to help deliver stuff on time) — I was pretty efficient in getting ready. In fact, I was showered, dressed and packed by about 9:40 A.M. and about to suggest we get going. So I was a little surprised when Scott chose that moment to say he needed a cup of coffee. Ah well, I puttered around and was in my office shutting down the computer when I thought I heard Scott shout, "Your cherry has arrived!" What?!??

Walking slowly to the front door, I saw the stretch limo. Kim Nash, WisCon's chair was standing on the sidewalk. The driver was opening the limo door for me. I stood inside the screen door just gazing at the scene for a few moments. Kim urged me to come out. When I got over my surprise I slid into the limo while Scott locked up the house. Many photos were taken. Inside the limo, I found Charles de Lint and Maryanne, Diane Martin, Kathi Nash, champagne, chocolate, and strawberries. We drove around Madison for an hour, pointing out the sights to Charles and Maryanne. Finally, we arrived at the hotel where more photographs were taken. It was all really fun.

My experience of the convention was narrower than I supposed it would be. It's the first time I've been on so many programs, pretty much back-to-back throughout the whole convention, and so any conreport I write is of necessity going to be more focused on my own panels than is usual for me. Normally I would focus on the readings, on things I heard from the audience and conversations with friends in the hallways and restaurants. Usually I would focus on the behind-the-scenes stuff, but I was pretty much out of the loop in that respect, except for what Scott told me when he came back from meetings with the hotel staff or with other concom members.

Maybe it was a numbers thing, but when I received the list of programming from Debbie and Jane, I looked at it purely from the point of view of the panels' content. I guess when I replied, "Looks great!" I didn't really consider how my schedule was going to work out. I was genuinely surprised when I circled my panels and events on the grid and discovered that I was scheduled on back-to-back programming from 4 P.M. Friday afternoon through Sunday night, not counting parties and sleep, and with the exception of my "roast" Saturday afternoon. As I drifted to sleep Friday night, I thought dark thoughts about my carelessness and about what I had gotten myself into. But as it turned out, what I had gotten myself into was a great deal of fun.

Preparing some notes for each of the panels helped me segue smoothly into each panel, but the main credit is due to some thoughtful panelist selection and a compilation of some really creative panel ideas. I've watched

and listened to Debbie and Jane interact with WisCon attendees who have proposed program ideas, and I'm convinced that they are two of the most talented people at the art of orchestrating all the voices, opinions and ideas that harmonize together on a con "symphony." It IS an art, I think, this process of providing a harmonious range of forums for such a large number of opinionated and variously talented people, not to mention dealing with misunderstandings and people changing their minds at the last moment. Bravo Debbie and Jane!

Scheduling "When It Changed: Feminists Debate the History of Women in Science Fiction," right at the start of the convention on Friday, was a masterstroke. It was exactly the right discussion to make available at the beginning of the con. It provided a thoughtful introduction to the convention to those of us who participated on the panel and for audience members. It seemed to me as if the rest of the panels (well, mine at least) flowed naturally from this one. This was the feminist history 101 panel that several concom members had lobbied for over the past year, and I'm happy to say that it was a lively and interesting panel that could well have gone on for another hour. In fact, it did, as several of us on the panel continued the conversation over dinner. What great panelists too! Justine Larbalestier, Joan Haran, Timmi DuChamp, Nalo Hopkinson, and Eleanor Arnason were fantastic. I look forward to this panel evolving at other conventions under Justine's care, and returning to WisCon next year, as the class panel does.

Opening Ceremonies was great fun, thanks to Tracy Benton and Bill Bodden and their troupe of players. I didn't even have to memorize any lines and I was still allowed some punch lines.

"An Alternative History of Science Fiction," turned out to be one of many reminiscing panels at WisCon 24. Janice Bogstad and I had some fun remembering the things that drew us into SF. I liked the thrust of this panel very much; I don't remember any previous WisCon doing anything like it.

But probably the most fun in programming I had outside of giving my speech was at my "roast" — which was titled, "An Open Letter to Jeanne Gomoll." What a fun panel! I'm still laughing when I think about the stories told by my friends on the panel and in the audience. It was a lovely gift.

"Creativity as Revision" turned out to be rather different from the panel Laurie Marks has traditionally done at WisCon, but I think we captured the spirit of her program, and I was really excited by some of the things we discussed — especially the comparison of creative processes between writing, graphics, jewelry-making and music composing. We panelists created some interesting metaphors and taught one another some useful techniques for getting creative work done. I'm very glad to have been on this panel.

And I was glad of the chance to do a discussion of Suzy Charnas' Holdfast series. I wasn't actually very pleased by my moderation of the Potlatch panel I did on this subject earlier this year, but perhaps the Seattle rehearsal made this evolved version more successful. I'm more inclined to think, though, that its format as a discussion instead of a panel is what made it such an exciting discussion. That, and the fact that we were able to go on past the 1½-hour mark. It's a BIG discussion and we were able to use the extra time. Excellent program decision there.

I was most nervous about the "Building Utopia" panel, because when I got around to reading Brian Aldiss's novel *White Mars*, whose ideas are what inspired this panel, I found I didn't like the book....\*Sigh\* But as it

INEZ: A swimming pool would be nice, too...

AUGIE: Sure, we could dig a hole for the pool right behind the tennis court!

INEZ: We'll do all those things someday, honey, I'm sure we will. But right now I've got some news for you. I'm pregnant again!

AUGIE: No kidding! That's wonderful! What a surprise! Oh sweetheart, I couldn't be happier! We've already got three of the most perfect, wonderful kids in the whole world. They're the most well-behaved, even-tempered kids a parent could imagine! Perfect angels! Who wouldn't be happy at the prospect of another angel!

INEZ: We're so lucky to have such delightful offspring! They all get along so well together and are so helpful around the house.

*[AUGIE and INEZ look over and smile fondly at the kids playing peacefully in the corner. And say together:]*

AUGIE & INEZ: Perfect angels!

AUGIE: We need to celebrate. I think I'll make myself a martini.

INEZ: This will be a surprise to the children. How should we tell them the news?

AUGIE: I've always wanted to have a family meeting,

*[AUGIE and INEZ look at one another, nod in agreement and call out to the kids:]*

AUGIE & INEZ: Children! Family Meeting time!

*[The kids walk toward their parents in a line. All are wearing halos and smiling angelically.]*

JEANNE: Hello mother and father. Would you like me to set the table for dinner?

INEZ: No, thank you dear. We're going to have a family meeting.

RICK: Hello mother and father. I already took out the trash. Would you like me to do anything else?

AUGIE: No thank you, we're going to have a family meeting.

STEVE: Hello mother and father. Would you like me to clean my room? It's pretty clean but I could dust my trophies.

INEZ: No thank you. We're going to have a family meeting.

AUGIE: Your mother and I have a wonderful surprise for all of you.

INEZ: In a few months, you're going to have a new little brother or sister!

KIDS *[all together, all excited]*: Wow! A new baby brother?! A new baby sister!? That's great!

*[AUGIE cups his hand around INEZ's stomach but it rebounds as if his hand has been pushed violently away.]*

AUGIE: Wow! That kid really wants to get out of there NOW!

EVERYONE: *[laughs fondly]*

JEANNE: The new baby can sleep in my room!

RICK: No, he can sleep in our room!

JEANNE: But there's already two of you in your room.

STEVE: There's room! I'd be glad to sleep on the floor. The new baby can have my bed!

*[Kids exit to the corner again. This time they do not play nice. JEANNE and STEVE, especially, seem to be fighting. RICK reads. JULIE climbs onto a chair. INEZ and AUGIE go back to their chairs and sit side by side. Augie picks up a newspaper and reads it. JEANNE (the real one) steps in front of them and says:]*

JEANNE: That was an earlier, more innocent time. We kids grew less angelic. Time passed; seven years passed. I was thinking about college and sending applications to universities. Rick was amazing everyone with his intelligence. Steve and I had developed a bit of friendly rivalry. And Julie was already showing signs of independence and innovation. But once again, mom had some surprising news for us all.

*[JEANNE steps off stage. AUGIE is still reading the newspaper. INEZ is nervously looking at him.]*

INEZ: Augie...

AUGIE: Look at the pictures in the travel section here. They say fishing in Canada is great! I sure would like to see Canada some day... You know...

INEZ: Augie, there's something I want to tell...

AUGIE: You know, we could do it this year! Julie is going to be seven years old and will start school this year and we'll finally have more time to ourselves. Jeanne can baby-sit for a couple days. We can take off just the two of us on a vacation. We haven't gotten away

turned out, the idea of building a Utopia by choosing five aspects of Earth life to jettison, turned out to be an exciting premise, no matter the quality of the novel.

My sister Julie probably wished she'd dug up a few more embarrassing stories about me at my "roast" Saturday afternoon. One of the pieces I read during my reading was the story of how she got the name "Crash," so many years ago. Now, THAT was fun! I've never gotten the chance to read my humorous stories at WisCon, and I enjoyed the opportunity tremendously. I think I secretly want to be a stand-up comedian someday.

I felt more the expert at the panel "Art and the Computer" than I did at any other panel. Nevertheless, I was really impressed by my co-panelists, especially sculptor, Joyce DiBona. We had a great panel and were mobbed afterwards by audience members who had all sorts of technical questions, something that surprised me, but shouldn't have. There is obviously a market for this kind of nuts-and-bolts panel at WisCon, in the same way as there is for nuts-and-bolts writing panels. Debbie scheduled several panels focussing on visual and music artists. Great idea.

My first panel, "When It Changed" reminisced about the general history of feminist SF. My last panel, "The Legacy of Janus/Aurora" reminisced about some very specific history. It seemed we'd come full circle, or maybe full spiral, and all of it pointed to and wove seamlessly into my plans for my speech that night. It was a very satisfying feeling.

I was busy, but as my last panel ended, I felt as if my spirit and ideas had been gathered together, and I felt ready (for the first time in the weeks past that I'd been struggling with writing my speech), and that it was all coming together. I knew then that the words I had written were the right ones. By the time we sat down for dessert, I was no longer nervous, not even when I looked over to see my parents, brothers, and sister at the next table.... In fact, I was probably a lot less nervous than Scott, who had just learned that he would be expected to formally introduce me at the ceremony. Still, I was stunned by the standing ovations, not to mention the human pyramid organized by Spike Parsons after the speeches. By the way, if you're curious about my speech, it is posted on the WisCon web page, <[www.sf3.org/wiscon/](http://www.sf3.org/wiscon/)>.

My only complaint is the inevitable one, the complaint we hear from everyone about WisCon programming, the complaint that we interpret proudly as a compliment. There was too much that I wasn't able to see.... The program descriptions were marvelous; the panelist lineups were intriguing. I wished a half dozen times that I could split myself in two and see other panels. I am crossing my fingers that some of you write con reports so that I can find out what happened in some of those other panels and conversations.

I wish I could have watched what happened when the kids took over the Harry Potter panel. I really wanted to be there for the next iteration of the class panel. (Lyn Palao's syllabus is really intriguing!) And where ARE the boys? I still wonder. And what a coup, to have gotten Jeff Smith talking about his memories of Alice Sheldon! Boy, I sure hate having missed that one. I always love sitting in on readings and I didn't get to hear any this year (except my own). Ah well, I could go on and on, about all the panels I would have liked to have gone to. This was a program PACKED with excellent panels and events. I think Debbie and Jane did a super job. Thank you.

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**Y**ou, Arthur and Lyn called me on my use of the word “conspiracy” to describe the withdrawal of public monies from political art — as dramatized in the film, *Cradle Will Rock*. (I should also have been corrected for my error in naming John Houseman as one of the evil businessmen. I meant to refer to the steel mill owner.) I guess I was a little hasty with that word, “conspiracy.” Certainly the film portrayed a fantasy of a literal conspiracy of industrialists *vs.* artists. A handful of rich guys get together, ironically all dressed up in costume as if they are part of Louis XIV’s court, and agree to withdraw their financial support from all but what they believe are harmless abstract artists. Obviously, I don’t really believe that such a meeting actually happened; but I do think that with or without formal pacts, wealth in this county has been directed away from artists who use their talents to criticize the status quo. Not that this is anything new: this has happened fairly regularly in human history; the guys in charge have always demanded that artists back them up or stay silent. But it seems to me that a slightly different spin has been put on the process in the last century, as big money interests have acquired virtual monopoly possession of communication and entertainment venues. International corporations have not only been able to exert control *against* revolution-minded artists, but *for* the use of the arts to support their interests in ways never before imagined by the most powerful of historical dictators. The final scene in *Cradle Will Rock* was a powerful one for me: the brilliantly lit ads blinking in Times Square which fade in and replace the image of the inspiring, artists’ depression-era street action. That simple segue in time pointed at the way our arts and our very life have come to be flooded with images supportive of wealth and profit, rather than of human rights and passion. The film *Cradle Will Rock*, was a metaphor, but it felt to me as if it accurately described a very real change. Its villains may have been too simply portrayed as a few wicked individuals rather than the institutional forces that actually prevailed, but the sense of what happened in history felt spot-on to me. And as you say, “...it worked.”

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**T**hanks for the recommendation to read Tom Wolfe’s *The Painted Word*. I’ll check into it.

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© Debbie Notkin

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**T**hanks for the news on Guy and his household. I hope Carol is better now and things are working better for them all.  
Good point that some or many of the stories of theft in convalescent homes stem from the poor memories of the patients. I suddenly remember my grandmother’s anger (15 or 20 years ago, just before she died in a convalescent home) about things disappearing from her room that could have had no conceivable value to anyone.

Speaking of my sister doing scary things.... I don’t know if you talked to her at WisCon about her latest traveling stories, but she just got returned from a safari in Botswana and a diving expedition off the South African

together since our anniversary... [*smiles broadly at Inez*] ... yeah, since our anniversary.

INEZ: [*speaks under her breath*] Maybe we’ve been off together a little bit TOO often.

AUGIE: Yeah, this could be great. Since we don’t have to worry about watching the calendar any more [*winks and grins at Inez*]

INEZ: [*under her breath again*] There’s certainly no reason to watch the calendar any more.

AUGIE: Better get those cardboard box suitcase plans out!

INEZ: Augie!

AUGIE: And I’ve been thinking about the back yard again—

INEZ: AUGIE!

AUGIE: Stop interrupting me! I could pour concrete this summer...

INEZ: AUGIE, LISTEN TO ME!

AUGIE: What?

INEZ: We may have to postpone our plans.

AUGIE: Postpone? What do you mean? Why?

INEZ: I’m preggers.

AUGIE: [*stands up, raises arms to sky*] NO!!!! [*Begins coughing*]

[*INEZ pounds him on the back and is redirected by AUGIE to his lower back. He recovers.*]

AUGIE: But HOW? How could this happen?

INEZ: You know damned well how this happens!

AUGIE: But... but... I thought you were done.

INEZ: You thought I was done?

AUGIE: No ... I mean ... Yes. What about the hot flashes?

INEZ: I guess it was just a warm summer.

AUGIE: But when—?

INEZ: Our anniversary, remember! It was YOUR idea!

AUGIE: Well you haven’t had an idea in three years!

INEZ: What about the leather brazier? That was my idea!

AUGIE: You would have preferred cardboard? Damn, who’d have known?

INEZ: BOTH of us, after all these years! Well, what do you think?

AUGIE: It'll be OK. We'll have to make a few changes, but everything will be OK. I suppose we should think about putting an addition onto the house—

INEZ: Not a cardboard one.

AUGIE: No?

INEZ: We'd better tell the kids.

AUGIE: Yeah. Let's celebrate. I need a martini.

AUGIE & INEZ: Kids!

[JEANNE, RICK, STEVE and JULIE troupe in, this time WITHOUT the halos. RICK is carrying a book. JULIE is carrying a phone. They all carry a banner that reads "Another Family Meeting, which they drop when STEVE and JEANNE start arguing.]

JEANNE: Stop pulling the banner!

STEVE: I'm not pulling it! You're slow!

[JEANNE kicks STEVE. STEVE hits JEANNE and then tries to run away. JEANNE trips him and laughs when he falls. RICK watches and then seems to get bored. He opens his book and reads it as he carries it across stage. JEANNE and STEVE run after one another to the corner. Rick sits down and becomes engrossed in his book, "Fixing Up Your Closet." Julie starts jumping from one chair to another.]

INEZ: Julie, be careful! You're going to break your back some day!

JULIE: [JULIE stops jumping and picks up the phone.] Hi, this is Julie. Is this Mr. Gates, my kindergarten teacher? Oh, hi! Say, I've got an idea for using our nap times to turn out a product. I figure we could make an IPO by November...

AUGIE: You can talk to your little friends later, Julie. Hang up, we're going to have a family meeting now.

[AUGIE takes RICK's book away from him and tosses it onto the floor in front of RICK.]

RICK: What—?

AUGIE: Meeting time, Rick. We're going to have a family meeting.

[The kids still aren't paying much attention. JEANNE and STEVE are still fighting. RICK turns a page of his book with his foot and tries to read it while it sits on the floor. JULIE takes out a calculator and starts punching in num-

Cape ... in a shark cage. She brought back some really scary photos of Great White Sharks swimming toward her, jaws wide open. Whew.

WisCon programming was wonderful, Debbie. I think you did a fabulous job. I know you were unhappy about some technical glitches, but I truly think that they were just that, glitches, which didn't touch the overwhelming fact that the content of the program was dynamite and excellent. A couple times during the weekend, I had the feeling that you didn't think I was being sincere in my praise of your work on the program, that awareness of the glitches in the program grid overshadowed almost everything else for you. I'm still struggling to find a way to let you know how very much I appreciate your work. Please accept my thanks, Debbie.

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I wish you luck with Max if you decide to keep him. Two years ago, a friend of mine adopted a pit bull who had apparently been abused by its original owner. My friend put a lot of effort training her dog, whose name I cannot recall right now, went to formal dog-training school, etc., but was never able to overcome the effects of physical abuse. Her veterinarian suspected that the dog had been drugged and was experiencing flash-backs resulting in violent behavior. In the end, the dog threatened my friend, and she accepted her trainer's recommendation to euthanize her dog. It was all very difficult for her. As her trainer told her, no dog needs to be trained to defend their master from an attacker. This behavior is inbred in all dogs. Training a dog to be violent against people for any reason can make a dog dangerous to have around *anyone*, including the owner. Besides which, it's a dreadful thing to do to the dog. It's a shame that pit bulls have gotten the reputation they have and that some people put so much effort into training the dog to transform into the monsters they are supposed to be.

I sympathize with the problem you are having with the new hire, Lori, in terms of her inexperience. It seems to me that this is related to something that often happens in large organizations in which advancement is defined as moving up a hierarchical ladder whose qualification steps are defined by performance in the previous job, not on the basis of experience in the *new* job's skill set. I know you said Lisa is a new writer and that she didn't move up from another position within the company, but bear with me for a moment. I'll make the connection momentarily. It seems to me that large organizations don't value the depth of experience within specific job categories. Superior employees are often defined as those who excel in a certain job and who then move upward and begin the process of mastering the next level. There don't seem to be advancement paths for skilled people who view their career as increasing their skill in one area and have no interest in advancement if it means leaving that skill area. This is something I deal with where I work. I've refused opportunities to promote to positions in which I would no longer be an artist, and have mightily confused a few of my bosses who thought they were offering me a great boon when they recommended me for advancement. In any case, given the assumptions by those who work in a typical hierarchical structure, most people who start a new job may hold a certain base level of skills, but will learn most of what they need to know on the job. Managers aren't used to thinking about the fact that there may be several people at that same level who should be

rewarded more than others at that same level for more highly developed skills. Managers don't usually consider these experienced workers' reactions when someone new is hired at the same level and same salary. The expectations are that qualified people move UP not DEEPER. At least that's been my experience. The hierarchical structure may depend upon the accumulated expertise of skilled technicians and artisans, but it has great difficulty providing differential reward levels for them.

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**B**oy, that must have been hellish — working without experience or advice on a project you thought you were going to be taught in the course of your job, not put in charge of right away. Do you have a sense that this is going to happen again? How did your boss react when you expressed your unhappiness with how it was handled?

You've had a lot of tragedy in your life recently. I wish you a much happier year to come. I admire how you've used the ceremonies around the deaths of your friends to help you and other survivors to deal with loss.

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© Elizabeth Fox

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**W**hen my partner Scott was young, his family, like yours, patronized a dentist who didn't believe in using novocaine. Scott's dentist was an old Marine and thought people needed to be tougher around minor pain and shouldn't resort to painkillers so easily. Scott was very happy to find more compassionate dentists later in life.

Your list of relationship rules (for Ian) certainly shows that everyone's relationship expectations are different. I don't think I could accept a friendship, much less a partnership in which neither person was allowed to challenge the other. This would most definitely not be one of Scott's and my rules. Neither would the rule about not telling the other when one of us was fucking up. Doing it in a tactful, loving way, might be a useful rule, but a rule that required that we actually ignore the fucking up would be awful for us. One of the things that decidedly has never worked in my relationship with my parents is my parent's explicit demand that some things not be talked about (sex, religion and most aspects of politics). All that "rule" had done is to us more distant from one another. So I would tend to resist any "rule" that actually required the creation of such distance.

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© Ian Hagemann

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**C**ongratulations on the wedding. Sorry I didn't say anything about this at WisCon. It turns out that I hadn't actually read my apa before the convention. You are the first person I am aware of who has actually embedded the renewable, limited-term idea into their marriage vows. That's always seemed like an extremely interesting idea to me and I'll be looking forward to hearing how it works in actuality. It certainly seems like a good, common sense.

I loved the story of Bill Bradley at the Pike Place Market fish stand! Thank you. Good for the heroic fish monger! Mayor Schell deserved what he got.

*bers. AUGIE finally pulls a whistle out of his pocket and blows it.*

AUGIE: FAMILY MEETING!!

JEANNE: *[laughing, she looks at Inez as if to make a joke]* Not AGAIN, mom?!

*[INEZ glares at JEANNE.]*

JEANNE: *[ducks her head and quickly sits down]* Ooops.

*[AUGIE sits down next to INEZ and cups his hand on her stomach. He looks puzzled. Then he puts his ear close to her stomach.]*

AUGIE: *[looking up again, but still perplexed]* You're all going to have a new brother or sister ... who REALLY doesn't want to leave your mother's womb. Is that a couch? Do I hear music?

*[INEZ slaps AUGIE 's hand away and glares at him.]*

AUGIE: Do any of you have some suggestions for the new baby's name?

JEANNE: *[kids can pick out their own favorite ugly names.]* Archibald!

RICK: Gertrude!

JULIE: Persephone! *[with that, JULIE jumps off a chair and plows into Steve.]*

STEVE: Damn!

INEZ: WHAT did you say?!

STEVE: I said DAN. How about Dan for a name?

The End

And thank you too, for reprinting your wedding vows/contract. It's a little bit too rule-bound for my taste (for the reasons I gave in my last issue of *Grayscale*), but it certainly shows you've both put a huge amount of thought into the kind of relationship you want to build, which is a lovely thing. I hope you will be joyfully challenged by one another and help one another to grow for a long time. While I was reading your vows, it occurred to me that they read like the beginning of a utopian novel. Now that's a nice way to begin a marriage!

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I really enjoyed the story of your bus ride. I once had the luck to find a really helpful bus driver, too. This happened only a few days after I first moved into Madison. I hadn't yet used the bus system and was unfamiliar with how it worked. In addition, Madison's layout was mostly a mystery to me. A friend and I wanted to go to a movie and after scrutinizing the bus schedules we waited at what we thought was the appropriate corner. Many buses passed us by, but never the bus we were waiting for. More buses passes us by, some of them more than once. Finally, one stopped and the driver leaned toward us and asked us where we were going. "I've passed you a couple times. Which bus are you waiting for?" he said. We told him and he laughed. "You're on the wrong side of the street," he said. "You want to go *east*, not west! Climb in. I'll take you there. I'm done with my shift and have to take my bus back to the garage anyway." So he drove us right to the theater's door and told us where to stand to get a bus back home after the movie was over. And along the way he pointed out buildings and streets he thought we should know, and in general, gave us a tour of the city. He was great. What a nice thing to happen to a couple of confused newbies in town. It's probably one of the things that made me love Madison right from the start.

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Thanks for working on the Green Room again, Kerry. I didn't see much of you or the room because I didn't seem to have much time between panels, and when I did, my fellow panelists had usually already departed for the program. But from what I hear, people were very happy with the room.

Beautiful photos! I envy you your trip to England. I'm getting an itch to do some more traveling, too. This year I think Scott and I may head up to the North Shore

(the coast of Lake Superior in Canada) and spend some time camping underneath waterfalls.

Interesting comments about *American Beauty*. I wasn't bothered as you were by Spacy's character's death. I've argued the point with a few people here in Madison (and haven't gotten any of them to agree with me yet, but ah well, here's one more try:) — I think that the ending to *American Beauty* is actually a happy one. Despite the fact that he died right after having finally gotten his life together and feeling good about having understood some things about himself, the achievement of self-understanding was such a good thing, that it didn't matter that he died. It was important simply that he get to that point. Most people never get there. The movie, for me, was about consumerism and how it destroys people's lives when substituted for integrity and respectful relationship as life goals. Getting untangled from the values pushed by a consumer society is the struggle which Spacy's character wins and which this daughter and the boy next door are still learning to identify (but at least has a sense of which way to look). The wife and daughter's girlfriend (and Spacy's lust object) don't even have a sense that there's a battle to be fought. Their goal is to become the best consumers possible. I liked this movie a lot.

You ask why I wouldn't want to invite friends to participate in Scott's and my commitment to one another. I think the question really should be why does anyone *chose* to invite a larger community to participate in their vows? I can be and have been convinced by individuals that this is a good idea for them personally, that they freely invite the participation of others in the celebration and enforcement of their specially crafted vows. But most people don't think about it much, and seem to take it for granted that exchanging vows in front of (and for, and to, and maybe with) a larger community is a natural part of their commitment. The idea that promises between two people should be the business of a larger community is the essence of what is generally referred to as a "marriage" and "family" in this culture. Promises made without the audience and approval of the state aren't considered real marriages. I don't believe that this should be the case.

Society has several ways of encouraging people to go along with a public ceremony. Young girls are taught that marriage, and more specifically a wedding ceremony should be their main goal in life. Young men are encouraged to accept the fact that one of the strings attached to the percs of a marriage is that they will have to go along with their fiancé's desire for



ceremony. That's the cliché that everyone repeats anyway. Everyone in the bride and bridegroom's family has a role in the ceremony and by their expectations, add to the pressure on a couple to go along with tradition.

Society gains power over individuals when they make their vows to one another in public ceremonies. The state and religious organizations are in control of the substance of those vows and the definition of the marriage (for instance, that a marriage cannot exist for a same-sex couple, for more than two people, or for less than a lifetime). The state and the religious institution can make certain demands upon the couple in terms of their responsibility as a couple to the state and the religion. Everyone who participates in the ceremony may feel that a promise has been made to them as well as between the two individuals getting married. In fact, in my mind, the biggest promises in public ceremonies get made to people *other* than the couple. The couple has already made implicit promises to one another before the wedding.

I chose not to make promises to anyone other than my partner. A wedding ceremony is a lot more than a party in my mind. A party would be fine; I have no problems with sharing my happiness about Scott's and my partnership with others. But a ceremony, the formalization of the act of making promises to one another, is Scott's and my business alone. I am fundamentally opposed to state, church or community involvement in that part of my life.

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We're very quickly moving toward a system in which criminals will be held responsible for the cost of their incarceration and more, which is something you say you are in favor of. Prisoner populations are frequently being tapped by big business as cheap labor, even slave labor, and will become more necessary for their ever-increasing profits. I do not agree with you that criminals should be expected to pay for their own incarceration. I would prefer that prisons stay very, very expensive — so expensive, in fact, that there

would be constant pressure to figure out ways to rehabilitate and educate inmates so that when they are released they would be more likely to turn into productive citizens. I would prefer that incarcerating criminals *never* get profitable, which is what it seems to me we are heading towards. In a world in which prison labor is profitable, there will be less motive to improve the conditions — poverty, racism, unequal education, etc. — that create criminals in the first place. After all, to ameliorate those conditions would be to threaten the source of slave labor and threaten the profitability of industry that depends upon it. In a world in which prison labor is profitable, there would be less motivation to reduce the numbers of people in prison or consider the racial and class prejudices that send some people unfairly to prison. I would prefer that incarcerating criminals stays very expensive indeed, to make it much less easy to think about solving our problems by locking away more and more end-results of our *real* problems.

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**S**o, do you know now how your new lover prefers you to ask (or not) for more time with them? I liked (and recognized) the way you described that little shock of realization that giving someone what we want is not necessarily what they want or need. I think parents have to deal with that all the time: of wanting to give their child something that they themselves desperately wanted from their own parents, and finding out that it's a whole new ballgame with their own kid. The kid will inevitably want something else entirely and most often will not even understand why the parent keeps trying to give them this other thing.

Excellent comments to Doug Barbour on the impacts of globalization upon the poor.

I wrote a comment to both you and D. Potter about your response to my *Cradle Will Rock* stuff.

—Jeanne Gomoll  
8 June 2000