

# Madison foursquare

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This issue of *Madison Foursquare* is brought to you by Scott Custis and Jeanne Gomoll, who live at 2825 Union Street, Madison, WI 53704.

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This is **Madison Foursquare #99**. *Madison Foursquare* was created using a Mac Studio with InDesign, Illustrator and Photoshop, all CC 2025, and printed on a Ricoh Aficio CL7200 color printer.

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January 2025 for *Turbo-Charged Party Animal #463*

## Story Slam!

[JG] I've been telling **Elizabeth**, telling you, and telling myself for a quite a while that I want to learn how to TELL stories (as opposed to writing stories). I don't actually have a bucket list, but if I DID keep one, doing stand-up comedy would probably be on it. One of the things I enjoy most about writing humorous stories is when friends tell me how they cracked up laughing while reading my pieces. Better yet: SEEING someone laugh as they read one of my stories. Better still: reading a story aloud and HEARING LAUGHTER punctuate the punchlines. Other than telling stories to friends during casual conversations, I've never done a formal storytelling without a manuscript in hand.

But I did try once. In 2013 I began listening to podcasts produced by The Moth ("True Stories Told Live") and ambitiously suggested a Moth-like storytelling panel to the Seacon program committee for the 2014 Worldcon in London. Since I was one of their guests of honor, they obliged me. In preparation for the panel, I read and re-read "Barbie's Inferno" to myself. Once the panel began, I laid the manuscript aside – intending to refer to it as little and briefly as possible, and ONLY look at it if I forgot a phrase or a plot turn. But when it was my turn and I glanced at the page to get started, I was unable to release the sheets of paper. I couldn't bring myself to put the written story onto the table. I ended up reading it aloud. The audience seemed to enjoy the story, but I knew I was being really unfair to the other panelists, which included **Andy**, who'd signed up for the program believing that they would be required to perform their story, not read it. I felt cowardly and defeated. I didn't think I'd ever be able to memorize the text well enough to confidently tell a story without notes.

Scott and I had enjoyed Elizabeth's storytelling years before she moved away from Madison. She told a few stories at one of our New Year's parties and ever after, Scott and I have repeated the last line of one of them at appropriate moments in our lives: "Be bold! Be bold! But not *too* bold!" Most of the stories she tells are reinterpreted folk tales and, at first, I didn't think those stories had much in common with the autobiographical kind of stories I like to tell. But when **Elizabeth** moved back to Wisconsin a few years ago, Scott and I began attending some of her storytelling performances. I admired how confidently she delivered delightful tales; it was clear that she was not reciting memorized lines. And then, after one of her performances, she revealed her secret: Elizabeth does not invent her stories by first writing them out, but

I wish I could change into a bird and escape to Cloud Cukoo Land.

instead, she develops them verbally. In preparation for a telling, she tells and retells the story out loud to herself – making changes both while preparing and during repeated performances. Elizabeth’s explanation completely shifted my understanding about how I need to prepare to tell a story.

And then **Pat** read “Barbie’s Inferno” at TurboCon. It was the first time I’d ever heard someone else tell a story I’d written. Somehow Pat’s reading freed the story in my mind from the form it had been set, mostly unchanged, for such a long time. It was a revelation. I began telling the story of “Barbie’s Inferno” to myself – while I swam laps, while driving – and it began to evolve and transform into a looser, livelier story. But I did not try to commit this new revised version into a new document. I thought that one day, maybe I would again try to TELL this story, rather than read it. I’m saving it for a special occasion, for when I get better at doing this new thing....

Enter Elizabeth again: “Did you know, Jeanne, that the Mad City Story Slam meets once a month at Mother Fools Coffee Shop in Madison?” She went on, explaining that Mad City Story Slam stories were limited to 5 minutes, that the audience was very generous, that there was no voting, and that it was a very friendly, non-competitive event. My ambition to tell a story in public was suddenly attached to a possible date, time, and place. At one of Elizabeth’s performances an audience member, who was aware that Elizabeth had previously run a story-telling workshop for young people, asked her if she would consider doing a workshop for adults. “I don’t know,” said Elizabeth. “Maybe.” I jumped in. “I’d be interested in signing up for that!” And voilà! Elizabeth scheduled the first storytelling workshop for adults on January 11, 2025 at the Hedberg Public Library in Janesville, where Elizabeth works as a librarian.

In preparation for the workshop, I began preparing a story, one about how I almost missed my high school graduation while glazing a pot, and was hurrying to finish before I lost access to the ceramics lab, when I noticed that the clock had stopped. I panicked. Only five minutes remained till the ceremony began. So, I showered, jammed my bare feet into platform heels, and pulled my graduation gown over naked body before joining my classmates. Hilarity ensues. I’m pretty sure I reprinted this story in the apa. You may recall it. It’s a short story that I thought would be fun to tell and get feedback on during the workshop.

In the meantime, I decided to attend the January 3 Mad City Story Slam at Mother Fools. Elizabeth couldn’t

join us. But I wanted to check things out, just listen, see how things worked ... I wasn’t planning to get on stage; I didn’t want to put any pressure on myself, you know. I wouldn’t sign up to tell a story, not this time. So, Scott and I arrived at Mother Fools just in time to snag the last little table and two chairs. Scott bought a coffee for himself and a hot chocolate for me. One of the hosts came over to our table with a clipboard and asked me if I wanted to tell a story, and I said “Oh no, I think I’ll just listen this time. Maybe next month!” He smiled and told me to find him if I changed my mind. And then the show began. Three people climbed up onto the small stage and told short amusing stories. The audience was kind and generous. People laughed and applauded enthusiastically. That’s when I leaned over to Scott and said, “You know, I think I can do that.” During a break I found the host and told him I had changed my mind. I *would* like to tell a story that night. Well, I’d already prepared a story. I knew it ran about 5 minutes, so when my name was called, I walked up onto the stage to tell the story of my high school graduation. I got a huge round of applause when the host told the audience that this was my first time. I felt as if my face glowed bright red, but Scott said it didn’t. My heart raced and my voice shook a little, but people laughed. A lot. And they applauded. It was fun. Scary fun. But definitely fun.

A few days after the Mad City Story Slam, a Facebook ad popped up with an advertisement of an event in Madison on Monday (just two days after Elizabeth’s workshop! Facebook works in mysterious ways). The Moth apparently runs open mike storytelling events in Madison once a month—a different Monday every month. I had no idea this has been happening. Thank you, Facebook. I have been aware of The Moth’s Grand Slams to which the highest rated storytellers are invited, because I’ve heard Grand Slam recordings on Moth podcasts. But I hadn’t realized where and when the “feeder” storytelling events happened. Well, apparently some of them happen just a few miles west of our home, at the High Noon Saloon on East Washington Avenue. The theme for January’s Moth was:

**“Reset:** *Prepare a five-minute story about a fresh start. Clean slates and wet paint. When the tide came in and the sandcastle returned to sand. Expunging your past reputation and going back to square one. Cutting bangs after the big breakup. Whether you changed your zip code, career, or outlook on life, tell us about a time you felt new. Tomorrow is another day.”*





Mad City Story Slam audience at Mother Fools Coffee Shop



Right away I knew I had a very appropriate story that would fit perfectly in this Moth theme: my story of how – when I moved to college – I pretended to be a confident, outgoing person instead of the shy, quiet, bookworm I’d been known as in high school. I dramatically killed a wasp and then put on an “act,” pretending to be confident and friendly. A short time later I realized that I’d completely fooled my new housemates. A little more time passed and I realized that I had in fact changed my identity, and had actually turned myself into a confident and outgoing person. I was no longer pretending. Expectations are a powerful things. By *Pretending to Become*<sup>1</sup> I turned myself into someone that my fellow high school students and teachers might not have recognized. I know I’ve reprinted this story in an issue of *Madison Foursquare*, so you might remember reading it.



IG on The Moth stage



Storytellers at The Moth: Reset night

Elizabeth’s first storytelling workshop happened a couple days before The Moth event, so I used the opportunity to work on my story for the Moth. Eight of us convened in the fireplace room at Hedberg Library. I took a few notes as Elizabeth introduced herself and her philosophy of storytelling and then three of us told stories. Elizabeth told the story we all heard her tell at Turbocon. A young woman told the sad and sort of terrifying story of the death of her beloved dog, and I told my “Pretending to Become” story. I came away from the workshop with some ideas for how to improve it, especially the ending. I’ll return to Janesville for the next three storytelling workshops. Thanks Elizabeth!



The Moth audience at High Noon Saloon

<sup>1</sup> *Pretending to Become* is the title of my book, still unpublished, still being edited, but which will eventually come out!

Two days later, I put my name into a bag at The Moth and was picked for the sixth slot. It was a good thing I'd practiced and timed this story. I had told the story to myself several times after Elizabeth's workshop (again, while lap swimming and driving) until I could tell it within five minutes. At the Moth, they're very strict about time. One of the show-runners rings a bike bell once when five minutes has passed, and then multiple times if the storyteller officially runs over and hits the six-minute mark. I finished just a few seconds after the short but very loud five-minute bell was rung. It discombobulated me a bit. I forgot the perfect phrase with which I had intended to end my story. But other than that, it went really well. We storytellers were judged and awarded points and at the end of the show our scores were added up and ranked. My score put me in the middle of the standings, which made me very happy. I thought the judges were very generous and the audience wildly enthusiastic. It was enormously fun to tell my story at the Moth. And again, it was Scary fun.

This whole experience has got me thinking a lot about how a written story differs from a story that is told. To start: Who is the audience? The audience for my written stories has mostly been made up of friends and fans who already know something about me, and that allows me the luxury of assuming that some of my history and references are understood. (For instance, I'm relying heavily on the fact that you all know things about me as I write *this* story.) However, when I tell a story to a live audience made up mostly of strangers, I need to provide background and definitions (as briefly and entertainingly as possible). It was instantly clear with the first story I told at Mother Fools, that I didn't have to guess how my stories might be received as I do when I write a story. A live audience reacts instantly, and I can tell immediately if my story is landing the way I want. I can tell if I am confusing people and need to explain. And I can tell when I've caught their interest and they like where the story is going, which allows me to emphasize the part of the story to which they're reacting. It's all fascinating. I'm looking forward to learning from experience, and also from watching others tell stories.

Scott took a video of my performance at the Moth. I didn't realize that I moved my arms and hands around so much when I tell a story. Maybe this doesn't come as big news to some of you. Scott laughed at my surprise. But really, I've never noticed this thing about myself. I had sort of thought that figuring out how to use movement in my storytelling was

something I might be able to learn from Elizabeth, whose performances have always seemed beautifully and gracefully choreographed. But apparently, I've already got a head start in that regard. You can see me mugging in the photographs I copied from Scott's video on these pages.

Onward! The theme for February's Moth is "Love hurts," and I've already begun practicing a story. Elizabeth's second workshop will again fall two days before the Moth event, so I will be able to work on my Love Hurts story then.

## Comments

### Cover

[SC] Beautiful stamps, beautiful cover Elizabeth.

[JG] I loved how the characters on the cover interacted with the letters. The princess, at the bottom of the page, seems to have spilled the letters and is trying to recover their order (just as we finally see "T U R B O 462.")

### Pat Hario

[SC] If you are going to have to live with a compulsion to collect things, collecting cookbooks is not a bad one, in my opinion. I think cookbooks are interesting and can be useful. Jeanne can tell you about my weird tendency to page slowly through cookbooks even though I don't cook. Having grown up with stews and casseroles, I thought Party Chicken sounded okay. Those Deviled Cheese Snacks are maybe a bit edgier. Is dried beef the same thing as, what we used to call, chipped beef? This snack sounded like a perfect work treat for a bunch of co-workers you felt very ambivalent about.

RYCT me and handcuffs, I leave it to your imagination. Whatever you come up will be more interesting than what actually happened.

Jeanne and I just saw *A Complete Unknown*, about the early career of Bob Dylan. It's very, very good. Even if you're not so much of a Dylan fan, it's a fine movie. Personally, I thought Chalamet made Bob's songs sound better than Bob did.

[JG] I think the common use of celery in mid-1900s American recipes was a nod toward its use in gourmet French cooking. The mixture of celery, carrots, and onion (or *mirepoix*) is used as a base for soups, stews, and sauces. I've seen *mirepoix* referred to (in American Test Kitchen pubs, for instance), as the "holy trinity" of French cooking. *Mirepoix* is the main part of a

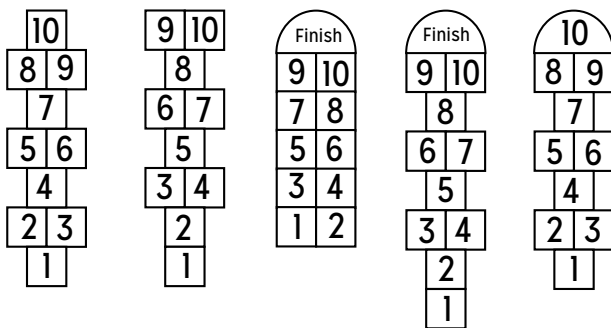


vegetarian gravy I've made for Thanksgiving dinner for the past couple years, and I can testify that it is incredibly tasty. I liked it better than turkey gravy.

I can't help you with the one-sided toast thing though.

I like the idea of collecting sand samples from beaches. I think I'd save smaller amounts though – little vials that held just a couple teaspoons. They'd make a cool display. I like to pick up postcards with art created by local artists when we travel.

I remember there being several hopscotch designs. When I was a first- and second-grader at St. Anne's Catholic Elementary School, a debate raged between three nuns as to which design should be considered the official hopscotch layout for lunchtime-break hopscotch tournaments. Various kid factions (mostly in grades above mine) – acolytes of the feuding nuns – each supported the design favored by their mentor nuns. Sometimes girls snuck out early in the day to the playground while they were supposed to be going to the bathroom. They erased one design and replaced it with a different one. I recall enjoying the spectacle of chalk warfare, but I wasn't a combatant. Not my hill to die on. But your use of the phrase, "only acceptable layout," makes me suspect that you might have been a fierce combatant if you'd attended my school. By the way, I just Googled "hopscotch designs" and see that there are indeed several versions....



### Ruth & Jim Nichols

[SC] RYCT **Elizabeth**, I drove a boxy little stick-shift Ford Fiesta when I met Jeanne. I even taught her to drive it, although these days she denies that she remembers how to do it. I maintain that once you get a feel for it, you never forget. Like riding a bicycle. It's unlikely we will ever test that theory because the osteoarthritis in my knees means that owing a manual transmission car again is not a good idea for me.

[JG] We laughed reading "I hope you aren't too put out that you were beaten to *Turbo* first position." **Pat** beat

all of us to first place! Scott's and my zine didn't even come in third; we fell way back in the issue this time (#12!). Work on my sister-in-law's book kept me from working on the apa till the week before deadline. And then we had a bit of a problem with our printer. Copies were coming out with vertical black lines that gradually grew thicker as week progressed. I carefully followed all the trouble-shooting suggestions, cleaning rollers and various other interior bits, but couldn't fix the problem until I realized that the printer needed a new black drum unit – the first time it's needed replacing since we bought the printer, more than 20 years ago. Finding a replacement was a bit of a pain because Ricoh is neither selling nor supporting our printer any longer and the only source for replacement parts is eBay. I'm stocked up on toner and developer, and even have drum units for color, but I didn't have a *black* drum unit. So, while we waited for the part, we sent a file to Office Depot to print our zine last week. Nice paper, but – whew! – expensive!

I also indulged in making apocalyptic art following the election. I'm going to use the result for February's *Turbo* cover. But, as you said, making apocalyptic art didn't help my mood either.

### Steven Vincent Johnson & Darlene P. Coltrain

[SC] For what it's worth, Steve, I rarely give money to panhandlers. We are unlikely to see any progress on relieving inequality in America over the next four years. Apparently, a bare majority of Americans don't really care. However, if you are interested in a short but pointed examination of poverty in America, I recommend reading *Poverty by America* by Matthew Desmond (mentioned again below.)

[JG] I'm seeing more frequent references to the declining birth rate, especially in connection with women's empowerment which, since it negatively affects economic growth, needs to be combated. We already see Republicans encouraging marriage, encouraging early marriage, discouraging divorce, and rewarding couples who have children, especially multiple children. I expect to see Incel groups adopting some of these talking points. But China didn't have much luck getting people to have more children, and I suspect that conservative, right-wingers will do no better. But in the meantime, I expect to see a lot of criticism aimed at people, especially women, who choose to be childless.

## Jae Leslie Adams

[SC] RYCT **SteveSw**, wouldn't it be nice to have a train option from Madison to Minneapolis/St. Paul? Today there is only one daily train from St. Paul to Duluth, but something called the Northern Lights Express has been proposed that would offer four trips per day from the Twin Cities to Duluth. A trip from Madison to Minneapolis and switching to the Express might work smoothly enough to make it a practical option to driving. Maybe someday.

[JG] I will be interested to hear what you think of the movie, *Wicked*, part 1, since you will have the source material so recently reviewed in your mind. I wrote more about the movie at the end of this zine, see below.

Learning history from movies: I empathize. The good part about getting interested in history via movie plots is that the mostly fictional stories frequently make me curious and lead to somewhat more reliable sources. Nevertheless (the bad part) is that my mind is full of fictionalized characters and conveniently rearranged chronologies.

I love your story of working at the cemetery. Thanks for posting it!

## Greg Rihn

[SC] *Alcina* sounded like a great time while the *Christmas Cantata* was very cool for doing the sing-along afterwards. I'm not a singer myself, but I can see how someone who can sing might love having a chorus and orchestra back up. How often is that likely to happen?

RYCT **Kim** on cars, I agree with you that most SUVs are uggo. Our Kia Niro, at least, is a compact, so it's not so obnoxious. Not only have station wagons effectively disappeared, but sedans these days can be really stingy with trunk space. I think some of them couldn't handle one large suitcase (sometimes a trunk separate from the passenger cab is desirable. What will TV writers do when sedan trunks are no longer large enough to hold a hostage or a dead body?) People may feel forced to choose SUVs or a car with a hatchback configuration just to be able to haul groceries home. We are a one car household, so our car needs to be able to carry a few things. Even so, our compact gets pretty snug sometimes. Another thing about SUVs is that they are notoriously top-heavy. If you have to drive off the road for some reason, the first thing an SUV wants to do is flip over which is very unhelpful in

an emergency situation. Most of the Subaru owners I have known are happy with their cars and I think you will be, too. We might have chosen a Subaru too but they had very few hybrid options when we were shopping.

## Georgie Schnobrich

[SC] Excellent essay on getting a Voice. We, here in *Turbo*, are lucky to have you conversing with us.

The Yule Cat image is terrific.

[JG] I loved your poem about Persephone leaving and Madam de Winter moving in. Much better than the baby and old man traditionally portrayed in cartoons about the new year.

I remember listening to Susan Stamberg, the first female host on NPR. Critics complained, citing the same nonsense about women's voices being inappropriate ... not strong enough, or too loud, or too abrasive, or too high-pitched ... or too *something*. But I loved Stamberg's voice, and pretty soon everyone realized that she was a national treasure. And then gradually we got used to women's voices reading the news, but those critics moved on to lambasting women who starred in superhero movies and video games, or any women who did something in public that had mostly been done by men in the past.

I second Scott's sentiment. We here in *Turbo* are lucky to be able to hear your voice.

The Yule Cat may not be your creation, but it certainly reminds me of your style. Scary!

## Catie Pfeifer

[SC] Thank you for the detailed review of *The War of the Rohirrim* movie. I'd seen ads for it, but I didn't take it very seriously, so your review was informative. I have never looked into the *Lord of the Rings* appendices, so I have no understanding of this Middle Earth history, but it sounds like fun. If you got some cosplay inspiration out of it, that would also be totally cool.

RYCT me, Jacob may be on to something. Some months I think I'd like a "curated" version, too.

[JG] Happy New Year to you too ... or, as I have heard Scott saying: "we wish you the best possible year under the circumstances."

Your comments about *Lord of the Rings* and Rohan reminded me of a fascinating bit of information I read (somewhere! Sorry, can't remember where.) about the actors hired as horseback riders for Rohan's big

gallop-down-the-hill-to-war scene in Peter Jackson's movie. Apparently, they had a really hard time finding enough male horseback riders. On the other hand, there was an abundance of women equestrians. So, most of the horse soldiers in the movie are actually women wearing beards. Cool.

### Lisa Freitag

[SC] I hope putting your Christmas tree up (even doing it by yourself) helps to get you into the seasonal spirit.

In the past, we have put up our "candle" Christmas tree (it fits on a table) in time for Thanksgiving dinner at our house with Jeanne's family. We didn't this year because hosting up to 15 adults for a sit-down dinner took up so much space, that we didn't want to further crowd things by putting up the tree. Since that was the last social event we hosted for the year, we chose not to put the tree up after Thanksgiving just for ourselves. Maybe we will have to put in a bit more effort next year to get the tree up. It does help get us into the Christmas spirit.



[JG] I've chosen not to think about particular disasters awaiting us with Trump's return, so I instead feel a sort amorphous dread about the coming years. I decided very deliberately not to engage with or even think too much about any of Trump's specific plans/threats or appointments, and to instead wait to see what he and his cronies are actually able to do. I expect that I will soon see myself as part of a resistance coalition, but I think it's really important that we not start flailing (or worse, negotiating and bargaining in advance) against likely or possible scenarios. I fully expect that awful and real horrors await us, and that it important to keep our powder dry for the actual battles.

### Andy Hooper

[SC] Awesome TurboCon article. It certainly helped that the weather cooperated so well. We had excellent fall weather just when we needed to be outside (the Union Terrace, the Farmers Market tour, the cemetery tour, **Jeanne Bergmann's** croquet/dinner event.) The less desirable weather held off until we were indoors. It was nice to have a thunderstorm on Saturday night to amuse West

Coast attendees. That was all planned, of course. Jeanne programmed the weather, too.

The gap in programming following **Luke** and Julie's event on Saturday night was deliberate. We were thinking folks could organize their own "after party," if desired, while the rest of us helped clear out of the community room and get some rest for a full day on Sunday.

One correction regarding the GoH spelling bee on the Union Terrace: **Steve Swartz** was also a contestant.

Your list of possible TurboCon II events is very impressive. It will be tough making choices, except for the BBQ at your house; that's got to happen.

RYCT us, I graduated from high school in 1974 and I remember it as the most optimistic time of my life. The Viet Nam war was winding down, Watergate was closing in on Nixon, we were starting to take action to improve the environment and movements like civil rights and feminism were broadly popular. When Jimmy Carter was elected in 1976, I thought we would never again elect a shitbag President like Richard Nixon. Yet, we have been on a mostly steady downhill decline since a mean, doddering, washed-up actor was inexplicably elected President in 1980. These days I'm very pessimistic.

[JG] What a fabulous TurboCon report! It was so much fun to read. I'm curious to see how your non-Turban letter-writers react.

I was indeed attracted to your idea for a con made up of "a series of meals and games in various locations, plus a publishing project," not only because it seemed like that would be an ideal format for a small gathering of apa members, but also because I like the idea of setting up new things. In my life I've been most keen doing things like working on a new kind of fanzine (*Janus*), planning a new kind of convention (WisCon), and pioneering events at WisCon like the Gathering. In my professional life, I excitedly championed computers for the DNR graphics department, and later, started my own business. But I am also much too aware of how some of those experiments ended up transformed into long-lived institutions, of which I have frankly had enough. And so, as we talked, Scott and I several times said (probably too often) that we did not want to commit ourselves to planning a series of TurboCons. Nevertheless, I love how this one turned out.

I was not alone in being excited about the idea that **Greg** expressed: "each *Turbo* member attending ... should take a turn live reading or otherwise performing an



item that could or would be a *Turbo* submission.... Then the audience can comment live.” This was my second favorite thing about TurboCon, second only to reuniting with and talking with so many old and new friends.

But I ignored a few of your suggestions, hoping that I had correctly interpreted them as jokes, not serious proposals. Like your proposal that we present “the Freitag Award, which consists of a \$19.73 honorarium & summary expulsion from the con.” You may also remember serving up this ambitious notion:

*“Perhaps the event might be mounted outdoors in a series of tents, which might take all sorts of unexpected forms. In one, a labyrinth of clubzines, creaking walls made of Rune and Cube and Anvil and The Texas SF Inquirer, full of feuds and fan funds and other dead ends. In another, the Wishing Mimeo – write your wish upon the stencil, put it on the drum, turn the crank – and all our dreams are perfectly reproduced, and in three colors! Then in the third tent – the wild Pickersgill!”*

I discarded this as a fever dream, inspired by your reading of Erin Morganstern’s *Night Circus*. But I found these suggestions of yours inspiring:

*“My preference for TurboCon I would be to emphasize things we did at summer camp – games, scavenger hunts, sing-a-longs, archery. Some kind of craft project, like a cover made entirely from Popsicle sticks. Campfire skits! Ghost Stories! Actually, in all seriousness, I would love to have a storytelling event like the ones Elizabeth attends – which could turn into a one-shot with a little editorial effort. ... The more elements of the County Fair we can import for our weekend, the better. If locals were motivated to, say, make a set of pies for consumption at the convention, I’d be very happy to test them all and award one the Roscoe Ribbon of Excellence. No, don’t thank me: I always try to give back to those I left behind.” A lot of that did happen!*

For a while, several *Turbo* members demonstrated that they were having difficulty letting go of expectations that TurboCon needed to resemble a traditional con. Questions about a dessert banquet, hotel blocks, hotel meeting spaces, a hospitality suite, and Guest of Honor speeches came up a few times. I began publishing the schedule pdf somewhat in defense, but mostly as a tool



to help us re-imagine our small convention as taking a very different shape from the hotel-centered cons with which we have all grown familiar. I steadfastly resisted scheduling concom meetings. Well, it did turn out to be necessary to publish a small pocket program containing a list of events with phone numbers, addresses and directions. I loved your suggestion that satisfyingly subverted the traditional guest-of-honor role – a spelling bee to determine the goh, who was saddled with no obligations but instead was honored by their friend with testimonials on the last day of the con. Yay **Luke!**

Scott and I became a little nervous about numbers, i.e., attendance numbers, as planning progressed. We really didn’t want to issue blanket invitations to the dozens of former *Turbo* members and be caught unprepared to host more folks than could be accommodated. Event hosts (**Hope** and **Karl**, **JeannieBe**, **Luke** and Julie) were already anxious, demanding to know how many people to expect, how many people would want to eat, how many *chairs* would be needed. But, as it turned out, we could have easily invited a few more people. After the con we realized that we had forgotten to mention the con to a couple Madison-area fans who had once been *Turbo* members. But it all worked out, I think. I’m happy. And I’m looking forward to how you transform the idea in Seattle for the next TurboCon.

### Carrie Root

[SC] Jeanne and I had a quiet holiday season, but still managed to get out a bit. We had a very good dinner at a fancy steakhouse downtown on Christmas Eve. That’s kind of notable because Madison tends to shut down tight on Christmas Eve. Even grocery stores and bars close early. Very few restaurants (or businesses of any sort) are open in the evening. It was interesting to be out and about when so much of the city was quiet. After dinner we took a drive down Monroe St. A few years ago, the neighborhood started a decorating trend — displaying giant, inflatable Santas in front of businesses and private homes. We drove the length of the street, with Jeanne counting Santas on North

side, and me counting Santas on the South side and I think we came up with a total between 70 and 80 nearly identical giant Santas.

On the 27th we went to see *Wicked* at a swanky new movie theater in Milwaukee



with Jeanne's brother Dan and his wife, Kelly. The place had a beautiful full bar, escalators, fancy new recliner seats and an army of wait staff to take and deliver food and drink orders at our seats in the theater. Their smallest soda, popcorn and a coffee (in an actual cup with a saucer) was \$20.00. Dinner afterwards at a Café Hollander was also good and less ritzy.

On New Years Eve, we had tickets to a traveling Broadway revival of *Funny Girl*, at the Overture Center. That was fun, too. Our program informed us that four regular cast members had been replaced by understudies. They must have had flu outbreak or something. The show got underway on time but came to a full stop and the curtain came down, about 20 minutes in. We were told there was "an illness" backstage. The show was halted for ten or fifteen minutes, and when it started up again there was another cast member replaced by an understudy — the star performer playing Fanny Brice! The replacement was great. At the intermission, I mused to Jeanne about how tough it must have been to be suddenly thrust into the starring role with such short notice. Jeanne pointed out that the understudy was likely thrilled to finally get to strut her stuff as the star and was probably more than ready. Jeanne was right, by the end of the show the replacement was blowing the roof off the theater. We had dinner afterward at home with a quiet midnight toast of champagne while re-watching season one episodes of *Bad Sisters* in preparation for season two.

### Steve Swartz

[SC] I expected your comments on the conclusion to *Little, Big* would be insightful and they were. Thank you. I thought Smoky's passing was sad, but not tragic. The end of his life was consistent with his role through the story and therefore satisfying for the reader, if sad. All in all, I enjoyed the book but I got so much more out of it from your commentary. I can see reading it again in a few years and reviewing your apazines first to get me into the right frame of mind. It's really a deeply rich book and very different from other fantasy novels I have read.

Did you notice that Jeanne decorated our zine with different *Little, Big* book covers every month? Apparently, there are a great many different covers.

RYCT me on *Red Team Blues*, it was okay but not among my favorites of last year's book group selections, in spite of the fact that I nominated it. My favorites from last year were *Spear*, *Shards of Earth*,

*A City on Mars*, *Hopeland* and *Cloud Cuckoo Land*. That last one was a struggle for most of it because I felt it was well written but relentlessly depressing until the end when all the stories came together in a reasonably satisfactory way. There were only a couple book choices that I would say I really did not like, and even in those cases I found the experience of reading and discussing them to be informative. Not a bad year.

[JG] Thanks for the preview review of Kelly Link's *The Book of Love*. I'm looking forward to reading it and seeing how her novel style differs from her short story style.

Even though I waxed on about Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Years of Salt and Rice*, I can only briefly inhabit the long perspective he encourages in his novel. Some of the despair I felt when Trump won comes from a recognition that it is unlikely that I will ever see a popular movement like the one so many of us expected during the 1970s. And when Obama took the oath of office. And again, during Kamala Harris's campaign. It's impossible to ignore the fact that at my age, I'm unlikely to see something resembling the renaissance that is needed to repair the environment, and all the other things I felt hopeful about in my youth. There have been so many steps "back" taken, that it seems like the most strenuous political and social work barely has a chance to repair the damage done during the past few decades, much less take steps forward beyond those repairs. To remain hopeful that future folks will take those steps forward and more is a beautiful dream that I try to believe. But it's hard.



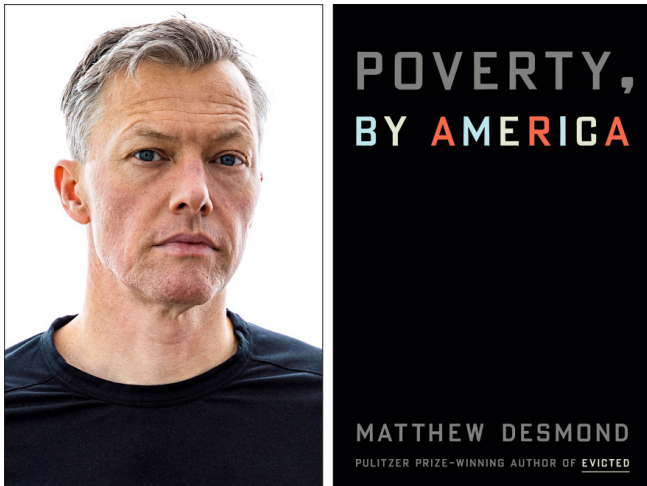
Re your comment about custom license plates to **Jim Brooks**: I saw one recently that commemorates Elkhart Lake's Road America. The image used on the plate is the outline of its 4-mile, 14-turn road circuit. So weird. I came up with a few hypotheses as to what it was, and then I drew it from memory so I could scan it and do an image search. I didn't realize until I found the link, that I'd completely missed the explanation at the bottom of the license plate. Duh!

Damn, that Osage orange is creepy.

## Luke McGuff

[SC] Scones sound good. I like scones. Hey, your baking story inspired a great idea. A new cooking show, “Feral Baking with Luke.” Not stuffy like those British baking shows. Maybe work in some blood and body parts. Keep it loose and be creative, it could be your ticket to fame and fortune.

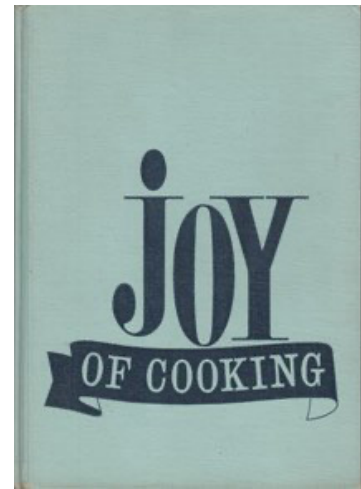
Thanks for the great piece on your postcard project. December was pretty light for snow around here this year. One month down, three still to go? Maybe just two (March is pretty iffy for snow. I’m thinking I might be starting to do some biking by then.) I will probably take my bike in for a check-up in February, when it’s pretty slow in the bike shops. I want to be ready if things open up as early as March. I still haven’t been motivated to return to the gym. Having had Covid a second time just last October, the idea of being in a room exercising unmasked with a bunch of other unmasked people is not very attractive. I have been walking lately, sometimes for as far as four to five miles, but I know I need to do more.



I’m currently reading Matthew Desmond’s *Poverty, By America*. It’s short but as powerful as a punch in the face. Desmond, a professor of sociology at Princeton, wants to answer the question, “Why is there so much poverty in America?” It’s important reading. I highly recommend it. When I visit some used bookstores I will keep an eye out for Desmond’s previous book, *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*, which won the Pulitzer Prize. He wrote it from studies he conducted in Milwaukee.

[JG] I have owned two copies of *Joy of Cooking*. I used my first copy to disintegration. I learned to cook using that first copy, starting around the time I graduated

from college and lived, for the first time, in an apartment. Now, I’m going to tell the story of how I learned to cook. But first: to the folks who have already heard or read this story, my apologies. I feel sometimes like a cranky old person obliviously repeating stories everyone has heard before. If this is a re-run for you, feel free to skip it.



One fateful weekend Viki was visiting a friend out of town. Vicki was a wonderful cook and frequently shared meals she made with me and my other roommate, Martha. Well, Viki was gone and Martha and I were broke and hungry. We didn’t even have enough money to buy a bag of fries at McDonald’s and realized that if we wanted to eat, we would have to figure out how to cook something, using the ingredients we found in the cupboards and refrigerator.

“How hard can cooking be, really?” we asked each other.

We made a list of all the ingredients available: flour, eggs, cheese, etc. Then we found a recipe in Viki’s copy of *Joy of Cooking* that contained those items. We followed the directions meticulously and waited for the oven timer to ring while our stomachs growled. But before the timer chirped, we heard a key in the lock and Viki stepped into the apartment – home early!

“What are you guys doing?!” she exclaimed in disbelief, since she’d never seen us cook anything but popcorn.

We explained our dire circumstances and pointed to the recipe in her cookbook. “We made something called SUF-LA,” I said.

“Soufflé! You made soufflé??!!” Viki gasped. That’s when the oven timer dinged. I opened the oven and we beheld a perfect, beautiful, and delicious soufflé. I never again managed to make a better one. After that experience I tossed aside my assumption that cooking was a mysterious talent forever beyond me and decided that all I needed was a recipe. I bought my own copy of *Joy of Cooking*. Martha promptly forgot the lesson, and reverted to non-cook status.





My favorite scone recipe comes from the Naniboujou Recipe Book. It makes the most divine scones. I would be glad to share it if anyone wants it.

I really like Postcards to Voters. Like you I don't want to call folks because I don't accept political calls, and I don't want to knock on doors because I don't like it when strangers knock on mine. But making and sending cool postcards sounds like fun. I think I will sign up for the next election I want to work on. Thanks!

Re your comment to **Pat**: I'm not a sticker person, but for some reason I have kept every Apple Logo sticker I've ever received. They come with most Apple purchases. Anyone have an idea of what I could do with them?

RE *Mrs. Byrne's Dictionary*. We own a copy. Anyone interested in a game? The Madison group used to play quite often with *MBD*. Players would take turns picking out a word from *MBD* and announce it to the other players. The person who picked the word would write it and the definition on a piece of paper, while everyone else wrote the word on their own pieces of paper ... and then an invented definition for the word. The picker then collects all the pieces of paper and reads all the definitions aloud, including the real definition. Then each player must guess which definition was the *MBD* definition. Players get a point for correctly identifying the real definition and the picker earns a point for every wrong guess. I remember the game fondly. The fake definitions were often hilarious, but it was a bad way for me to learn new words because fairly often I'd remember the fake definition instead of the correct one. But it's a fun game.

### Jeannie Bergmann

[SC] I'm looking forward to your trip report for Mexico. I hope you have a wonderful time. Best of luck with the cardioablation, I hope all goes well. Congratulations on the Elgin Award.

[JG] Re your comment to **Elizabeth** about a collection of books that doesn't actually exist, the novel *Cloud Cuckoo Land* is about a book that barely exists. A single copy survives, at least in part and badly damaged, from its origin in ancient Greek times. But there

is also a lovely bit in the novel about an academic whose research involves looking for books that have completely disappeared, and are known only through vague and scattered mentions in other books. We read *Cloud Cuckoo Land* by Anthony Doerr for the SF Without Borders book club. Highly recommended.

You wondered how much money the Otherwise Award has to "throw around." Actually, it may have quite a bit. When I left, our bank account was quite healthy with a good amount of money in long-term savings accounts. We were very good at fund-raising, at auctions especially. Our account held more than enough to pay for several years-worth of awards. Ask **JimH** for actual numbers; he knows. And since Otherwise will no longer give out awards (\$1000 per winner, plus transportation to Madison, plus four-days-worth of hotel rooms, plus an Art Award that we usually spent several hundred dollars on, plus chocolate of course), well, they will probably be able to afford to pay part-time staff, at least for a few years.

I like hot tea with milk and sweetener; and I like ice tea just with sweetener (but far less sweetener than is used in Southern "sweet tea"). But I can drink tea with no additions if I have to. But I can't stand the taste or smell of coffee, no matter how many sweeteners or cream is added. I have given away mugs that held just one pour of coffee because I can detect the taste of coffee.

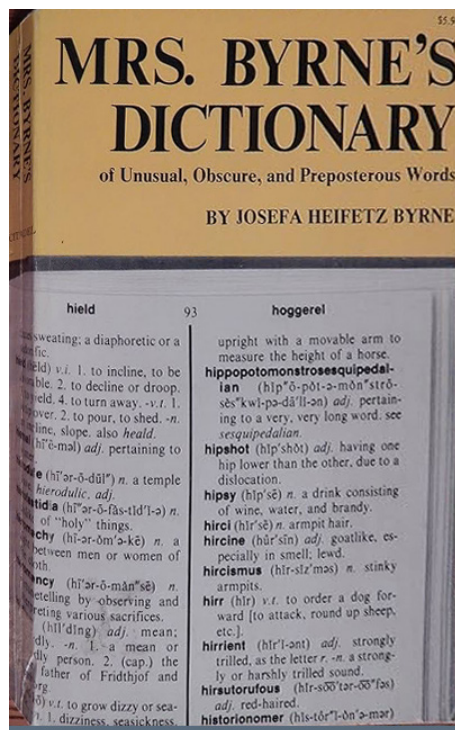
Re your comment to **SteveVJ**,

I haven't noticed spurious italicization of business names, but there sure is a lot of spurious capitalization going around, and not in an ironic way.

### Marilyn Holt & Cliff Wind

[SC] Good to hear from you as always. Lovely photos. My brother is a longtime advocate of CBD for a wide range of ailments, so I'm pleased to hear your animals are finding it helpful. The story of your cousin Paul working your farm while holding down a full-time job reminds me of the old joke about the farmer winning the lottery. When asked, "What are you going to do with the money?" He replied, "I'm going to continue farming until it's all gone."

I'm sorry to hear the sad news about Cliff.





## Screens we have seen

[JG] **Carry-On** (Netflix) Jason Bateman plays a bad guy in this movie where a young airline security guard is blackmailed by a mysterious passenger who threatens to smuggle a dangerous package onto a plane on Christmas Eve. The whole story bears more than a passing resemblance to *Die Hard 2*. At the end of *Carry On*, when our hero, Ethan, defeats the bad guy in a particularly gruesome way, his action also saves the life of his wife, Nora. As Ethan runs across the tarmac looking for Nora, I channeled Bruce Willis at the end of *Die Hard 2*, shouting for his wife at the top of his lungs. “H O L L Y –!” It’s a fun, but pretty light-weight action-adventure movie. I thought Bateman did a good job as the menacing terrorist.

**A Complete Unknown** (Theater) This is a fabulous movie: a great movie to start off the year. I’d like to see it again. Timothee Chalamet performs Bob Dylan’s songs; Edward Norton performs Pete Seeger’s songs; and Monica Barbaro performs Joan Baez’s songs. They are almost unbelievably believable and recognizable as actors and singers they portray. I would not be able to tell the difference between Chalamet’s singing and Dylan himself. Same for Norton’s Seeger. Both Scott and I agreed that Barbaro didn’t quite manage to reproduce Baez’s unique voice, but her clear, strong sopranos and acting was wonderful. All of them turned in stunningly excellent performances and I expect to see Chalamet and Norton, at least, on the list of Oscar nominees. And what a story! Nineteen-year-old Bob Dylan arrives in New York City during the 1960s carrying only his guitar, a revolutionary talent, and a compulsion, day and night, wherever he can grab a scrap of paper, to write his own music. He changes the course of American music. I used to be a fan of folk music and this movie brought back songs and familiar cultural history. But even if you never considered yourself a fokie, you almost certainly listened to musicians who covered Dylan’s songs and were influenced by his poetry. Dylan’s story is an important American story. Don’t miss this movie!

**The Franchise** (Max) This comic series follows the dysfunctional crew of an unloved superhero franchise movie (*Tecto*) fighting for their place in an insane and unruly cinematic universe. When a shared character is killed in a movie that will be released earlier, *Tecto*’s plot must be adjusted and the actor’s part eliminated on the fly. One film’s director and producers feud with the directors and producers who work on other movies organized within the same movie franchise, each striving for their movie to be considered a “tentpole film.” The plot of the fictional movie, *Tecto*, is supposed to have been based on a beloved comic, but it is haphazardly revised by clueless studio executives and sabotaged by changes resulting from decisions made on films in the same cinematic universe. *The Franchise* shines a light on the secret chaos inside the world of superhero franchises which share a common pool of characters and world, and shows us how the cinematic sausage gets made. I had never thought about how actors and directors might be interrupted or see their employment suddenly jeopardized by decisions made by other filmmakers. Now I’ll always think about that the next time I see a *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, *DC*, or *Marvel* movie. While we watched *The Franchise*, I thought to myself that if *Tecto* was a real movie and I saw the trailer, I would likely turn to Scott and simply say, “nope.” But the story about the *making* of such a movie was actually pretty enlightening and entertaining, especially because it was made by insiders, who are all too familiar with the trials and tribulations of movie franchises. Unfortunately, *The Franchise* was canceled after its first season, maybe because there were just too many inside jokes.

**Juror #2** (Max) A juror for a high-profile murder trial finds himself struggling with a serious moral dilemma that could influence the verdict and potentially convict, or free, the accused killer. He realizes, after he’s actually been impaneled onto the jury, that he himself might be guilty of the specific crime being adjudicated. There are a fair number of unbelievable elements in this story, and I can’t really recommend it. We tuned in because Clint Eastwood directed it. Not enough, I’m afraid.



**Vienna Blood**, season 4 (PBS) Sadly, this is the final season of a great buddy, detective story. Max Liebermann, a student of Sigmund Freud, helps Detective Rheinhardt in the investigation of a series of disturbing murders around the grand cafés and opera houses of 1900s Vienna. But, in my opinion, the murder stories were actually the least interesting part of this show. I loved the *look* of it – the art nouveau architecture, décor, and clothing was gorgeous and frequently distracted me from the plot. And I was intrigued by the peeks at the increasingly fascist politics of the giant, powerful Austria-Hungarian Empire. The last episode concluded with Max and Reinhart thwarting a conspiracy between nationalists and industrialists who are eager to jumpstart a profitable war by assassinating the Emperor – anticipating the historical assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand which precipitated WWI. I sort of wish there could be a fifth season, but it's obvious at the end of season 4 that a new season would necessarily involve the main characters – especially Max Liebermann and his Jewish family – in horrific choices. Recommended.

**Wicked**, Part 1. At first, I didn't plan on seeing *Wicked*. I'd seen the stage play years ago when a traveling Broadway company brought it to Chicago, but remember very little about it, other than that I disliked the Good Witch, Glinda. Well, Glinda wasn't the "good guy" even in the stage play, but she seemed to have gotten the best songs. I've read some of the Baum books and at least the first of Gregory Maguire's novels, but remember very little about any of them. I loved Geoff Ryman's novel, *Was*, but that book has almost nothing to do with *Wicked*. But then, recently, I started reading ecstatic praise for the movie, written by people whose opinions I generally respect and often agree. So, I changed my mind. Scott and I drove to Milwaukee to see it with my brother Dan, who wanted to see the movie for the second time. As it turned out, I loved *Wicked*, part 1. As I said, it's been a while since I saw or read any of the source books and the play, but still I was surprised that so much of the movie

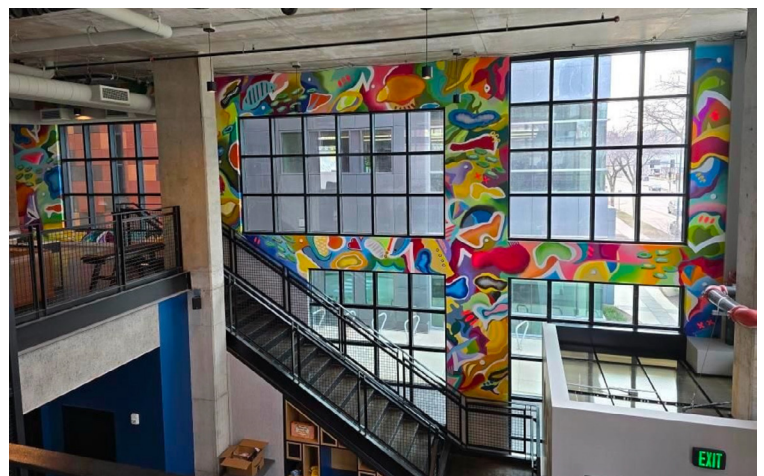
### Book of the Month Club: an outrage

[JG] Can you believe this? I'm pretty sure this a book club for folks who want books for decorative purposes, not because they want to read. No titles mar the spines or front covers.



seemed unfamiliar to me. I speculated that some elements from Baum's original stories might have been patched onto the movie. I was convinced that the oppression of intelligent, speech-capable animals, for instance, had not been part of the play. But Wikipedia proved me wrong. The plot of the movie, *Wicked*, follows

pretty exactly the plot of the stage play. I think the reason it felt so different to me was that the movie's portrayal of Elphaba's persecution by her popular classmates, and the wizard's attempt to appropriate her powers were given precedence in the script, over that of the struggle for popularity. There is a powerful moment in the film, in which Elphaba is standing in a dark forest and her skin does not look green; Elphaba is, instead, a beautiful black woman. That was the director saying, "Hint, hint!" Anyway, I am now looking forward to part 2 and definitely recommend the movie to you. I do have a question though. How come water doesn't seem to be a problem for the young green witch? At the end of the movie Elphaba flies through literal CLOUDS of moisture without injury. I noticed a poster about Elphaba and water that is visible very briefly in the flash-forward scene that begins the movie, set just after Dorothy has killed the evil witch with water. But I wasn't able to read it before it disappeared. I assume the film-makers are going to explain Elphaba's water "problem" in the second movie. That's just one more thing I seem to have completely forgotten from the stage play or Maguire's novel.



Triangulador sighting – the Moxy (a downtown, boutique hotel)